

Introduction

When I first visited Moscow, in 1995, I made the obligatory trek to Red Square. Standing in the center of the square, I was captivated by the Kremlin's spires and St. Basil's multihued curves and peaks, but the enormous, ornate retail arcade directly opposite the Kremlin—the famous GUM (Gosudarstvennyi universal'nyi magazin), the State Department Store of Soviet times—held my attention. As I scanned the lines of this sprawling neo-Russian fantasy, I puzzled over the incongruity of a shopping center, the ultimate symbol of consumer capitalism, in the center of Red Square. To my then-uninitiated mind, Red Square signified communism, and communism meant small, dingy shops bereft of goods, not this fantastical monument to consumption. As I soon discovered, GUM had not always been GUM; the arcade dated to the late nineteenth century, not the Soviet era. At the time of its completion in 1893, this complex went by the rather prosaic name of the Upper Trading Rows (Verkhnye torgovyie riady). In 1918, the Soviet government nationalized the Upper Rows and reopened it for business in 1921 as GUM. The spot occupied by the Upper Rows and then GUM has an even older pedigree. Prior to the completion of the Upper Rows arcade in 1893, four previous structures at that location had borne the same name, and the site had served as Moscow's central marketplace since the 1500s. As it turned out, the opulent arcade was as much a part of Russia's history as the Kremlin and St. Basil's, GUM being only the latest incarnation.

What interests me about the Upper Rows, GUM, and other landmarks of Russia's retail landscape is not so much their institutional history but the culture that grew up within and around them—the customs, practices, rituals, symbols, idioms, and discourses that over time became attached to the daily routines of buying and selling. In this book, I explore the creation, contestation, and re-creation of the retail sector across society and its exchange culture in the period from 1880 to 1930. This work demonstrates that retail and trade culture stood at the center of debates and also helped to structure the transformations taking place in the late imperial and early Soviet eras. This exploration of the retail sphere as a cultural system proceeds from the idea that the exchange of goods for money is not simply an economic transaction but a “form of socialization” and, further, that society as an “absolute entity” does not exist and then create exchange but that exchange itself creates the bonds of society.¹ Buying and selling were not just routine activities with little impact beyond the sales floor. These seemingly commonplace activities helped to constitute and signify state power, discourses of morality, ethnicity, civil rights and citizenship, the construction of social and gender identities, and codes of public behavior. As a public and symbolic site that engaged all sectors of society and represented their divergent agendas and aspirations, the retail sphere became deeply intertwined with the state, urban society, and the individual.

The argument developed throughout the chapters that follow is that stores, shops, retail arcades, and marketplaces were not simply sites where buying and selling took place but also agents and mediums of political transformation, social organization, and cultural training. Three major themes are important to note. The first involves issues of state power and the state's relationship to merchants and policies toward the retail sector and consumption. The retail sphere fit into the structures of tsarist and Soviet power, and although commercial and political interests sometimes conflicted, more often they supported and promoted each other. Moreover, both the tsarist and Soviet states adapted the tactics of the mass market to represent themselves, communicate with subjects and citizens, and further political goals. The second theme relates to the relationship of the retail trade to the city and the role of trade in creating urban mass society. Several lines of inquiry are pertinent here, particularly the contributions to the development of retail culture by diverse groups of individuals, including merchants, consumers, retail workers, activist journalists, trade union leaders, state and municipal officials, intellectuals, and artists. A related issue is the degree to which various individuals and groups identified with, appropriated, or rejected the culture of the urban retail marketplace and used its structures, symbols, practices, and language to define themselves, mediate their lives in the city, and assert their agendas. The third theme is cultural transformation. In the years

immediately after 1905, in the 1920s, and then again in the 1930s, new campaigns promised a beautiful, democratic, efficient, and cultured society through both the reinvention of relationships among merchants, retail employees, and consumers and the reform of buying and selling. These campaigns sought ultimately to transform society by installing a system of modern mass retailing, promoting consumerist values, and reeducating subjects and citizens.

The research on mass retailing and consumption in Western Europe and the United States is vast, although until recently the topic has received relatively little attention from scholars of Russia and the Soviet Union.² Since the mid-1990s, several fine works have explored Russia's nascent urban commercial culture, which began to develop in the mid- to late nineteenth centuries. Historians have focused especially on the extent to which an urban mass culture challenged social hierarchies and established traditions and beliefs. Louise McReynolds argues that new urban leisure industries offered Russians an entirely "new set of cultural referents," which helped them construct new identities and construe their lives.³ Sally West's work on the Russian advertising industry finds that advertisements promoted self-aspirational ideals and consumerist values. In contrast to McReynolds, however, West argues that Russians' engagement with consumption was complex, since the advertising industry's discourses of modernity and tradition both promoted and undermined accepted values. She concludes that in many respects a culture of consumption "happily" coexisted with Russian autocracy.⁴ Christine Ruane has argued that the capitalist transformation of retailing was never quite accepted in Russia and was largely viewed as a "foreign import."⁵ Still, her research on the history of Russia's fashion industry, which details its origins in the reign of Peter the Great and developments such as the establishment of a ready-to-wear industry and a fashion press, demonstrates the extent to which modern forms of urban culture, including those that promoted fashion, recreation, and consumption, had been created.⁶ The varying conclusions reached by these scholars suggest that philosophies of and attitudes toward mass retailing and consumption were variegated and contested and that the rise of the leisure and advertising industries, mass manufacturing, the department store, fashion magazines, and other vehicles of an urban mass consumer society in themselves constituted important sociocultural conflicts.

The previously neglected roles of retailing and consumption in Soviet society have also begun to be illuminated. The excellent body of work produced thus far demonstrates that whether or not a Soviet version of a consumer society existed, consumption was a primary concern, even a preoccupation, of daily life. In his pioneering work on the so-called NEPmen of the 1920s, Alan Ball establishes that the Bolsheviks' policies toward private enterprise alternated be-

tween tolerance and repression. The quest to eliminate private industry and commerce, however, ultimately took precedence and, Ball argues, ended up mostly hurting consumers, who resorted to extralegal measures in order to obtain basic goods.⁷ Several works on the 1930s show that as shortages, rationing, buying on the black market, and queuing became prevalent, the Soviet population obsessed over the process of consuming. Elena Osokina contends that Soviet society was actually organized around consumption, with its social structure denoted by a hierarchy of rationing, privileges, and entitlements.⁸ Julie Hessler's work has shown that shortages were not just a characteristic of the Soviet economy but its primary organizing principle. Shortages, queuing, and other traits of the consumer goods sector induced in the state and consumers behavioral patterns that over time, she argues, coalesced into a uniquely Soviet "exchange culture."⁹ Amy Randall has interpreted the Stalinist campaign for a cultured, socialist retail network as a campaign comparable to industrialization and collectivization, which mobilized and engaged the population, especially women, with its promotion of model stores and luxury goods.¹⁰ Scholars of the Soviet period have also taken up topics of travel and tourism and the party's and state's renewed efforts to address issues of consumption during the cultural thaw of the Khrushchev era.¹¹

One of the major outcomes of the research on commerce and consumption in the first decades of Soviet power has been the discovery of compelling continuities between the era of the New Economic Policy (NEP, 1921–1928, years during which state and private enterprises competed) and the Stalinist 1930s. Instead of interpreting the NEP as a "golden age" of limited private enterprise, relative economic abundance, and cultural experimentation and pluralism, several scholars have turned a spotlight on the NEP's darker aspects, highlighting state policies that limited choice, caused material deprivation, and led to high levels of anxiety and social conflict.¹² Further, as opposed to a conceptualization of the NEP years as a period when leaders tried to peacefully resolve the "complex social and cultural residues of prerevolutionary Russia, implicitly at odds with ongoing social and cultural goals of building a socialist or communist order," scholars like Osokina and Hessler contend that Stalin's political agenda of the late 1920s and early 1930s fulfilled NEP goals of centralization, social differentiation, and the liquidation of private enterprise, thus laying the foundations for a restructuring of the retail economy and society.¹³ My approach draws on both models of the NEP. While the NEP era was experimental in, for example, instituting state-run model retail firms to sell popular goods to workers and peasants, establishing a formal procedure for consumer complaints, and attempting sociocultural transformation through education and persuasion, it was also a period filled with tension and conflict as previous retail practices and

conventions clashed with the goals of building a worker-centered socialist retail sector staffed by efficient employees and patronized by conscientious citizens who consumed in purposeful ways.

I draw connections between the 1920s and 1930s but also bridge existing research on the late imperial period and the 1930s, thereby teasing out broader trends across the late tsarist era, the seven years of war, revolution, and civil war between 1914 and 1921, the NEP 1920s, and the turn to Stalinism at the end of the decade. To that end, I posit an expanded timeframe in Russia's pursuit of a modern, cultured retail sector, what contemporaries and scholars of the 1930s have labeled the "campaign for cultured trade."¹⁴ While most historians identify the 1930s as a turning point in the invention of both a socialist retail trade and a distinctive Soviet exchange culture, the Stalinist-era campaign fits into a longer historical timeframe and broader sociocultural context. I treat the entire period between the 1880s and the 1930s, therefore, as one continuous period of socioeconomic and cultural transformation, exemplified by recurrent attempts to revolutionize the retail sector and its culture. The years between the 1880s and 1914 were pivotal in the development of Russia's commercial industries, especially with the advent of mass production, the advertising industry, and new retail formats such as arcades and the department store, which operated according to new philosophies of merchandising and retailing and promoted material acquisition, pleasure, leisure, and an urban lifestyle. Whereas some Russians perceived in mass-produced consumer goods and stylish stores frivolous temptations or threats to native traditions and Russian autonomy, others saw promise and hope. In the years following the revolution of 1905, a sector among the merchant elite launched a campaign to revolutionize the retail sector. In the 1920s, the Soviet state embarked on a similar campaign. Although both campaigns sought to remake the retail sphere by introducing Russians to modern methods of retailing and ideals of beauty, cleanliness, technology, and civil interaction, established customs, traditions, and behavioral patterns nonetheless persisted.

Although I do not examine in detail the retail reinvention campaign of the 1930s, primarily because several excellent works on the topic already exist, my decision to begin this study in the late imperial period and to end it in the late 1920s indicates that the structure the Soviet retail economy assumed and the characteristics of its culture owed as much to the nature of the pre-1917 retail sphere and the NEP-era attempt to revamp it as to the state-directed campaign for cultured trade of the 1930s. And even though I do not consider 1917 a logical starting or ending point, political events spurred changes in retailing and consumption. The 1905 revolution, which resulted in a constitutional monarchy, the establishment of a Russian-style parliament (the Duma), and increased

freedom of the press, for example, galvanized some among the merchant communities of Moscow, Odessa, and St. Petersburg to launch a movement to recast the commercial world as the site of a rebirth of Russian society, with merchants as its leaders. The 1917 Bolshevik revolution also brought substantial changes to the retail economy and culture. The new socialist state continued and expanded the process of nationalizing and municipalizing large-scale manufacturing and commercial enterprises, which had been initiated under Nicholas II, and undertook its own campaign to remake the retail sector by creating a state network of model retail stores, rescripting the retail transaction, and promoting constructive attitudes toward consumption.

My exploration of Russia's retail culture also seeks to elucidate a series of developments that were more complex than can be captured in the term *consumer culture*, which has conventionally denoted a structural and mental shift in the West from societies preoccupied with the production of goods to societies focused on consumption. In this formulation, the emergence of a consumer culture entails the mass production of standardized goods for widespread purchase, the development of mass forms of retailing, as well as promotional techniques and attitudes that glorify the acquisition of consumer goods as the means to achieving happiness and establishing identity. A consumer culture also presupposes a society in which a large proportion of the population has both the income to consume goods above a subsistence level and the luxury of selecting one good over another.¹⁵ Given the various large-scale and long-range developments encapsulated in this definition, the term *consumer culture* seems something of a misnomer in that it suggests that the transformations that took place primarily involved the consumer and consumption. Moreover, as indicated above, there are disagreements about the extent to which the socioeconomic developments in Russia and the Soviet Union amounted to a consumer culture, at least in the terms set out by historians of the West. Although I fully engage the historiography on consumer culture and situate the introduction of modern, mass forms of retailing and the promotion of consumerist values in Russia within a broader European context, showing that developments in the late imperial commercial sector roughly paralleled those elsewhere on the continent, I am less concerned about judging whether or not the culture attached to buying and selling in Russia conformed to a Western version of the phenomenon. Instead, I am more interested in investigating the culture that in fact existed and in explaining its constitutive role in Russian and Soviet society and its role in shaping the changes that took place during roughly fifty years of momentous change. The introduction of methods of modern mass retailing provoked a search for meaning in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Russia. Analyzing Russia's brand of commercial culture is less about asserting

Russia's comparability to the West or, for that matter, declaring the victory of modern retail venues and practices or the virtue of traditional, customary ones. As I argue, Russia's retail sector melded modern and customary structures and practices into a kaleidoscopic landscape that allowed traditions and innovations to coexist, albeit not without conflicts and tensions. The syncretism of the retail sphere and of urban public life in the Russian Empire and Soviet Union symbolized neither social chaos nor economic backwardness but a society grappling with its multiple and diverse, although not necessarily incompatible, sociocultural legacies.

The culture of Russia's urban retail sector arose not only from the consumption of material goods but also from the protocols of buying and selling, advertising, the building and renovation of stores, media coverage, intellectual debates, and political imperatives, among other things, and the process involved merchants, retail employees, activist journalists, and state, municipal, and trade union officials, as well as consumers. Therefore, I employ terms like *retail culture*, *exchange culture*, *culture of the retail marketplace*, or even *commercial culture* more often than *consumer culture*.¹⁶ In preferring these terms, I am trying to designate a culture that is broader in scope, one that captures the wide-ranging political, social, and cultural functions of the activities surrounding the core ones of buying, selling, and consuming and one that indicates the participation of multiple sectors of society. As the various chapters illustrate, commercial culture was not all about consumption or the consumer. The context within which consumers consumed incorporated a range of diverse influences and various relationships. Consumption was only the end point in a series of interrelated acts that might begin with a consumer becoming aware of a store or product, perhaps through childhood experiences or from a newspaper advertisement, and then entering a shop to inquire about the price of a tin of Chinese tea or being coerced into a neighborhood shop to have a look at the wares on display and venturing an opening bid in a haggling match for a pair of boots. The ways in which individuals made meaning from these various influences and routine public transactions by constructing identities, forming relationships with other city dwellers, merchants, and political authorities, imagining their role in the city and society at large, and carrying out political change through the prism of daily encounters are, of course, enormous, complicated issues. I hope, however, to begin to illuminate them in this book.

This conceptualization of commercial culture is not intended to deny the significance of the consumer or to de-center consumption. Mass production and retailing were driven by increasing consumer demand, and the consumer was an active participant in the creation of Russia's exchange culture. Yet consumers and acts of consumption were embedded within a society whose members,

in various productive, promotional, intellectual, and symbolic capacities, contributed to the elaboration of a culture organized around the key activities of buying and selling. Merchants of the late imperial period presented themselves, their businesses, and merchandise in ways that reflected their personal beliefs, social status and aspirations, and business philosophies and that had been developed in association with the state and other merchants and that were consonant with their religious convictions. Journalists and urban chroniclers interpreted changes in the retail sphere for a reading public, pondering the implications of new retail structures, policies, and business tactics, alongside established, traditional ones, and constructing visions of urban life and Russian society based on their interpretations. Through their daily rounds of shopping, consumers formed identities, such as city dweller, subject, or citizen, immersed themselves in the spectacle of urban life, and, in the Soviet period, lodged complaints against the new regime. The tsarist state acted as both regulator and patron. The Soviet state became primary merchant in the 1920s, infusing the retail sphere with concepts of political struggle and, through its priorities and policies, introducing shortages and rationing. The press promoted the firms and agendas of retailers who advertised in their newspapers. Thus, the activities leading up to, attached to, and following the exchange of goods for money engaged individuals at all levels of society. Moreover, no one group dominated the development of such activities or the meanings assigned to them.

This broadly inclusive designation of an urban retail culture engages reconceptualizations of the relationship between state and society, or the concept of civil society.¹⁷ Some of the initial research on Russia's civil society focused on merchants' social status and the extent to which they developed a middle-class consciousness or contributed to the formation of civil society in late imperial Russia.¹⁸ Scholars who pursued this line of inquiry ultimately centered on the issue of the middle-class failure to mobilize politically in 1917. They acknowledged changes within the merchantry, but most came to the conclusion that late imperial civil society was small and fractured and, as a result, never gave rise to a middle class capable of defining and defending its political interests. A couple of recent works, including the book *Merchant Moscow*, which explores Moscow's last prerevolutionary generation of elite merchants, continues this line of interpretation. Although the majority of its essays paint portraits of a self-assured, energetic merchant elite whose political philosophies, commercial architecture, and modern dress signaled merchants' position on the cusp of modernity, the introductory essay casts doubt on the depth of their ideas and activities, arguing that the "deeply rooted" impediments of an autocratic state and static social structure ultimately inhibited the development of a "modern entrepreneurial bourgeoisie."¹⁹

However, other scholars have challenged the idea that civil society and entrepreneurship did not develop in imperial Russia because of the authoritarian nature of the tsarist state. As Joseph Bradley and others have pointed out, European rulers “enabled, if not purposefully created, civil society,” and merchants and other professional groups existed in a relatively harmonious, rather than contentious, relationship with the state.²⁰ Historians of mass culture argue that Russia’s middle classes were not, in fact, “missing” but, for instance, played a significant role in the emergence of the urban mass media and leisure and entertainment industries.²¹ Others whose research focuses on commerce and merchants conclude that the authoritative role played by the Russian state in public and commercial affairs does not necessarily mean that its relationship with civil society or merchants was an exclusively adversarial one. The tsarist state approved the creation of business firms and subsequently regulated their activities; however, the state also encouraged commerce and rewarded merchants for excellence and innovation.²²

The evidence presented in this book supports this more complicated view of the relationship between the state and professional groups. Successful, socially prominent merchants who owned large-scale retail businesses in the late imperial period more often operated in concert, rather than in opposition to, the state, at least until 1905, and to a large extent even thereafter, cooperating, for example, to carry out the rebuilding of the Upper Rows and symbolically melding their business firms with the imagery and rituals of state power. At the same time, their methods of modern retailing challenged established conventions by providing spaces where individuals could carve out identities and roles that subverted traditional social and gender hierarchies. Their advertisements cut across socioeconomic, gender, and ethnic strata in an idiom that conveyed messages of acquisition, elegance, and pleasure. Finally, reform-minded merchants who were influential in municipal politics and associational life began to showcase their aspirations to political, social, and cultural leadership. Some among them undertook agendas of commercial reform that challenged established authorities and structures, even as they were embedded within a limited political system and “vocabulary of social description” that they themselves helped to articulate.²³ Clearly, merchants and the retail sphere stood in a complex relationship to state power and to other social groups.

The relationship between state power and professional groups like merchants became even more complex in the 1920s, when the state established its own model retail stores to compete in the marketplace against private merchants. Private retailers continued to serve consumers, by all accounts much more effectively than state retail enterprises, but merchants lost the autonomy they had previously had to organize public life. State model retailers instead

took the lead in revolutionizing the retail sphere, applying similar ideals of beauty, justice, technology, and civil interaction that the prerevolutionary commercial trade press had advocated and that the merchant elite's retail firms had promoted, although they introduced the class struggle into the marketplace and privileged the retail worker. The state also institutionalized a formal complaint process, which gave consumers the opportunity to vent their frustration with the state's management of the economy. The establishment of a complaint process allowed state retail firms to function as public places where citizens could express an opinion and, in short, exercise a limited kind of citizenship. Thus, even as state retailers carried out the regime's agenda of transforming the retail marketplace by squeezing out private retailers and creating a socialist retail economy, they provided a forum in which citizens could expose the state's dysfunction and unfulfilled promises.

Just as political regimes influenced developments in the retail sector, the methods of modern commerce influenced the state's exercise of power. The tsarist and Soviet states both adopted the methods of mass retailing, marketing, and merchandising to present themselves to and communicate with a public that was becoming more accustomed to buying material goods in order to express their affections and loyalties, thus developing a sort of urban spectatorship. In the last decade or so of the empire, the tsarist regime had begun to commodify its symbols and imagery through the sale of common household goods emblazoned with pictures of the court and royal family and through the propaganda poster, a medium that, in Russia and in other countries, became a government tool to rally support during World War I.²⁴ The state expanded its use of commercial techniques in the Soviet period as the Bolsheviks embarked on a full-scale campaign to sell socialism to the public. Recognizing the potential in modern marketing and retailing strategies to wage a struggle against capitalism, state retail firms employed artists to create agitational advertisements that recommended shopping at GUM at the same time they harangued consumers about shopping at private stores. Product packages and wrappers featuring socialist slogans and symbols of the new regime praised the accomplishments of the Red Army and denigrated capitalism. As the Bolsheviks recognized, the mediums and idioms of modern commerce that were so effective at selling chocolate, cigarettes, tea, and soap could also be used to sell politics.

The introduction of mass marketing and retailing also gave rise to new conceptualizations of femininity and masculinity. In European countries throughout this period, urbanization and the commercialization of culture and leisure made women increasingly visible on city streets.²⁵ New kinds of retail venues brought with them new cultural referents and values and gave rise to reconceptualizations of masculinity and femininity. Although consumption has been

conventionally conceived of as uniquely connected to constructs of femininity, as Rita Felski notes, competing myths of modernity emphasized both masculine and feminine qualities, although masculinity was most frequently associated with rationalization and productivity and femininity, with sensuality and passive hedonism.²⁶ Most of the literature on gender and consumption has replicated the focus on discourses that connected women in the cultural imagination to the department store and fashion. Much less attention has been devoted to constructions of masculinity based on men's relationship to retailing and consumption.²⁷ When the male consumer appears in the historical literature, he often distinguishes himself through inconspicuous purchases designed to display his sobriety, restraint, and political virtue or through individuated consuming activities.²⁸ The exploration of such icons of restraint and modes of purposeful or extraordinary consumption has permitted scholars to incorporate masculinity into interpretations of the emergent world of urban mass consumption, although in my mind they have limited understanding of the ways in which men actually consumed and have thus reinforced cultural stereotypes. What has been largely missing is the identification of masculine consuming identities that situate men within the daily context of buying and selling and that portray their purchasing habits as an aspect of their routine activities and nonextraordinary identities.

This book furthers the conceptualization of the male consumer, balancing constructed images with practice. The male consumer appears in the pre-1917 period in the guise of the haggler and, in the ads of state model retailers, as the novice peasant male consumer, the primary beneficiary of the new Soviet retail sector.²⁹ In practice, men, as well as women, struggled to supply themselves with basic goods during the civil war and lodged complaints against the state's model retailers in the 1920s. These findings suggest that men and constructions of masculinity were as deeply embedded in the processes of buying, selling, and consumption as were women and constructions of femininity, and such findings also accord with the tendency of late imperial period advertisers to pitch ads to men as frequently, if not even more often, than they did to women.³⁰ Perhaps men's limited scope for autonomous, independent political action in Russia partially explains the creation of more numerous representations of masculine consumption. In the Soviet era, the politicization of retailing and consumption may also have made these activities seem appropriately masculine arenas of action. However, I doubt the Russian case was extraordinary.

Finally, this book is also about the relationship of the retail trade to the city, particularly Moscow, and to urban culture. Certain centrally located retail venues, including the Upper Trading Rows, the Muir & Mirrieles department store, Eliseev Brothers, Odessa's Passazh and Petrokokino Brothers, as well as

GUM, Mostorg, and department store and other retailers, were landmarks on the urban landscape. I trace through 1917 the ways in which these retailers operated and the ways in which Russians perceived them and interacted in them. These and several other retail sites provide focal points not only because their rich, recorded histories transcend 1917 but also because they had a literally towering presence in the city. Many served as cultural touchstones, with their appearance, products, business strategies, and employees and with Russians' memories of them being constitutive of self, society, and history. These retail venues also evoked much social commentary and private rumination. Urbanites mediated the city in part through their relationship to the merchants and retail employees they encountered and the routines they performed in stores and shops. For some Russians, becoming an urbanite seems to have been just as important as, if not more important than, thinking of themselves as a subject of the Russian Empire. In the Soviet period, the emphasis on becoming an urbanite may have been superseded by the struggle to understand what it meant to be a Soviet citizen, although new arrivals to the city no doubt continued to try to navigate the urban landscape by learning how to shop in downtown stores and markets. Moreover, Moscow was at the center of efforts to construct a socialist retail network, and Soviet leaders privileged urban centers, particularly Moscow, over other cities and the provinces.

Although the primary focus in this book is Moscow, it does include some comparisons to Odessa, as a way of testing the power of mass retailing to absorb, accommodate, and subsume ethnic and religious differences. Moscow's population was largely Russian Orthodox, and although foreign merchants were conspicuous, Russians dominated every sector of commerce, a fact that reflected that city's demographics. By contrast, Odessa, a Ukrainian city located at the margins of the Russian Empire on the Black Sea, prided itself on its ethnic diversity and its independent, commercial spirit. Odessa's ethnic profile may have provided a more cosmopolitan outlook and corps of activist commercial editors more willing to directly challenge traditional conceptions of the merchant, consumer, and the retail marketplace and, by extension, political authority. However, even though merchants in the two cities conceived of themselves and the role their city played in the empire differently, the culture of the marketplace may to some extent have subsumed ethnic and religious differences beneath a façade of beauty, material goods, technology, and middle-class culture. This idea is merely a suggestion, however. The degree to which Odessa's merchant classes, and those in other regions, created an alternative public culture or altered the dominant one merits further exploration. Roshanna Sylvester, for example, argues that in Odessa a "secularized Jewish culture" be-

came dominant and that Odessa's own "brand of modernity" was a function of the "reciprocal relationship" between Russians and Jews of the middle classes.³¹ Certainly, the important work being conducted on empire could help to illuminate the interplay between Russian Orthodox culture and the variations on urban commercial culture that ethnic and religious minorities provided.