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# Gender and the Emergence of the Soviet 'Citizen-Consumer' in Comparative Perspective

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**Chapter Seven**  
**Gender and the Emergence of the Soviet ‘Citizen-Consumer’**  
**in Comparative Perspective**  
**Amy E. Randall**

**Abstract:**

In the 1930s, the Stalinist regime promoted a campaign to establish “Soviet trade,” a non-capitalist system of “socialist” retailing. Policymakers also legitimized ordinary people’s desires for greater material comfort and increased consumption, and encouraged them to act as new Soviet consumers by engaging in new consumer behavior and official efforts to improve retail trade. This essay examines how the government’s mobilization of consumers helped to produce a new identity, the Soviet “citizen-consumer,” whose consumer practices facilitated the integration of consumers into the Soviet polity and the building of socialism. It also considers how this mobilization of Soviet consumers was similar to and different from the government mobilization of consumers in other countries during the interwar era. Whether in the Soviet Union, the United States, China, or Germany, the recognition of consumers as central actors in economic and political affairs had particular implications for women. The material culture of different societies, however, in conjunction with differing political and economic contexts, shaped the “rights” and “responsibilities” of these women “citizen-consumers.”

**Keywords:**

Soviet Union, consumers, women, material culture, retail trade, consumer citizenship, comparative, United States, China, Germany

**Introduction**

In the 1930s the Stalinist regime promoted a campaign to establish ‘Soviet trade’, a non-capitalist system of distribution and retailing. In doing so, the authorities recognized the Soviet people as consumers, not merely workers, and legitimized their desires for greater material comfort. Moreover, as the authorities encouraged consumers

to adopt new practices and participate actively in the trade campaign, they reconfigured consumers' role in the Soviet polity and linked their behaviour to the building of socialism.

These developments might seem surprising given the broader economic and political context of Stalinism. In the late 1920s Stalin's 'revolution from above' included a drive for forced collectivization and rapid industrialization, with devastating consequences. Grain, seed and peasant lives as well as the provisioning of basic foodstuffs and other consumer goods were sacrificed for the cause of heavy industry. In pursuit of a state-controlled command economy, the regime also destroyed the formal private retail system, leaving behind a dismal and wholly insufficient network of cooperative and state stores. As the government blatantly disregarded the populace's material needs, scarcity, high prices, and empty store shelves became an everyday reality. Meanwhile, in a society that prized engineering feats and steel plants, the Communist authorities officially idealized industrial workers, and disparaged consumers and consumption, associating both with the 'materialistic' and 'greedy' Nepmen and Nepwomen of the 1920s, capitalism and the bourgeoisie.<sup>1</sup>

The Stalinist regime's volte-face regarding retail trade and consumption in the 1930s was a pragmatic response to the results of the 'revolution from above', namely the major distribution and consumer goods crisis it engendered, which provoked popular outrage, rapid labour turnover and decreased productivity, threatening social stability and the drive for rapid industrialization. Although initially the regime sought to manage this crisis by instituting limited rationing and scapegoating officials and personnel in the

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<sup>1</sup> In the 1920s, as Marjorie Hilton's chapter shows, there had been some limited efforts to promote 'socialist' advertising, commodities and retailing. Even so, consumers and consumption were still viewed quite negatively.

cooperative and state trade apparatus, in 1931 it began to discuss the need to establish ‘Soviet trade’. Proponents envisioned ‘Soviet trade’ as a socialist and modern alternative to capitalist distribution and retailing that would further not only economic goals, but also social, cultural and political goals. To develop the former, authorities endorsed new retail technologies, organizational strategies, sales processes and the remaking of the retail workforce. To achieve the latter, they promoted new educational initiatives, the feminization of salesclerks, a ‘Stakhanovite’ labour-hero movement in retailing, and a widespread system of ‘control’ to monitor employees and weed out anti-Soviet behaviour. To placate the mass of citizens who were unhappy with their material conditions, and to reconcile consumption with socialism, the authorities also advanced a new official discourse, which legitimized consumption and transformed consumers into legitimate and productive members of socialist society (Randall 2008).

It would be easy to interpret the Stalinist regime’s intervention in the retail sphere, including its mobilization of consumers, as a product of totalitarian aspirations to establish party-state control. After all, the historical development of modern retailing and consumer culture is typically associated with the capitalist marketplace, not the state. Recent scholarship demonstrates, however, that state involvement in the commercial marketplace, including in the mobilization of consumers, is not a uniquely Soviet story, and details how there has been what Victoria de Grazia calls a ‘diversity of trajectories’ to consumer modernity, rather than a ‘single hegemonic American model’ (de Grazia 1998: 61).<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the campaign for ‘Soviet trade’ - and the Stalinist regime’s

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<sup>2</sup> For more on the state’s role in the making of consumer culture and consumers, see Strasser, McGovern and Judt (1998), Dauntton and Hilton (2001) and Trentmann (2006).

reconfiguration of consumers in the body politic - can be understood as an anti-liberal, socialist approach to the making of modern consumer culture.

Historian Lizabeth Cohen has argued that the concept of the citizen-consumer emerged in the 1930s in the United States as policymakers and consumer activists promoted the centrality of consumers to political and economic affairs, including national health and recovery, a process that “increasingly identified” the ‘consumer in the economic realm [with] the citizen in the political realm’ (Cohen 1998: 111).

Significantly, the United States was not alone in advancing a concept of consumer citizenship at this time. This chapter argues that the socialist trade campaign in the 1930s promoted a Soviet version of the ‘citizen-consumer,’ and analyses this Soviet version in comparative context with similar phenomena in the interwar era in the United States (a capitalist democracy), Nazi Germany (a dictatorship with strong control over aspects of the economy), and the Republic of China (a very divided political entity in a semi-colonial situation). How was consumer citizenship constituted in disparate political and economic regimes? How did it involve different discourses? How did particular ideologies, social systems and material cultures inform consumer citizenship? This chapter argues that regardless of differences, the articulation of consumer citizenship and the politicization of consumption contributed to the development of national consumer cultures, and had particular implications for women as a result of both their traditional exclusion from the public, political sphere and their primacy in the private sphere.

### **Consumers’ Interests and Governmental Accountability**

The interwar idea that consumers had distinct interests and ‘rights’ had its roots in the era of mass industrialization and urbanization. As non-agricultural labourers and urban populations increasingly relied on purchased rather than home-produced goods, and the mass consumption of such items became more widespread, concerns about unsafe and fraudulent commodities, particularly adulterated food products, grew. In response, local and national governments began to intervene more actively in the marketplace and assume greater responsibility for consumers’ interests. The German food law of 1879, for example, introduced food controls to thwart food adulteration (Teuteberg 1994; Spiekermann 2006a: 148). Such regulations were often a product of pressure from ‘below’ - from business associations, writers, social reformers, women activists, consumer organizations and professional experts such as chemists - to protect the public from dangerous goods, fraudulent commodities and unfair business practices. The exposé of the meat industry in Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*, for instance, along with the Progressives’ support for consumer protections, contributed to the adoption of the U.S. Meat Inspection and Pure Food and Drug Acts of 1906, which established minimum standards for the safety and quality of consumable goods (Cohen 2003: 21).

In many countries during World War I, wartime exigencies, such as the redirection of economies for military purposes, and wartime conditions, such as naval blockades and submarine attacks, significantly diminished civilian food supplies, leading to scarcity and hunger. As social unrest surged and housewives, consumers’ groups and others requested help from the authorities, many governments responded by adopting food control measures.<sup>3</sup> The German government, for example, established rationing in 1915 for bread (and later for other foodstuffs), and a War Food Office in 1916 to manage

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<sup>3</sup> For German housewives’ activism, see Davis (2000).

all food distribution.<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, as local and national authorities took action, they not only promoted the principle of greater governmental accountability to consumers' interests, at least during times of national and economic crisis, but they also began to recognize consumers as a distinct group who could actively support war goals. The U.S. Food Administration, for example, urged consumers, particularly women, to modify their diets and 'observe "wheatless, meatless, and porkless" days' to increase food shipments to American soldiers and European allies (Ciment and Russell 2006: 322; Eighmey 2010). German officials urged housewives "'to demonstrate their willingness to sacrifice' for the war by being 'thrifty and do[ing] without'" (Davis 2000: 34). War propaganda that focused on women engaging in economical and resourceful consumption reinforced a process already underway in modernizing societies - the discursive feminization of the consumer.<sup>5</sup>

Major economic and political turmoil in the interwar era served to politicize consumption even more. In the United States and many European countries, this was particularly true in the 1930s as economies collapsed due to the Great Depression. As individuals and families suffered great hardships, consumption became a major public issue. In the United States, for example, women activists from older consumer groups, such as the National Consumers' League, which had previously focused on improving the working conditions under which consumer goods were made, explicitly took up consumer issues (Cohen 2003: 33-5). In the face of consumer despair and varying degrees of consumer activism, the United States and many European governments became more involved in the marketplace. Thus, for example, the New Deal government

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<sup>4</sup> Davis (2000: 143). See also Davis (2000), chapters 6-7. For other measures, see Allen (1998).

<sup>5</sup> There is a vast literature on this topic, too extensive to cite here.

adopted the U.S. Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act of 1938 (which was stronger and more expansive than earlier acts), and the Nazi regime in Germany established the Office for the Supervision of Prices to combat rising inflation.<sup>6</sup> These and similar measures fueled a new relationship between states and consumers by solidifying the idea of governments' responsibility to safeguard consumers' "rights" - the right to essential commodities and decent material conditions as well as the right to be protected from unfair prices, dangerous and deceptive goods, and other commercial abuses.

In the United States, the government's new relationship with consumers involved more than expanded protective legislation and regulations in the marketplace.<sup>7</sup> It entailed the institutionalization of the consumer viewpoint in state agencies; President Roosevelt argued that consumers deserved 'to have their interests represented in the formulation of government policy' (Cohen 1998: 121). New Deal politics and the idea that consumers could serve the public interest by acting as a countervailing force to business and labour groups stimulated support for consumer representation. The government established consumer offices and consumer advisory boards for various federal agencies, such as the newly formed National Recovery Administration (NRA) and the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, as well as local county consumer councils for the 'welfare of the consuming public'. Although the U.S. government never created a 'Department of the Consumer', which many consumer advocates wanted, and consumers' policymaking influence was limited, consumer representation in economic affairs served to promote the identity of the 'citizen-consumer' (Cohen 1998: 117-22; Jacobs 1999: 38, 41, 44; McGovern 1998: 55-6).

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<sup>6</sup> Cohen (2003: 33-5). See also Berghoff (2001: 169).

<sup>7</sup> For more on this new relationship, see Jacobs (1999), McGovern (1998), Cohen (1998: 37-83, 111-25), and Cohen (2003).



The 1930s construction of the American citizen-consumer was also a product of growing support among economists, policymakers, and others for Keynesian thinking about the economy, that is, for the idea that underconsumption was a major cause of the lingering depression. Linking mass consumption to national recovery, government officials argued that ‘consumer empowerment [was] integral to the nation’s political and economic health’. According to this logic, it was the government’s duty to adopt strategies that would facilitate such empowerment (Jacobs 1999: 34). If the government could empower consumers, their increased purchasing power would help to lift the country out of the depression. Fostering mass consumption, many politicians and economists argued, would also save ‘American democracy’ and foster the American ideal of equality (in this case in the marketplace). Although Lizabeth Cohen has argued that this emphasis on consumers as purchasers competed with the idea of consumers as citizens who had the ‘right to be protected in the marketplace or to be heard in government chambers’, the former formulation reinforced the idea of consumer citizenship because it linked consumer spending to national regeneration, economic prosperity and political ideology (Cohen 2003: 54-6). As a result, regardless of whether policymakers focused on consumers’ rights or purchasing power, consumers gained new importance as political actors whose behaviour could safeguard the collective good. Significantly, however, in the context of Jim Crow laws and segregated stores and public services in the South, African American consumers were denied rights in the marketplace.

In Germany, a new dynamic between the government and consumers was forged by the Nazi regime. As the Nazis assumed power in 1933 and confronted widespread

economic destitution, they promised to restore the economic and political might of the country, and to enhance consumers' buying power. This pledge, however, did not fit easily with the regime's ultimate goals of developing an autarkic economy and suppressing overall levels of consumption to redirect resources for military purposes, or its concomitant policies of banning many foreign imports, including raw materials necessary for domestic goods production. To demonstrate concern for consumers' interests while simultaneously restraining consumption, the government therefore not only adopted new consumer protection measures, but it also supported the *increased* consumption of basic necessities as well as certain material objects - such as canned goods, synthetic fabrics, cameras, record players - that symbolized modernization and higher living conditions. The Nazi regime thus subsidized the mass manufacture of small household radios to bring mass entertainment and the 'good life' as well as Nazi propaganda into the homes of ordinary Germans. In addition to promoting selective *increased* consumption, the Nazis also tended to consumers' interests by fostering 'virtual consumption'. To underscore every person's right to own an automobile, which had previously been a privilege of the wealthy, the regime launched a campaign for an affordable 'people's car', the *Volkswagen*, which encouraged consumers to participate in a savings scheme for eventual car ownership. By 'soak[ing] up purchasing power', this scheme as well as other saving campaigns that promised future virtual consumption, particularly once the regime secured greater *Lebensraum* (living space), diminished citizens' surplus buying capacity (Berghoff 2001: 173, 175-8, 183-4; Baranowski 2004: 35-6). These Nazi strategies served to legitimize consumers' interests and desires, even as other economic policies restricted consumption and demanded consumer sacrifices.

The centrality of anti-Semitism and racism to the regime's worldview shaped Nazi consumer politics; consequently the Nazi regime's attention to consumers' interests did not include *all* people. Many state programmes and policies that provided citizens with material benefits excluded groups that were deemed racially undesirable and rejected from the national community. Thus, for example, in an effort to increase the number of marriages and hence the birth rate, the Nazis provided interest-free 'marriage loans' to newlywed 'German' couples in the form of vouchers for household durables and merchandise (loans that were also partially or fully forgivable, depending upon the number of subsequent childbirths). Jews and other unwanted groups were not entitled to these loans and associated goods. Similarly, the Nazi leisure organization, Strength through Joy (KdF), which provided millions of Germans with various forms of 'noncommercial consumption', such as discounted tickets to cultural events and subsidized excursions, explicitly barred Jews from these benefits (Baranowski 2004: 31, 35, 55, 60). In 1935, Jews were also barred from receiving aid from the Nazi Winter Relief Program, an annual drive that redistributed 'voluntary' donations of food, clothing, and other items to impoverished Germans (Cole 2011: 119).

A racialized logic also undergirded the regime's actions in the commercial marketplace. Authorities advanced an 'anti-foreign, buy German' campaign not only to encourage self-sufficiency, but also to defend consumers from 'harmful' commodities, such as Jewish and French-designed clothes, which the Nazis deemed degenerative and unhealthy. Although for economic reasons the Nazi regime did not immediately force the Aryanization of all Jewish businesses, it supported private efforts to transfer Jewish ownership to non-Jews, and passed a 1938 ordinance that 'formalized and accelerated the

[A]ryanization of Jewish property' already well underway (Guenther 2004: 144-5, 162-3). After first trying to restrict modern forms of retailing such as chain stores, in part because of their association with 'unfettered big business' and 'cosmopolitan outlooks identified with the United States and international Jewry', the Nazi regime reclaimed them by Aryanizing their management (de Grazia 2005: 167, 176-7, 181).

The growth of Chinese nationalism and anti-imperialism in the early twentieth century, which was fuelled by China's semi-colonial situation, also led to the increased politicization of consumption in the interwar era, and transformed the individual and private act of buying into a public matter. It was the National Products Movement (NPM), and not the Chinese government, which initially made 'the consumption of national products a fundamental part of Chinese citizenship' (Gerth 2003: 4). The NPM, which began around 1900 and gained momentum during the 1920s, nationalized Chinese consumer culture by 'imputing nationality to material culture' (Gerth 2003: 68) and branding 'every commodity as either "Chinese" or "Foreign"' (Dikötter 2006: 40). It instructed consumers to 'honour product nationality over other criteria', such as price, when making their purchases, 'lest they betray their nation' (Tian and Dong 2013: 41). NPM advocates linked national commodities to the protection of the Chinese people; many 'Chinese' goods were ostensibly superior to and healthier than Western products, and their domestic manufacturing supported Chinese industries and protected China's international balance of trade. As NPM supporters engaged in a growing number of anti-imperialist boycotts in the 1920s, they also linked the boycott of 'enemy goods' to national humiliations at the hands of imperial powers, particularly the Japanese. By encouraging consumers to identify as citizens of a modern nation-state, the NPM helped

to instil 'nationalist consciousness' and produce a Chinese version of the citizen-consumer (Gerth 2003, especially chapter 3).

The Chinese government's relationship with the NPM was mixed. On the one hand, after the collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1911, the leaders of the new Republic promulgated new sumptuary regulations that encouraged the wearing of Chinese-style clothing and national fabrics. Many government officials also endorsed the NPM's promotion of domestic products. On the other hand, under pressure from Japan, the Chinese government sought to suppress the many nationwide and local anti-imperialist, anti-Japanese boycotts in 1915, 1919 and the 1920s (Gerth 2003: 104-5, 113, 118, 136, 138, 140, 143).

The Nationalist, Guomintang-controlled government that came to power in 1928 was not only sympathetic to the NPM, but many of its members had been involved in its activities. The government affirmed the NPM and the intertwining of consumption with anti-imperialism and nationalism by moving quickly to adopt National Products Standards and Certifications, and directing companies to seek 'authentication' for their goods. This move, as well as the government's decision to promote 'national products' exhibits and museums as well as a National Products Movement Week in 1928 and 'National Products Years' in the mid-1930s, bolstered the NPM's longstanding efforts to promote nationalistic consumption. Teaching consumers how to distinguish foreign from Chinese goods would supposedly shield them from foreign economic and political encroachment. Ultimately by linking citizenship, nationality, anti-imperialism and

consumption, the Nationalist government and NPM ‘denied the consumer a place outside the nation as economy and nation became coterminous’ (Gerth 2003: 15).<sup>8</sup>

As Communist leaders and policymakers pursued the development of Soviet trade, they promoted consumers’ interests and ‘rights’, including the right to be protected from a wide array of hazards. Numerous laws and regulations similar to those established in other modernizing societies -e.g. stringent sanitary standards - were therefore adopted. The regime’s goal of creating a non-capitalist system, however, broadened its view of potential dangers, hence authorities aimed to protect consumers from ‘anti-Soviet elements’ as well as harmful ‘capitalist’ practices. Thus, for example, they criminalized ‘speculation’, the resale of consumer goods at higher than their original prices - a practice usually tolerated in capitalist systems, unless excessive. In the context of the trade campaign, authorities also promulgated consumers’ ‘right’ to a better retail experience. Soviet authorities and the press especially emphasized the importance of customer service by recognizing salesclerks who provided exemplary service as ‘Stakhanovite’ labour heroes. A *Pravda* editorial titled ‘Respect for the Soviet Consumer’, paraphrased Stalin, stating that the retail apparatus needed ‘to genuinely turn its face toward the consumer, to learn to respect the consumer’ (*Pravda* 1936). Trade officials asserted that such respect would serve as the ‘basis’ for cultured Soviet trade (Bolotin 1935). Salesclerks and other employees were instructed to demonstrate not only respect but also ‘deep concern’ and even ‘love’ for the ‘Soviet citizen-customer’ (*Sovetskaya trgovlya* 1936; *Za pishchevuiu industriyu*, 6 July 1937; *Voprosy sovetskoi trgovli* 1938).

The trade campaign was accompanied by official recognition of people’s material needs and consumer interests. This move was not only about promoting social stability

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<sup>8</sup> See also Gerthe (2003), chapters 4-7; Dikötter (2006: 67); Yen (2005: 172).

and worker productivity, but also about legitimizing socialism more broadly. Stalin linked consumption to socialist efforts to conquer capitalism and the West, and argued that socialism would provide people with more goods and greater wealth than capitalism (Stalin 1967: 81). He also claimed that enhanced consumption would demonstrate that socialism was not about ‘destitution and deprivation’, but increased prosperity (*XVIII S’ezd VKP (b)* 1939: 30-1). The regime’s goal of providing all people with greater access to quality goods, even those previously considered ‘luxury’ items, would ideally underscore the superiority of socialism over capitalism, and promote a new ‘socialist’ material culture. The expanded production and consumption of more modern and ‘cultured’ material objects, such as semi-prepared foods, canned goods, and gramophones, would additionally serve as a testament to socialist industry and foster the transformation of the ‘backward’ masses into new Soviet people (Randall 2008, especially chapter 1).

The regime’s pledge to increase consumption levels was not merely rhetorical. The Second Five-Year Plan (from 1933 to 1937) devoted far more resources to foodstuffs and consumer goods than the First Five-Year Plan, and the production of many commodities witnessed significant expansion. Thus, for example, by 1937 the manufacture of portable gramophones had increased to 675,000, almost 12 times the output level in 1932. Inexpensive versions of luxury items, such as champagne and high-quality chocolate, also became available to the consuming public. Public consumer services, such as day-care facilities, rest homes and movie theatres, likewise grew. Nonetheless, in the earlier stages of the trade campaign, millions of peasants died from the famine of 1932 to 1933. In subsequent years the regime’s efforts to meet consumers’

needs, though not insignificant, were entirely insufficient. In terms of rhetoric then, if not in reality, Soviet consumers gained the 'right' to purchase *more*, even though they never obtained the ability to purchase *as much* as they needed or wanted.

### **The Active Consumer and Civic 'Responsibilities'**

A new politics of consumption emerged in many countries in the 1930s. As governments turned to consumer affairs, and consumers were encouraged to become involved citizens by engaging in practices that would support broader political, economic, and national goals, a concept of consumer citizenship emerged. Meanwhile, as consumer activists, who had long claimed their legitimacy as voices of the public interest, and consumers themselves ascribed civic significance to consumer behaviour, they bolstered the identity of the citizen-consumer.

Consumers in the United States acquired new duties under President Roosevelt's New Deal government. Although a xenophobic and popular 'Buy American' movement predated Roosevelt's presidency, and President Hoover had signed the 'Buy American Act' that required the federal government to favour American-made products in its purchases, President Roosevelt did not promote the 'Buy American' campaign as official policy, instead advancing international free-trade policies, making the import of foreign goods easier (Frank 1999, especially chapters 3-4). Roosevelt did urge consumers, however, to exercise their purchasing power to back one of his new government agencies, the NRA, and its efforts to compel American businesses to pursue fair labour practices and fair prices, by shopping in stores in compliance with NRA codes (Jacobs 1999: 37). Authorities rendered buying practices a matter of civic importance not only by urging



consumers to patronize retail establishments that supported government initiatives, but also by urging them to consume *more*. Indeed, as officials increasingly linked mass consumption to economic recovery, they characterized greater spending as a patriotic duty that would further economic growth and the general well-being of the nation.

The U.S. government's recognition of consumers' right to have a voice in policymaking signalled consumers' responsibility to help formulate official responses to mass consumption, economic problems and the limits of the free-market economy. Consumer representatives carried out this new civic duty not only on a federal level, but also more locally by serving on county consumer councils. Ordinary consumers also acted in the public interest as they reported 'unfair prices' to authorities and engaged in food strikes, with the expectation that the federal and local governments would intervene against such profiteering (Jacobs 1999: 41-3; Cohen 2003: 29).

Women from diverse backgrounds were vital in advancing an American concept of consumer citizenship. The NRA Women's Division championed Roosevelt's plan to enlist consumer support in holding businesses accountable to new practices, and recruited an extensive network of female volunteers to educate and mobilize women, for as the head of the group explained, 'the buying power of the country' was in women's hands (Jacobs 1999: 36-7, 41). In addition, as consumer activists, mainly women, became emboldened in the context of the Great Depression, they moved their boycotts and protests beyond local neighbourhoods to coordinate citywide and national actions, and 'established new authority for themselves as guardians of the public welfare' (Cohen 2003: 34). By pushing city councils, state legislatures and the federal government to take action in the marketplace, serving on government agencies and councils, and educating

the public about consumer issues, such women acted as citizen-consumers, and ‘turn[ed] consumption into a new realm of politics, and its policing into a new kind of political mission for themselves’ (Cohen 2003: 36). As well as mobilizing together with white female consumer activists to promote the general good, African American women in the northern United States also used consumer activism to promote greater racial integration; they organized ‘Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work’ campaigns and similar initiatives to pressure white-owned business to increase black retail employment (Cohen 2003: 44).

The Nazi government’s anti-Semitism, xenophobia and aggressive nationalism fostered a model of consumer citizenship in which consumers were urged to contribute to national economic and political goals by thinking of consumption in a ‘racial-political light’ and changing their behaviour accordingly (Lacey 1997: 179). Thus, for example, German consumers were expected to boycott Jewish retailers as well as Jewish-produced commodities, for not doing so would supposedly abet ‘international Jewry’ and ‘yoke Germans into an economic system run by Jews wielding a “hunger whip”’ (Cole 2011: 140). To establish an autarkic economy and promote the ‘regeneration of the national community’ as well as protect ‘authentically pure’ German culture, the Nazi regime appealed to consumers to ‘buy German’ (Lacey 1997: 180). As a part of this effort, authorities argued that domestic foodstuffs were ‘patriotic, healthier, and more natural’ than imported items (Reagin 1998: 257; 2001). What was one way to ‘strengthen the racial community’ and decrease ‘disease and degeneration’? It was to eat wholemeal bread! (Spiekermann 2006b: 149). Consumers were also supposed to express their nationalism by patronizing small, traditional stores, which purportedly reaffirmed German culture and German ways.

Whereas the civic duty of American consumers was to increase personal consumption, German consumers' duty was to consume less. To encourage this behaviour, the Nazi authorities initiated a massive campaign against waste in 1936, instructing citizens to live more simply, reduce their purchases, and recycle. It particularly emphasized how to combat the spoilage and waste of foodstuffs and publicized new storage techniques and strategies for using leftovers (Reagin 2001: 169; Cole 2011: 173-8).

In the Nazi efforts to steer consumption, women in particular gained new public responsibilities in the 1930s, both as activists and consumers. Members of housewives' organizations in the 1920s, which had endorsed similar ideas about consumption as the Nazis - such as the need to reject imported goods - joined with other women to become activists in various Nazi women's organizations. Among other duties, these women's organizations were tasked with altering housewives' consumer choice behaviour and housekeeping practices on behalf of the Nazi economy. To encourage new habits, the Home Economics Division of the Nazi National Women's Bureau organized approximately 85,000 courses in 1938 to educate women how to cook with replacement foodstuffs, and publicized recipes and menus in support of such new eating patterns. To bolster the consumption of *ersatz* products, Nazi women's groups argued that many of them, such as synthetic fabrics, were actually superior to more traditional items in short supply, such as wool and linen. Nazi propaganda and activists also encouraged housewives to be more resourceful - e.g. to can their own foods and make their own clothes - to decrease pressure on domestic industries. Hermann Goering, the top Nazi leader in charge of the economy, promoted women's new civic roles as consumers by

calling them ‘trustees of the nation’s wealth’ (quoted in Lacey 1997: 175).<sup>9</sup> The idea was that by sacrificing personal and family consumption for state goals, and adopting new consumer and household practices, these women citizen-consumers would protect the national economy.

In China citizen-consumers were expected to express nationalism and anti-imperialism through specific acts of consumption and non-consumption. The new Nationalist government and NPM argued that it was the duty of patriotic consumers to purchase ‘Chinese’ goods. At the opening ceremony of the 1928 ‘National Products Week’, the mayor of Shanghai explained that ‘[p]romoting national products is the responsibility of all citizens’ (Gerth 2003: 239). Although the Nationalist government did not ban imports altogether, partly because of their popularity as well as for economic and political reasons, it introduced new tariffs that limited their influx, and along with the NPM, linked the strong presence of foreign items in the consumer economy to ‘imperialist’ efforts to undermine Chinese sovereignty. In this context it became consumers’ civic obligation not merely to purchase national commodities but also to boycott foreign goods and even merchants who sold them. Chinese citizen-consumers sometimes went too far with their duties, and resorted to violence, occasionally murderous, against foreign merchants as well as ‘treasonous’ Chinese merchants.

As in the United States and Nazi Germany, women played a key role in the construction of consumer citizenship in China. As the NPM and then the Nationalist government sought to nationalize consumer culture, they specifically mobilized women to support their efforts. In 1934 they organized the ‘Women’s National Products Year’ to educate women to consume nationalistically. According to movement advocates, women

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<sup>9</sup> See also Reagin (1998: 256-7; 2001: 169-77), and Berghoff (2001: 180).

had a particular responsibility as the nation's primary shoppers to change their consumption habits; doing so would enable China to 'not only survive the incursions of imperialism, but also [to] grow rich and powerful' (Gerth 2003: 286). If women could limit their expenditures on foreign commodities, supposedly China's annual trade deficit could be much reduced. As household managers, wives, and mothers, women also had a civic obligation to manage their husbands' and children's consumer habits, and to cultivate 'nationalistic consumption practices' in them. Official slogans for the Women's Year militarized housewives and asserted that '[a] woman who commands her family to use national products is the equivalent of someone commanding officers and soldiers on the battlefield to kill the enemy of the country' (Gerth 2003: 296). The Nationalist government's promotion in 1934 of the New Life Movement, which combined nationalism, Confucianism and Christianity, and aimed to improve citizens' morals and personal conduct, also focused on women's consumption habits, and attacked the "Modern Woman" for her alleged 'self-indulgent consumerism', which often centred on foreign-style clothing and cosmetics (Edwards 2000: 120, 130). The New Life Movement deemed women's consumption of foreign products 'not only unpatriotic but also morally unacceptable', and pressured women to begin a 'new life' by using Chinese products (Yen 2005: 172). By lauding or castigating women for their consumer behaviour, and linking it to China's national salvation or destruction, the government, NPM, New Life supporters, popular press and others underscored women's central public role as citizen-consumers.

As the Stalinist regime and trade campaign assumed greater responsibility for the populace's material needs and officially acknowledged consumers' interests and 'rights',

they also promoted consumers' responsibility to embrace new behaviour that would assist in the building of socialism. This included consuming in a 'socialist' way - that is, in a more rational, modern and 'cultured' way. Soviet consumers were not supposed to act like bourgeois consumers, who purportedly engaged in greedy and self-indulgent conspicuous consumption. They were also expected to give up 'primitive' and 'uncultured' material objects, such as *bast* (straw) sandals that symbolized rural backwardness. Instead, consumers were directed to be purposeful and cultured in making their purchases, and to demonstrate 'Soviet taste' - a modern, urban and practical aesthetic. As the Communist authorities conceptualized certain material objects as hallmarks of modernity and culturedness, the consumption of these items - such as urban clothes, watches, toothpaste, canned corn, phonographs - marked a cultured and modern person. Moreover, the increased demand for these items purportedly signalled the transformation of 'backward' workers, peasants, women and nationalities into modern Soviet men and women, and thus the advancement of socialism. Communist leader Molotov, for example, argued that the great interest among *kolkhozniki* (collective-farm workers) in 'iron beds, hanging clocks, silk dresses, and so on' demonstrated that they were 'no longer' peasants (Molotov 1936).

The Soviet regime promoted a version of consumer citizenship in which consumers' *non-purchasing* practices, too, were linked to the building of socialism. Soviet consumers were expected to reach beyond individual acts of buying and become active participants in state building, particularly in the trade campaign. As the trade official Shinkarevsky explained, it was customers' 'duty and right' to improve Soviet retailing (Shinkarevsky 1936). Consumers could advance this goal in a variety of ways.

They could engage in more civilized behaviour while shopping, or they could get involved in retail reform on an institutional level, by joining store committees or activist groups, or engaging in official *kontrol'* (monitoring and regulation) via state and public organizations. The authorities also pressed consumers to offer individual 'criticism from below' by publicly expressing feedback about consumer goods and the retail sector in various state-approved venues. Hundreds of thousands of Soviet people participated in the official *and* unofficial regulation of retailing, and articulated criticism (and sometimes praise) at manufactured goods conferences and exhibits, in letters to the press and in-store 'complaint and suggestion' books, and at customer conferences. Instead of being slanderous and anti-socialist, railing against nepotism in the retail system or the rude salesclerk and poor assortment of merchandise was considered the fulfilment of civic duty. Public consumer disapproval, while constrained within certain parameters, was still allowed to be extremely negative, and was considered 'healthy Bolshevik' behaviour.<sup>10</sup> The new responsibilities placed on Soviet consumers served the regime's interests and also allowed ordinary people to articulate their material needs, reprimand local trade authorities and employees, and influence retail conditions and the manufacture of consumer goods, at least to some extent (Randall 2008, chapters 5 and 6).

The Soviet construction of the citizen-consumer, as in other countries, enjoined female consumers in particular to take on new responsibilities. Authorities recruited women, especially housewives, to support the trade campaign by becoming official and unofficial controllers, store activists, and participants in venues for consumer feedback. Women's alleged characteristics, such as their 'natural' concern for others and their 'housewifely eyes', as well as their domestic experiences as household managers and

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<sup>10</sup> Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv po ekonomiki (henceforth RGAE) 7971/1/364: 62.

primary shoppers, apparently made them particularly valuable in promoting retail reform. Campaign advocates repeatedly emphasized the need for housewives' participation in customer conferences, because as frequent customers they were a 'huge force' that could identify a store's bad attributes or what needed to be changed.<sup>11</sup> The regime's explicit focus on female citizen-consumers granted women new public influence and opportunities. It allowed them to speak as deserving citizen-consumers acting on behalf of the collective good and national interests. In a newspaper address 'to all mothers with multiple children in the Soviet Union', for example, 214 mothers from Belorussia explained that they were raising their 'sons and daughters as Soviet patriots, dedicated to the affairs of Lenin and Stalin', and called on stores to provide what they considered to be necessary materials items - such as children's layettes and small bath tubs - so that they could achieve this goal, and serve and educate their children in the best way possible.<sup>12</sup>

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Although the nascent constructions of consumer citizenship that emerged in the interwar era involved a version of consumer 'rights' and 'responsibilities', the balance between the two was not necessarily equitable. In Nazi Germany, China and the Soviet Union, consumer citizenship was weighted towards consumers' civic duties. Moreover, in all of the countries discussed in this chapter, the 'rights' and protections afforded to consumers were limited. In the United States, this was due to the lax enforcement of consumer protection measures, insufficient consumer representation and power in policymaking, and the officially-approved violation of African American consumers'

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<sup>11</sup> RGAE 7971/1/396: 13; 7971/1/363: 83; 7971/1/354: 101.

<sup>12</sup> RGAE 484/3/629: 77, 97.



rights in the South. . In Nazi Germany, Jews and other unwanted groups lacked basic rights, including as consumers, and non-Jewish Germans' 'rights' were subordinated to the regime's political, economic, and racialist objectives. In China, it was consumers' duties rather than rights that were emphasized in the national framing of the country's struggles against imperialist economic and political aggression; and many of consumers' interests - such as in lower prices - were sacrificed to the cause of national consumption. Soviet consumers' interests and 'rights' were constrained by the Stalinist regime's strong commitment to heavy industry and rapid industrialization, the failures of Soviet bureaucracy and economic planning, and retail corruption and incompetence.

Government recognition of consumers as central actors in economic and political affairs particularly affected women. It allowed women, who were mostly excluded from the formal institutions of the state and high politics, to enlarge their public influence and acquire new civic authority and roles. But political leaders' focus on women's consumer behaviour was both a blessing and a burden. It reinforced women's importance at the same time that it held women more accountable than men for engaging in consumer practices that would promote the *public good*. During a time in which women's changing societal roles in many different countries caused considerable consternation, the attention paid to women's consumer behaviour served as a mechanism for regulating their femininity and reinforcing their domestic responsibilities. If American women didn't exercise their buying power properly, the national economy would suffer. If German women used imported butter in their cooking or frequented Jewish-owned stores, they would hinder national economic and political objectives. If Chinese women bought imported goods, they would undermine 'national goals in the household' and the

economic might of Chinese producers, and set a bad example to their children. If Soviet women purchased 'backward' material objects or did not offer their womanly insight or housewifely eye as consumers involved in retail reform efforts, they would hinder the regime's socialist objectives. The emphasis on women consumers' responsibilities also led to the greater regulation of women's femininity. Were they good mothers, wives, women? That depended in part on whether they engaged in patriotic or unpatriotic consumption, whether they purchased healthy domestic or unnatural foreign commodities, whether they engaged actively in state building efforts, or not.

As the identity of the citizen-consumer emerged in the 1930s, the economic and political objectives of different governments as well as their differing ideologies informed notions of consumer citizenship. Despite important differences, common factors such as mass industrialization and urbanization, and the rise of the interventionist state in the modern era - in which government officials and state agencies became increasingly interested in transforming the populace and engineering society, and were aided in their efforts by various "experts" - contributed to the ultimate formation of consumer citizenship. The modern challenges of mass production and consumption, combined with wartime demands and then increased concerns in the interwar era about national identity, economic and political stability, and women's changing roles, led state and non-state actors to recognize consumers as central political and economic actors. At the same time, consumers themselves began to reconceptualize their relationship to the nation-state and invest their practices - both purchasing and non-purchasing - with civic, racial, and national meaning. Thus, the Soviet mobilization of consumers, although a socialist endeavour, was, as in all the other cases discussed here, a deeply modern project.

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