An Erotic Revolution? Pornography in the Russian Empire, 1905-1914

Introduction

In May 1911, Fridrich Liblik, a 51-year-old bookshop owner living in Iur'ev (now Tartu, Estonia) stood trial for selling pornographic postcards.[1] Two students alleged that Liblik kept postcards with "seductive images" in a special box in his bookshop. On the basis of their testimony and the discovery of 11 of the offending postcards, Liblik was fined 15 roubles and required to serve a week's prison sentence. Liblik was charged because the production and circulation of pornography was illegal in the Russian Empire. In 1845, the production of "obscene" literary or artistic works "with the goal of corrupting morals, or which are obviously opposed to morality and decency" was one of the offences included in the Empire's first criminal code.[2] Under article 1001, individuals who produced and disseminated material that had the potential to "corrupt morals" faced a maximum fine of 500 roubles, or up to three months' imprisonment. Censorship committees were responsible for deciding what exactly constituted an illegal image, guided by this vague definition of obscenity as material intent on bringing about moral decline. Overburdened officials working within the tsarist bureaucracy were charged with confiscating illegal images and bringing the producers and distributors to justice.

This article examines the history of pornography in the Russian Empire between 1905 and 1914 from the point of view of distributors, publishers, and the imperial police. The article has two principal arguments. First of all, that reactions to pornography signaled unease with

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[1] Rahvusarhiiv (National Archives of Estonia, EAA hereafter) 417.1.8202.

[2] N. C. Tagantsev, *Ulozhenie o nakazaniiakh ugolovnykh i ispravitel'nikh 1885 goda* (St Petersburg: M. Stasiulevich, 1908), 525.

the Empire's accelerated path towards "modernity", broadly defined as industrialization, urbanization, consumerism, and the development of mass communication. This argument situates the Russian example within wider scholarship on European trends in the dissemination and policing of pornography, and helps to shift historiography on pornography away from the Anglophone, Francophone, and Germanophone contexts which have so far dominated the discussion.[3] The development of mass-circulation media in the early 1900s transformed state attempts to suppress pornography in Europe. In the era of mass print culture, the legality of pornography came to be defined by issues of distribution and access, as well as content. Obscenity became a "performative category" that hinged on questions of production and dissemination.[4] Sexual imagery and naked bodies were deemed acceptable in high culture, but these images became "obscene" when they were mass produced and printed on postcards or in the popular press, where they could be accessed by women, youth, and lower-class people.[5] The expanding definition of pornography brought new mass-produced mediums under the banner of state control, such as postcards, commercial advertisements, and cheap periodicals.

In the Russian Empire as elsewhere, pornography traders responded to trends in consumerist culture and took advantage of new networks of transport and communication, as they advertised cheap pamphlets, postcards, and photographs in mass-circulation newspapers,

[3] There are a few notable exceptions, including Hardik Brata Biswas, "The Obscene Modern and the Pornographic Family: Adventures in Bangla Pornography" in *The Sexual History of the Global South: Sexual Politics in Africa, Asia, and Latin America,* ed. Saskia Wieringa and Horacio Sívori (London: Zed Books, 2013), 44-64; Charu Gupta, "Cast(e)ing and Translating Sex in the Vernacular: The Writings of Santram BA in Hindu", *Porn Studies* (2019); Natalia Di Pietrantonio, "Pornography and Indian Miniature Collecting: The Case of Avadh, India", *Porn Studies* (2019); Klara Arnberg, "Before the Scandinavian 'Porn Wave': The Business and Regulations of Magazines Considered Obscene in Sweden, 1910-1950", *Porn Studies,* 4, no. 1 (2017): 4-22.

[4] H. G. Cocks, "Saucy Stories: Pornography, Sexology, and the Marketing of Sexual Knowledge in Britain, c. 1918-1970," *Social History,* 29, no. 4 (2004), 467-468.

[5] Lisa Z. Sigel, "Introduction: Issues and Problems in the History of Pornography" in *International Exposure: Perspective on Modern European Pornography, 1800-2000,* ed. Lisa Z. Sigel (New Brunswick: Johns Hopkins Press, 2005), 14; Lisa Sigel, "Filth in the Wrong People's Hands: Postcards and the Expansion of Pornography in the Atlantic World," *Journal of Social History,* 33, no. 4 (2000): 856-885; Walter Kendrick, *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture* (New York: Viking 1987); Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets, and Images in Nineteenth Century London* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Gary D. Stark, "Pornography, Society, and the Law in Imperial Germany," *Central European History,* 14, no. 3 (1981): 200-229.

allowed customers to place postal orders, and facilitated the movement of goods across imperial and national borders.[6] Concern about the impact of these new consumerist trends sparked international efforts to prevent the distribution of pornography. On 4 May 1910, the Russian Empire signed the Agreement for the Suppression of the Circulation of Obscene Publications, along with Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Brazil, the German Empire, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Signatories to this treaty forbade the distribution of pornography in their respective countries and agreed to share information regarding obscenity offences with one another.[7] In this context, efforts to suppress "obscenity" became a state or imperial project underwritten by official and popular anxieties about gender, class, race, and ethnicity.[8]

Secondly, the article teases out the distinctiveness of the Russian case, paying particular attention to the de-centralized and disjointed nature of Russian imperial governance and the impact of the 1905 revolution. 1905 marked a distinct turning point in the relationship between law, state, and subject. Beginning with the violent suppression of a peaceful demonstration outside the Winter Palace in St Petersburg in January 1905 (known as Bloody Sunday), multiple waves of violence, strikes, mutinies, pogroms, assassinations, and protests broke out across urban and rural spaces of the Empire, which forced Tsar Nicholas II to reluctantly grant

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[6] On the development of consumer culture in late imperial Russia, see Marjorie L. Hilton, *Selling to the Masses: Retailing in Russia, 1880-1930* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012) and Christina Ruane, "Clothes Shopping in Imperial Russia: The Development of a Consumer Culture," *Journal of Social History,* 28, no. 4 (1995): 765-782.

[7] On the evolution of pornography trafficking as an international and cross-border crime, see Philippa Hetherington, "'The Highest Guardian of the Child': International Criminology and the Russian Fight Against Transnational Obscenity, 1885-1925", *Russian History,* 43 (2016): 275-310. Evidence of communication between Russian and international law enforcement organs as part of the international suppression of pornography can be found in Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Arkhiv (Russian State Historical Archive, RGIA hereafter), f. 776, op. 22, d. 33, ll. 379, 381-390, 401, 407-409, 416, 427.

[8] Lisa Z. Sigel, *Governing Pleasures: Pornography and Social Change in England, 1815-1914* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002); Lisa Z. Sigel, "Name Your Pleasure: The Transformation of Sexual Language in Nineteenth-Century British Pornography," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 9, no. 4 (2000): 395-419; Sigel, "Filth in the Wrong People's Hands."; Deana Heath, *Purifying Empire: Obscenity and the Politics of Moral Regulation in Britain, India, and Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Carolyn J. Dean, *The Frail Social Body: Pornography, Homosexuality, and Other Fantasies in Interwar France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

basic civil liberties to his imperial subjects.[9] Pornography became increasingly available and visible in the wake of this social and political upheaval. In November 1905, the tsarist government partially repealed the law on pre-publication censorship for newspapers and periodicals. Thereafter, a deluge of pornographic stories, and pamphlets, as well as anti-government publications denouncing the Tsar, his family, and his government, flowed across the Empire.[10] In the years after 1905, cheap, semi-sensational tabloid newspapers reported on all aspects of city life, including crime, immorality and sexual excess.[11] Sexual themes permeated social commentary, fiction, and advertising, much to the horror of many observers from across the political spectrum.[12]

The 1905 revolution also granted provincial governments additional powers to prevent the circulation of contentious material, be it political or pornographic. Amid the social turmoil, regional authorities gained additional powers by extending the statute on public order and state security (known as emergency law) across numerous territories of the Empire. Enacted after the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, the 1881 statute strengthened the control of the government and granted provincial governors the power to impose significant restrictions on the behavior, visibility and movement of their subjects, as well as the power to aggressively repress criminal activity.[13] In the years after 1905, various regional governments used the

[9] A useful concise summary of the 1905 revolution can be found in Mark D. Steinberg, *The Russian Revolution, 1905-1921* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 47-52. The essays in *The Russian Revolution of 1905: Centenary Perspectives*, ed. Jonathan D. Smele and Anthony Heywood (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005) provide a comprehensive discussion of the social and political history of 1905.

[10] On anti-government material see Tobie Mathew, *Greetings from the Barricades: Revolutionary Postcards in Imperial Russia* (London: Four Corners Books, 2018), 85-97; Daly, "Government, Press, and Subversion," 28. On the use of sexually-explicit images to illustrate the bloody reprisals of the autocracy against the 1905 revolution see Louise McReynolds, "Raping Freedom: Pornography and Politics in the Satirical Journals of 1905-1906," *Experiment* 19 (2013): 63-86.

[11] On newspaper reporting and public opinion, see Joan Neuberger, *Hooliganism: Crime, Culture and Power in St Petersburg, 1900-1914* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 15-22.

[12] Laura Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 359-420.

[13] Peter Waldron, *Governing Tsarist Russia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), 129-130

additional powers granted to them by emergency law in their attempts to suppress the circulation of pornography.

Several pioneering works have turned their attention to pornography in the Russian context, examining sexually explicit imagery in political satire, Russian/Soviet involvement in international efforts to prevent the cross-border circulation of "obscene" materials, and the impact of pornography on ideas about gender, sexuality, and ethnicity.[14] In her important book, Laura Engelstein marks 1905 as a turning point in discussions of sexuality, as physicians, jurists, and pedagogues who had long been interested in issues of sexuality and sexual behavior claimed that the revolution represented an expression of libidinous individualism. Post-1905, research on the "sexual question" exploded, as experts sought to understand and discipline sexual behavior believed to be problematic, such as masturbation, promiscuity, same-sex relations, and sex between adolescents.[15] Building upon this body of developing scholarship, this article explores 1905 as a turning point for other registers of regulation in the Russian Empire, examining the interrelationship between disciplinary regulation (through expert discourse) and legal and administrative regulation (through legislative changes and the application of emergency law). Shifting sole focus away from the discussions of educated elites to examine the interaction between these different registers of regulation reveals the confusion, inconsistency, and regional variation inherent in Russian imperial policing. Efforts to regulate

[14] For a broad survey of pornography in Russian history, see the many excellent essays in ed. Levitt and Toporkov, *Eros i pornografiia*. See also Ernest A. Zitser, "A Full-Frontal History of the Romanov Dynasty: Pictorial 'Political Pornography' in Pre-Reform Russia," *Russian Review*, 70 (2011): 557-583 and Boris I. Kolonitskii, "'Politicheskia pornografiia' i desakralizatsiia vlasti v gody Pervoi mirovoi voiny (slukhi i massovaia kul'tura)," in *1917 god v sud'bakh Rossii i mira: Oktiabr'skaia revoliutsiia: Ot novykh istochnikov k novomu osmysleniiu*, ed. . V. Tiutiukin (Moscow: Institut Rossiiskoi Istorii, 1998), 67-81; McReynolds, "Raping Freedom"; Hetherington, "'The Highest Guardian of the Child'"; Alison Rowley, *Open Letters: Russian Popular Culture and the Picture Postcard, 1880-1922* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2013), 105-135; Dan Healey, "Active, Passive, and Russian: The National Idea in Gay Men's Pornography," *Russian Review*, 69 (2010): 210-230; Laurie Stoff, *Russia's Sisters of Mercy and the Great War: More than Binding Men's Wounds* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2015), 290-292.

[15] Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness*, 215-298.

and suppress pornography in late imperial Russia were a crucial site at which the relationship between law, state, and subject, and public and private, was renegotiated in the wake of 1905.

This article draws on archival files of the Main Administration for Press Affairs (Glavnoe upravlenie po delam pechati, GUDP hereafter), provincial governments, and the central Department of Police held in Russian, Estonian, and Ukrainian archives. In light of this, the discussion will relate to official perceptions of pornography, rather than the subjects or actors at the center of this material, the consumers, or mechanics of its production. Throughout the article, I will use the terms pornography and "obscene" material interchangeably as they were both labels employed in official documentation and social commentary. The most commonly used adjectives to describe material were pornographic (pornograficheskyi) and obscene (nepristoinyi), but problematic content was also labelled debauched (razvratnyi) and immoral (beznravstvennyi). It is not my intention to establish whether or not the material in question was produced specifically to arouse sexual feelings, but rather to examine how contentious materials were discussed and suppressed.[16] Definitions of pornography are largely subjective and the term itself remains highly theorized and contested even in the present day.[17] In late imperial Russia, pornography was an umbrella term used to describe everything from images of naked women to adverts for venereal disease cures.

Russia's pornography boom: markets, mediums, and moral decline

The social, cultural, and technological transformations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries generated an explosion of pornography (in old and new mediums) across the Russian Empire. Innovations in photographic technology, including the wide distribution of new, smaller, and more durable equipment, caused a sharp increase in the number of

[16] Lynn Hunt defines pornography as "the explicit depiction of sexual organs and sexual practices with the aim of arousing sexual feelings", Lynn Hunt, "Introduction: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity" in Hunt ed. *The Invention of Pornography,* 10
[17] Sigel, "Introduction", 8-9.

photography studios and amateur photographers in major urban centers.[18] The rapid development of the Russian film industry, particularly after 1908, generated an insatiable appetite for foreign and domestic cinema among urban dwellers.[19] Falling costs of printing and distribution, coupled with rising literacy levels amongst lower-class urban and rural populations, marked an enormous expansion of the commercial publishing industry around the turn of the twentieth century.[20] Cheap illustrated storybooks and pamphlets were sold widely in bookshops, kiosks, or by street traders all over the Empire's urban centers. Between 1889 and 1908, the number of newspapers and periodicals in circulation across the Empire increased by over 500 per cent and circulation continued to rise throughout the early 1910s.[21] In 1874, the Russian Empire became one of the founding members of the Universal Postal Union, an international organization created to unify postal services and ensure the free circulation of post between Union members.[22] At the same time, the Russian Empire's postal system expanded rapidly at a local and national level, and by the early 1900s, hundreds of millions of letters, postcards, and parcels were sent through the post.[23] These developments also made it possible for people to order and pay for goods through the mail, both within and outside the Empire.[24]

One distinctly modern form of pornography in the context of the early 1900s was the picture postcard. From 1872, postcards began to be sold in the Russian Empire following than

[18] Christopher Stolarski, "Another Way of Telling the News: The Rise of Photojournalism in Russia, 1900-1914," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History,* 12, vol. 3 (2011): 561-590.
[19] Louise McReynolds, *Russia at Play: Leisure Activities at the End of the Tsarist Era* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 253-291.
[20] Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861-1917* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 59-108.
[21] Louise McReynolds, *The News under Russia's Old Regime: The Development of a Mass-Circulation Press* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 293-299.
[22] Signatories of the 1874 Treaty of Bern (which brought the Union into existence) included Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Denmark, Egypt, the USA, the UK, and the German, Ottoman, and Russian Empires.
[23] Rowley, *Open Letters,* 17-18.
[24] Christine Ruane, "Fashion and the Rise of Consumer Capitalism in Russia" in *The Human Tradition in Imperial Russia,* ed. Christine D. Worobec (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009), 10

overhaul of the Empire's postal services.[25] Parallel international developments increased the circulation of postcards across imperial and national borders, as the Universal Postal Union approved postcards as a form of legitimate form of national and international post in 1886.[26] Following this, erotic postcards became a staple of early twentieth-century visual pornography, both within and beyond the borders of the Russian Empire. The Empire was firmly situated within the European market for pornographic postcards, as the western cities of Kiev, Warsaw, and Odessa were well-established sites of production and dissemination.[27] Further east, pornographic postcards were sold at the Empire's largest trade fair in Nizhnii Novgorod, which attracted thousands of domestic and international traders every summer.[28] The development of railway networks in concentrated bursts (throughout the 1890s and then again post-1907) meant that these locations became well-connected to other towns and cities within the European portion of the Russian Empire, as well as other regions of Europe.[29] In the early 1900s, especially after the partial abolition of pre-publication censorship for periodicals, advertisements for pornographic postcards flooded the pages of newspapers and journals in the capital and provincial towns. Men were invited to send money to post-boxes or warehouses in various corners of the Empire, after which they would receive an envelope of erotic postcards delivered right to their door.[30] The new networks of communication, information, and transportation facilitated the trade of pornographic postcards both within and outside the Empire.

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[25] Mathew, *Greetings from the Barricades,* 30-31.

[26] This decision had a significant impact, as between 1894 and 1919 roughly 140 billion postcards were sent around the world, Sigel, "Filth in the Wrong People's Hands," 860-861.

[27] Rowley, *Open Letters,* 105-135. The Kiev Inspector of printing houses and bookshops claimed that pornography in Kiev came from Warsaw and Odessa, Tsentral'nyi Derzhavnyi Istorichnyi Arkhiv Ukrainy m. Kyiv (Central State Historical Archives of Ukraine in Kyiv, TsDIAUK hereafter), f. 442, op. 856, spr. 726, ark. 6.

[28] Rowley, *Open Letters,* 109-110. On the fair, see Anne Lincoln Fitzpatrick, *The Great Russian Fair, Nizhnii Novgorod, 1840-90* (New York: Palgrave, 1990).

[29] By 1913, the Empire had about 70,500km of railway routes, three-quarters of which were concentrated in European Russia, Anthony J. Heywood, "'The Most Catastrophic Question': Railway Development and Military Strategy in Late Imperial Russia" in *Railways and International Politics: Paths of Empire, 1848-1945* , ed. T. G. Otte and Keith Neilson (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2006), 46.

[30] For example, *Novoe Vremia* (22 October 1907) and RGIA, f. 776, op. 22, d. 33, l. 62.

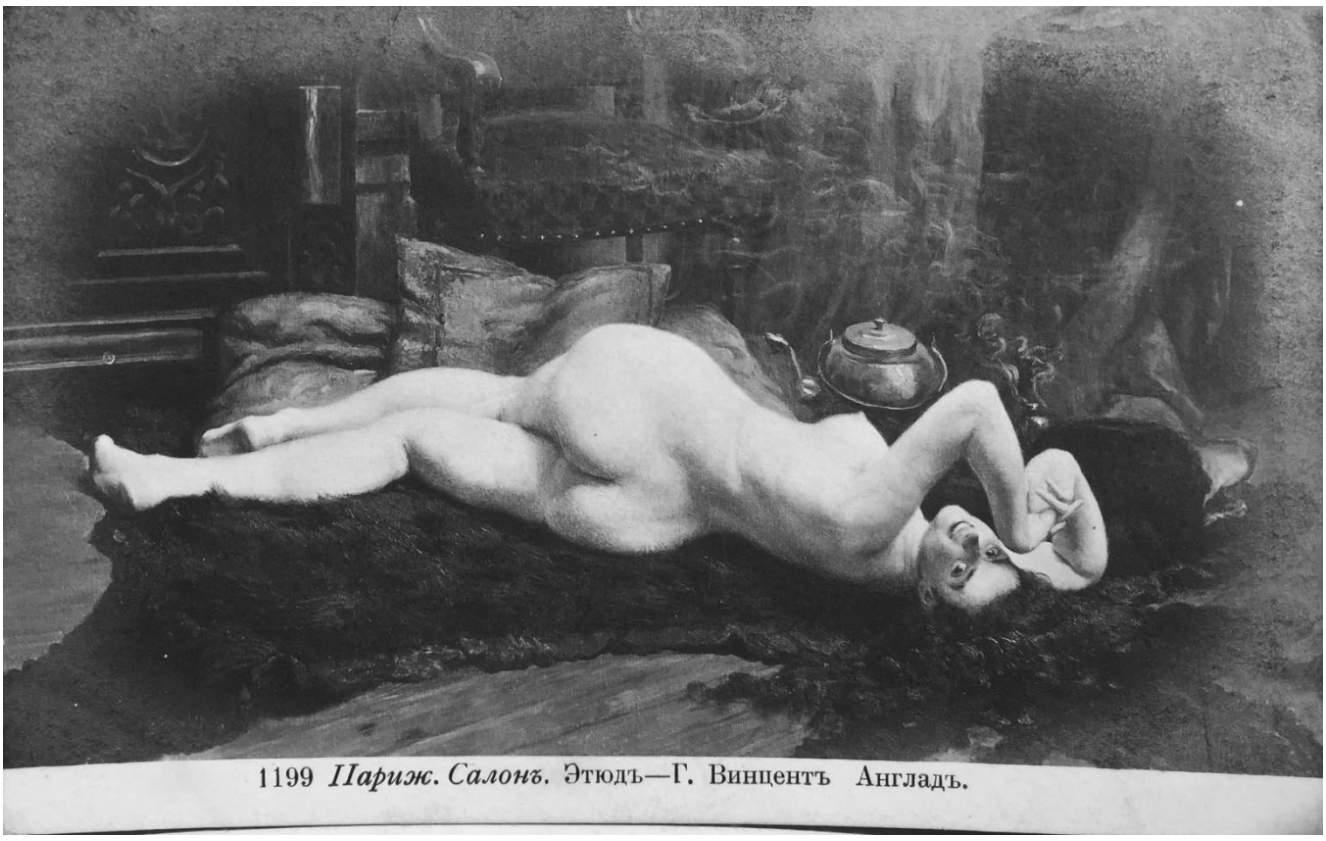
Finding examples of late imperial pornographic postcards is challenging, especially because none have been preserved in any of the archival files that I have consulted in Russia, Ukraine, or Estonia. In order to provide context for the items discussed, I purchased 30 erotic postcards produced in the early twentieth century from postcard vendors at Russian markets.[31] This methodological approach has its limitations, as there is no way of knowing how similar the postcards in this sample were to the ones discussed by government and police officials. My sample is comprised of a combination of foreign imports and domestic products, which aligns with Alison Rowley's research on similar cards held at the New York Public Library.[32] Often the images were copies of paintings by French or German artists exhibited at the Paris Salon and then printed with translated Russian captions. In mine and Rowley's samples, the naked bodies on display were always female and always white. Pornographic postcards were most likely products produced for heterosexual men, although there is fragmentary evidence to suggest that postcards depicting idealized male nudes and sex between men were also in circulation in the early twentieth century.[33]

[31] In Izmailovo market in Moscow and Udel'naia market in St Petersburg, I asked to see the pre-revolutionary collections of each vendor and then selected the postcards with sexualised imagery or nudity. All of the images that I found were of women, which could either suggest that these postcards were mainly produced for heterosexual men, or perhaps reflect the impact of state-sponsored homophobia in contemporary Russia.
[32] Rowley, *Open Letters,* 109.
[33] Dan Healey, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia: The Regulation of Gender and Sexual Dissent* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2001), 43.

Figure 1

P. Ribera, "Velvet Claws" (Barkhatnye kogti), n.d

Figure 2

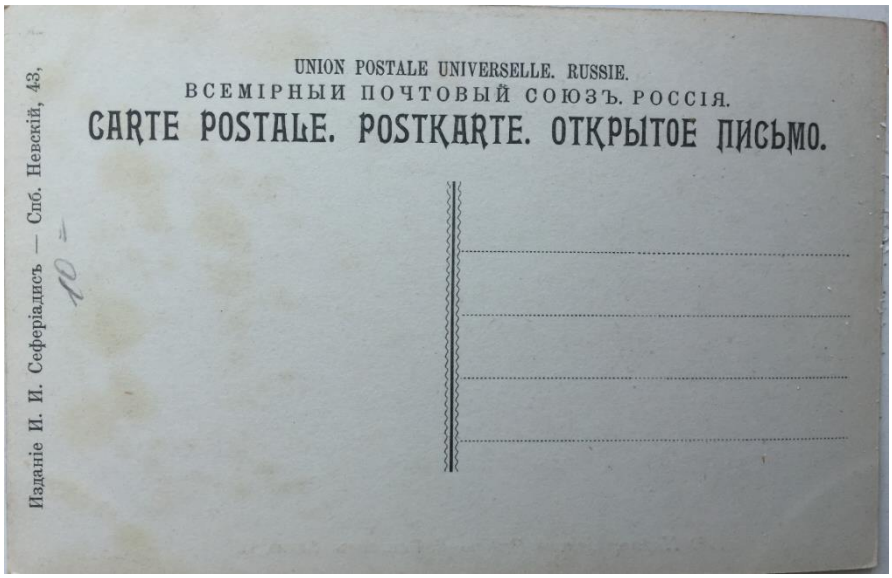


G. Vintsent Anglad (likely Henri Vincent-Anglade), "Etud" (Etiud'), n.d

Figure 3

Skal'ber (likely Jules Scalbert), "Bathing is prohibited" (Kupat'siia vospreshchaetsia), n.d

Figure 4



Bottom: Reverse of a postcard. Note the translation of postcard into French, German, and Russian. The text on the left of the postcard indicates that it was printed at the Seferialdis firm on Nevskii Prospekt, St Petersburg.

The themes present in the above figures were common in other erotic postcards produced within the Russian Empire and elsewhere. In figures 1 and 2, the female models are presented as receptive and insatiable, and specific parts of their bodies (in these cases, their breasts and buttocks) are presented as "pictorial synecdoches for female sexuality."[34] Figure 2 depicts a woman in fur, a popular trope in erotic postcards which played on the metaphors of women as domesticated animals, wild prey to be "tamed", or trophies of manhood.[35] Figure 3 invokes the idea of voyeurism, which has been explored in visual and literary pornography for centuries, as the consumer is encouraged to join the male spectator secretly watching two women bathing naked without their knowledge or consent.[36]

Modern forms of pornography, like postcards, were especially concerning as they were cheap, readily available, and did not require the skills of literacy to consume. This medium moved away from earlier forms of written pornography (often suffused with ideas about politics and social commentary) and increased lower-class people's access to erotic materials.[37] According to the cries of Russian educated observers, the increasing availability of cheap forms of pornography brought about widespread moral decline and instigated excessive and unnatural sexual desire amongst groups perceived to be vulnerable, including lower-class people and the Empire's youth. Commentators claimed that pornographic postcards, pamphlets, and books, were brazenly sold at bookshops and markets in all the Empire's major cities.[38]

Officialdom professed a desire to prevent young people, especially young men, from accessing pornography in order to safeguard the future moral and physical health of the Empire.

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[34] Rowley, *Open Letters,* 117; Sigel, *Governing Pleasures,* 132.
[35] Sigel, *Governing Pleasures,* 133.
[36] Sarah Toulalan, "'Private Rooms and Back Doors in Abundance": The Illusion of Privacy in Pornography in Seventeenth-Century England", *Women's History Review,* 10, no. 4 (2001): 701-720; Sigel, *Governing Pleasures,* 136-138.
[37] Sigel, "Filth in the Wrong People's Hands," 859.
[38] M. A. Chlenov, *Polovaia perepis' Moskovskago studenchestva i ee obshchestvennoe znachenie* (Moscow: Studencheskoi meditsinskoi izdatel'skoi komissii, 1909), 89; Mark Steinberg, *Petersburg Fin-de-Siècle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 180, 183.

Journalists, academics, religious leaders, and tsarist officials emphasized pornography's degenerative qualities, and insisted that consumption from an early age caused unnatural sexual instincts, physical weakness, and criminal behavior.[39] This was especially concerning after the dissolution of social order during the 1905 revolution, in which young people, especially students, had played a visible and central role.[40] In the years after 1905, experts and officials paid special attention to the sexual behavior of pupils and students as a way of "morally profiling" the future generation, and sexual discipline transformed from a matter of "individual therapy to a science of collective life."[41] Physicians, psychologists, and pedagogues commented that the revolutionary upheaval had unleashed an "erotic hunger" in young men that needed to be disciplined.[42]

In 1907, the Minister of Education, in a letter to Petr Stolypin (then Minister of Internal Affairs), blamed poor school discipline on the "general unbridled morality outside school", caused by the "flood" of cheap pornographic postcards and penny brochures on display in kiosks and bookshops, which he claimed had the potential to "corrupt [pupils'] minds almost to infancy."[43] Parents' committees urged the government to take action to prevent the corruption of their children. In 1908, the parents' committee of the Aleksandrovskii secondary school in Smolensk and the Ostrogozhsk women's and men's gymnasium asked the government to prohibit the sale of pornographic literature on the basis that it "pollute[d] the imagination of adolescents" and sparked premature sexual feelings that were "detrimental to

[39] "Pornograficheskii rynok", *Moskovskie Vedomosti* (10 April 1910); M. A. Kal'nev, *Pornografiia, ee posledstviia i neobkhodimost' bor'by s neiu* (Odessa: Eparkhial'nyi dom, 1913); Hetherington, "'The Highest Guardian of the Child'", 294-300.
[40] Susan K. Morrissey, *Heralds of Revolution: Russian Students and the Mythologies of Radicalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 99-123.
[41] Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness*, 218.
[42] On experts' efforts to discipline the sexual behavior of young male students, see Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness*, 215-253.
[43] Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoii Federatsii (State Archive of the Russian Federation, GARF hereafter) f. 102, d. 2, op. 63, d. 101, l. 36. With thanks to Tobie Mathew for sharing this reference with me.

their undeveloped organisms."[44] Much of the concern centered on the corruption of young men and boys, as pornography was presented as a gateway for their engagement in other problematic sexual behaviors, including masturbation and paying for sex.[45] In 1909, during a survey of attitudes and habits of students in Moscow, a quarter of respondents admitted to looking at pornographic images, which the compiler of the survey claimed caused many students to "suffer" from masturbation and excessive sexual desire.[46]

Russian commentary on pornography was part of a wider discourse of degeneration and civilizational decline, which was circulating in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Combining elements of evolutionary biology and psychology, theories of degeneration posited that society was in a state of physical and moral decline because of both hereditary biological and social factors. Discussions of degeneration permeated turn-of-the-century sociological and criminological studies, art and literary criticism, as well as social commentary, as metaphors of sickness, moral and spiritual corruption, contagion, and decadence circled back and forth across Europe.[47] In urban Russia, ideas about degeneration and decline were somehow "more widespread in society, more public, and more pessimistic" than elsewhere in Europe, driven in part by the proliferation of commentary on the problems caused by the Empire's rapid, brutal (and comparative late) confrontation with modernity.[48] Discussions of pornography were extremely pessimistic and hyperbolic in the Russian context. One brochure produced specifically for readership amongst students painted a bleak picture of the corrosive influence on modern life, drawing directly from discourses of degeneration:

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[44] RGIA, f. 776, op. 22, d. 33, l. 24, 26.
[45] Hetherington, "'The Highest Guardian of the Child'", 279-280.
[46] Chlenov, *Polovaia Perepis' Moskovskago Studenchestva,* 51, 64-65. The sexual lives of university students were topics of fervent discussion in pedagogical, medical and popular literature around the turn of the twentieth century in Russia, as elsewhere in Europe, see Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness,* 248-253.
[47] On degeneration theory in Europe, see Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c.1848-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). On Russia, see Daniel Beer, *Renovating Russia: The Human Sciences and the Fate of Liberal Modernity, 1880-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).
[48] Steinberg, *Petersburg,* 158-159.

> If we look calmly and impartially at modern society and its relationship with pornography, we face such a hopelessly bleak picture of degeneration and decay that fear creeps into the soul, not only for us as individuals, but for the future of the entire nation and country.[49]

Not only was pornography allegedly responsible for damaging fragile young organisms, it also actively destroyed "traditional" Russian culture. Pornography polluted "pure, ethical and patriotic" Russian folk songs with coarse and cynical turns of phrase.[50] Worse still, it contaminated all forms of modern literature, collapsing the boundaries between "high" cultural texts and the cheap fiction of the boulevard.[51] To combat the situation, educated commentators called for the suppression of pornography and moral education of youth to protect the future of the Empire, and even humanity.

The government crackdown on pornography after 1905

The 1905 revolution radically transformed the relationship between subject and state and forged a deeper connection between the politically radical and sexually obscene in official imagination. The legal methods used to suppress pornography in the Russian Empire also underwent transformation in the wake of mass social and political unrest. Before 1905, "obscenity" was predominantly regulated through the criminal code, as individuals could be prosecuted for the production of material with the potential to "corrupt morals" and receive varying prison sentences and fines depending on how widely the material had been circulated.[52] All printed material was subject to pre-publication censorship by censorship committees, who

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[49] D. M. Berezkin, *V chadu pornografii (Rech' k uchashchemusiia iunoshestvu)* (Saint Petersburg: Ia Bashmikov, 1914), 16.
[50] M. A. Kal'nev, *Pornografiia,* 7.
[51] Steinberg, *Petersburg,* 184-185. On anxieties regarding sexual themes in literature and the cultural displacement of "high" culture, see Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness,* 359-420.
[52] See chapter 6 of Paul Goldschmidt, *Pornography and Democratization: Legislating Obscenity in Post-Communist Russia* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999).

were responsible for reviewing texts and images and deciding which were "obscene" and subject to suppression. In November 1905, pre-publication censorship was abolished for newspapers and periodicals. Non-periodical publications, including postcards, remained subject to pre-publication censorship in theory, but imperial officials found it impossible to keep up with their workload in practice.[53] Tsarist officials were reminded that individuals found to be publishing or distributing "obscene" content were to be dealt with by the courts, rather than through administrative measures.[54] This partial relaxation of censorship provided greater opportunities for freedom of speech, but it was introduced alongside emergency law, which actually facilitated the easier suppression of pornography and other contentious material. Emergency law was rolled out across in many regions of the Russian Empire after 1905, which gave regional governors the power to confiscate any "obscene" material (regardless of whether it had already been approved by a censorship committee) and bypass judicial procedure by applying whatever sanctions they deemed appropriate to the publisher or distributor. By spring 1906, 70 per cent of the Empire's subjects lived under some kind of emergency law.[55]

In 1906, the issue of the mass consumption of pornography was brought to the attention of the top rungs of imperial power, under the banner of the protection of young people from moral decline. In autumn 1906, Mariia Protsenko, the chairwoman of the Union of Russian People's (URP) Women's Circle in Kiev, petitioned the Tsarina Aleksandra Fedorovna to ask her to prevent the sale of "immoral" images and publications because of the "serious danger" that they posed to young students.[56] The URP was a far-right, antisemitic, anti-socialist, monarchist political organization that was founded in November 1905 (in response to the October Manifesto) and which received support and funding from the Tsar and his government.

[53] Mathew, *Greetings from the Barricades*, 111-112.
[54] Mathew, *Greetings from the Barricades*, 102.
[55] Peter Waldron, "States of Emergency: Autocracy and Extraordinary Legislation, 1881-1917," *Revolutionary Russia*, 8, no. 1 (1995), 4.
[56] TsDIAUK, f. 442, op. 856, spr. 726, ark. 1.

Although the URP was a highly patriarchal, specific women-only groups performed various social, political, and cultural duties within the organization.[57] Rightist organizations like the URP used the widespread availability of pornography, as well as the apparent sexual promiscuity of students, as evidence of the "terminal decline" of Russian society and the urgent need for moral and spiritual renewal of "truly Russian" people.[58] The URP's newspaper, Russkoe znamia published sensationalist and antisemitic articles about pornography, claiming that Jews produced pornography specifically to corrupt Christians and that young men felt compelled to commit rape after looking at "depraved" postcards.[59] Far-right organizations like the URP linked moral degeneracy with political degeneracy, drawing a binary between Jews (who they claimed overwhelmingly supported the revolutionary movement) and "true Russians" who endeavored to preserve the autocratic order.[60] The URP's crusade against pornography was well known and even ridiculed. One newspaper article claimed that teenagers in the town of Kovrov, Vladimir province, sent anonymous pornographic postcards to members of the URP, as well as other far-right organizations, in order to "disgust" them.[61]

The petition sent by the Kiev Women's Circle of the URP to the Tsarina initiated a concerted effort to crack down on pornography across the Empire. First, the Tsarina wrote to Stolypin asking whether any measures were being taken to combat the "evil" of pornography in Kiev.[62] Stolypin ordered an investigation into the situation in the city, and then on 10 November 1906, the Department of Police issued a circular to all regional governors across the Empire instructing them to prevent the sale of pornography and bring those who produced to

[57] George Gilbert, "Zhenshchiny, natsionalizm, i rossiiskie pravye organizatsii (1905-1917)," *Quaestio Rossica,* 5, no. 3 (2017): 656-674.
[58] On the cultural campaigns of rightist organizations, see George Gilbert, *The Radical Right in Late Imperial Russia: Dreams of a True Fatherland?* (Routledge: Abingdon, 2016), 155-188.
[59] GARF, f. 102, op. 63, d. 101, l. 43, 58. See also Gilbert, *The Radical Right,* 165.
[60] Sergei Podbolotov, "'True Russians' Against the Jews: Right-Wing Antisemitism in the Last Years of the Russian Empire," *Ab Imperio,* 3 (2001): 191-220.
[61] GARF, f. 102, op. 63, d. 101, l. 48.
[62] GARF, f. 102, op. 63, d. 101, l. 1.

"legal responsibility."[63] The circular did not have the desired effect, as a few months later in February 1907, Stolypin received a letter from the Minister for Education on the same issue. The Minister claimed to have inundated with letters and petitions from parents of students, teachers, parents' committees, and even students themselves about the "shameless" pornographic images and books on display in shop windows and kiosks in various cities across the Empire.[64] In response, the Department of Police issued a second circular to all regional governors on 28 February 1907. Rather than providing specific instructions, regional governors were merely ordered to "take measures" to prevent the sale of pornographic images and publications, presumably using the powers granted to them under emergency law.[65] In Kiev, the authorities answered the Department of Police's call. In June 1908, Nikita Miatlikov and Egor Borisov, two peasant migrants living in the city, were arrested for selling pornographic postcards and brochures of "vile pornographic content" entitled Ia – zhenshchina (I am a woman) and Rasskaz zemskogo vracha (Stories from a county doctor).[66] They were convicted for violating a "mandatory emergency decree" from June 1907 on the sale of prohibited publications. In 1906, nine individuals were convicted for selling pornographic postcards in Kiev, and a further two bookshops were under police surveillance for stocking "indecent" postcards.[67]

Between 1906 and 1907, a "state of extraordinary security" was established in Odessa, following the widespread strikes and brutal pogrom of 1905.[68] The authorities in Odessa used the emergency legislation to curb both the circulation of pornography and political materials, as well as to reinforce antisemitic stereotypes about the political unreliability and "deviant"

[63] GARF, f. 102, op. 63, d. 101, l. 3.
[64] GARF, f. 102, op. 63, d. 101, l. 10.
[65] GARF, f. 102, op. 63, d. 101, l. 13.
[66] TsDIAUK, f. 442, op. 858, spr. 51, ark. 30.
[67] TsDIAUK, f. 442, op. 856, spr. 726, ark. 6.
[68] Jonathan W. Daly, "On the Significance of Emergency Legislation in Late Imperial Russia," *Slavic Review*, 54, no. 3 (1995), 623. On the 1905 revolution in Odessa, see Robert Weinberg, *The Revolution of 1905 in Odessa: Blood on the Steps* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993).

nature of Jews. The construction of these stereotypes was part of a wider pattern of abuse and concerted effort on the part of the government and police to incriminate Jews as threats to order and decency.[69] In August 1906, Rusak Itskov, a lower-class Jewish migrant from Lutsk, was sentenced to 20 days detention or obliged to pay an extremely steep 100-rouble fine for selling pornographic photographs at his workshop.[70] As well as pornography, Itskov was also apparently found to be in possession of political brochures and photographs of political prisoners. The Odessa police continued the longstanding tradition of blaming Jews for the negative effects of urbanization and social unrest, and repeated the ideas about innate Jewish "deviance" which had been further popularized in the wake of panic regarding apparently widespread sex trafficking at the turn of the twentieth century.[71] Police reports described Itskov as an uneducated and unemployed Jew who kept the company of other Jewish "traffickers."[72] As if the caricature of the deviant Jewish trafficker in pornography could not be more clearly drawn, the police used Itskov's possession of pornography as evidence of the "unity of Jews in this kind of business." In the same month, Solomon Ushan, a lower-class Jewish migrant from Kishinev (now Chișinău, Moldova) was for detained for two weeks for selling pornographic postcards in his warehouse.[73] In a particularly stringent measure, the Odessa authorities insisted that Ushan's warehouse be closed down for the entire period in which emergency legislation remained in place, which in some regions was several years.[74] The classification of Jews as the chief producers and distributors of pornography was common across the Empire. The Governor of Lifliand province (now northern Latvia) blamed the entire trade of pornographic postcards

[69] On the origin and implementation of tsarist antisemitic state policies, see the introduction of Eugene M. Avrutin, *Jews and the Imperial State: Identification Politics in Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010).
[70] TsDIAUK, f. 335, op. 1, spr. 59, ark. 5, 18.
[71] Robert Weinberg, "Workers, Pogroms and the 1905 Revolution in Odessa," *Russian Review*, 46, no. 1 (1987), 55-57; Laurie Bernstein, *Sonia's Daughters: Prostitutes and Their Regulation in Imperial Russia* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 161-166.
[72] TsDIAUK, f. 335, op. 1, spr. 59, ark. 19.
[73] TsDIAUK, f. 335, op. 1, spr. 59, ark. 132.
[74] Daly, "On the Significance of Emergency Legislation," 623.

in Riga on an "unknown Jew" who apparently sold his cards in city taverns.[75] When two Moscow students running an Empire-wide mail-order pornographic postcard business were caught by the city police, they claimed that their supplies came exclusively from a man named Zil'berberg in Warsaw.[76]

Certain officials answered the Department of Police's demands to suppress pornography with arbitrary zeal, empowered by the new conditions of emergency law. In September 1907, the Governor of St Petersburg issued an administrative order forbidding the display of images of naked bodies in any public places, even if the images were copies of famous works of art.[77] Anyone who failed to heed to the order faced a hefty administrative fine of 3000 roubles, or three months' imprisonment.[78] In connection with this order, the Governor removed seven nude paintings from the 1907 exhibition of the Imperial Society for the Promotion of Arts on the basis that they were "too realistic." The Governor claimed that "only a certain section of the public could relate to the human body, and genitalia, from an artistic, and moral point of view", whereas for the rest (presumably lower-class urban dwellers), such images would evoke "unnecessary temptation."[79] The Imperial Society asked the Ministry of Internal Affairs to cancel the Governor's order, but received no response.[80]

The St Petersburg Governor's order was vehemently criticized in the popular press. An anonymous article published in the liberal daily newspaper Russkie Vedomosti insisted that the Governor's order was indicative of the dangerous effects of the decentralization of legislative power.[81] The writer drew comparisons between the Governor's order and the

[75] GARF, f. 102, d. 2, op. 67, d. 38, l. 101.
[76] GARF, f. 102, d. 2, op. 67, d. 38, l. 77.
[77] GARF, f. 102, d. 2, op. 63, d. 101, l. 30.
[78] In Moscow in the same period, individuals who published anti-government articles could face the same punishment, Daly, "Government, Press and Subversion," 37.
[79] GARF, f. 102, d. 2, op. 63, d. 101, l. 26.
[80] GARF, f. 102, d. 2, op. 63, d. 101, l. 24.
[81] Clipping of the 1907 article "Novoe rasporiazhenie v Peterburge," *Russkie Vedomosti*, available in GARF, f. 102, d. 2, op. 63, d. 101, l. 27.

controversial German Heinze Law, which expanded both definitions of obscenity and the power of law enforcement organs to suppress it.[82] The Reichstag finally approved the Heinze Law in June 1900 following three years of intense debate, during which some of the more repressive clauses were altered in line with objections from across the political spectrum.[83] The writer contrasted this with the Governor's administrative order, which had significantly increased the maximum punishment for obscenity as defined under the Empire's statute of punishments, and been introduced without any debate or discussion.[84] The order was used as evidence of Russian backwardness, as the writer claimed that the superseding of criminal law by administrative order was a throwback to "old, patriarchal times" and not a common occurrence in western European countries.[85] The criticisms within the article echoed wider discontent amongst officials working in the central government regarding the way emergency legislation diluted the power of the center in favor of local authorities.[86]

Emergency legislation granted provincial authorities significant control over attempts to suppress pornography within their region, which resulted in an uneven application of the law and variation in punishment. Take, for example, the following two cases of Iurii Bernstein and Veniamin Mikhailovskii, both wealthy merchants who caught the attention of the tsarist authorities for distributing pornography. In the first case, Bernstein was fined and expelled from St Petersburg in 1907 after the police found pornographic postcards in his warehouse.[87] He was expelled under the conditions of emergency legislation and forbidden from returning to St Petersburg while the capital remained in a state of "reinforced security."[88] Bernstein

[82] Stark, "Pornography, Society, and the Law," 216-220.
[83] For a detailed discussion of the law, see R. J. V. Lenman, "Art, Society, and the Law in Wilhelmine Germany," *Oxford German Studies,* 8, no. 1 (1973): 86-113.
[84] A. A. Leont'ev, *Ustav o nakazaniiakh* (St Petersburg: D. V. Chichinadze, 1905), 91.
[85] GARF, f. 102, d. 2, op. 63, d. 101, l. 27.
[86] Waldron, "States of Emergency," 13-14.
[87] RGIA, f. 1363, op. 4, d. 1670, l. 3.
[88] A "state of reinforced security" was declared in St Petersburg in 1906 and this was not revoked until 7 July 1910, Daly, "On the Significance of Emergency Legislation," 623. On the use of administrative exile under the conditions of emergency legislation, see Waldron, "States of Emergency," 7-8.

finally obtained permission to return in February 1911, but he was prosecuted under article 1001 a few months later, essentially receiving two punishments for the same crime.[89]

In the second case, the authorities were led to Veniamin Mikhailovskii after an advert for pornographic postcards appeared in one of the Empire's most popular newspaper, Novoe Vremiia, in October 1907.[90] The advert was "of interest to all men" and invited them to send money to a Narva warehouse to receive various series of postcards with titles such as "First night of the newlyweds", "Morning Parisienne" and "Risqué adventures."[91] Postcard series, which depicted several scenes within a larger story, were a popular device used by pornography manufacturers, as the desire to see the logical conclusion of a woman undressing or a couple in a romantic clinch encouraged customers to purchase the complete set of cards.[92] Following the advert, the Narva Police Chief ordered a raid of the warehouse and 11,119 postcards were confiscated. On 31 January 1908, the owner of the warehouse, a wealthy merchant known as Mikhailovskii, stood trial in Revel' (now Tallinn, Estonia) on obscenity charges.

Were Mikhailovskii's postcards pornographic? Unfortunately, none of the cards made their way into the archival files for this case in either the Russian State Historical Archive or the National Archives of Estonia. However, two weeks before the trial, an investigator for the court produced a report with detailed descriptions of their content.[93] The investigator seemed keen to query the St Petersburg Governor's categorization of the postcards as pornographic. He claimed that the postcard series "Risqué coquette" included photographs of women in their underwear, but their poses were "not obscene." Several photographs of naked women featured in the series "Beauties", yet their genitals and pubic hair could not be seen. Even though the series "From the boudoir" included a photograph of a model naked below the waist, she was

[89] RGIA, f. 1363, op. 4, d. 1670, l. 4.
[90] RGIA, f. 776, op. 9, d. 287, l. 1. With thanks to Tobie Mathew for sharing this reference with me.
[91] RGIA, f. 776, op. 9, d. 287, l. 2.
[92] Rowley, *Open Letters*, 115.
[93] EAA.139.1.2478, lk. 26-27.

facing the viewer, therefore he judged the image not to be obscene. After a thorough investigation of the case, the Revel' Prosecutor ruled that Mikhailovskii was not guilty in February 1908, and although he was forbidden from selling the most explicit postcards in his collection, the majority of the cards were to be returned to his warehouse.[94] Official justifications for acquitting Mikhailovskii mediated on the etymology of pornography. One court investigator explained that in the original Greek, the word pornography literally translated as "describing dissolute women", a phrase often used to describe women who worked as prostitutes.[95] The investigator claimed that as the cards did not depict any such women, Mikhailovskii could not be convicted, and dismissed the strong possibility that women who sold sex also posed nude to supplement their income.[96]

Mikhailovskii's acquittal and Bernstein's double prosecution illustrates the slippery definition of pornography in late imperial Russia, as well as the leverage afforded to local officials in applying the anti-obscenity criminal article or other sanctions under emergency law. In Mikhailovskii's case, the presence of over 11,000 cards in a warehouse and an advert in one of Russia's most popular newspapers insinuates that he was a well-established trader of pornography. During the investigation, it emerged that Mikhailovskii had purchased many of the postcards abroad and brought them into the Russian Empire, which suggests that he had the financial means to bribe Narva customs officers. One officer even testified in Mikhailovskii's defense at the trial, so it is likely that his elevated social status, considerable income, and connections were crucial factors in ensuring his favorable hearing.[97] Bernstein described himself as a "hereditary honorary citizen", a prestigious social category awarded only to

[94] EAA, 139.1.2478, lk. 4.
[95] EAA, 139.1.2478, lk. 28.
[96] Rowley, *Open Letters*, 271n10.
[97] EAA, 139.1.2478, lk. 19-20.

wealthy or influential merchants.[98] Nevertheless, his surname suggests that he was either Jewish or ethnically German, which perhaps marked him as an outsider and a greater threat to public morality.[99] Vague definitions in the wording of the anti-obscenity law, coupled with the greater decentralization of power through emergency legislation, meant that the fate of the accused rested largely on the whim of local officials.

The confiscation of "obscene" materials was the responsibility of provincial authorities, namely the regional branches of the Inspectorate of Print Houses and the Book Trade and the local police. Often provincial authorities were overburdened with an insurmountable list of administrative duties. For example, provincial governors were in charge of the supervising all organs of local administration; chairing provincial administrative boards and committees; and preserving the rights of the gentry, nobility, and Russian Orthodox Church.[100] Provincial authorities had very limited resources at their disposal for ensuring the suppression of pornography. Regional police forces in particular were chronically overburdened, underfunded, and understaffed.[101] In 1907, the Governor of Khar'kov province (now the region surrounding Kharkiv, Ukraine) informed the central Department of Police that attempts to suppress pornography were unlikely to be successful due to the "complete lack of policemen and the overwhelming burden to preserve order as part of their official duties."[102] The Kiev Chief of Police also reported a lack of competent policemen in 1909.[103] Poor communication between central and provincial authorities, as well as between different branches of government, characterized the chronically overburdened tsarist bureaucracy. Local police were in charge of confiscating illegal images, but often they were unaware of whether censorship

[98] Alison K. Smith, "Honored Citizens and the Creation of a Middle Class in Imperial Russia," *Slavic Review* 76, no. 2 (2017): 327-349.
[99] Jews could be awarded the status of honored citizen with official approval "only for unusual efforts" that surpassed what was required for gentiles, Smith, "Honored Citizens," 336.
[100] Waldron, *Governing Tsarist Russia,* 100-102.
[101] Neil Weissman, "Regular Police in Tsarist Russia, 1900-1914," *Russian Review,* 44, no. 1 (1995), 56-58.
[102] GARF, f. 102, op. 63, d. 101, l. 17.
[103] TsDIAUK, f. 442, op. 856, spr. 726, ark. 11.

committees had approved the material in question. In Kiev, the local press inspector complained about contradictory approaches to suppressing pornography in the city, as sometimes the police were lenient, whereas on other occasions they even ordered the confiscation of copies of famous works of art, or photographs of artists in leotards.[104]

Despite staff shortages, central government continued to outline unrealistic tasks to be performed by regional police. In 1913, the central Department of Police insisted that police officers across the Empire were in charge of personally checking the content of all films shown within their localities, because cinema reels were not subject to general preliminary censorship.[105] Certain regional authorities rose to the challenge, such as Odessa, where the city authorities completely forbade 104 cinema reels and a highlighted a further 16 that could only be screened with the removal of specific violent or "immoral" scenes.[106] However, the regional nature of censorship meant that films could be screened in certain provinces when they were censored elsewhere. Aleksandr Kuprin's Iama (The Pit), a 1915 film adaptation of his serialized novel about prostitution, was banned in St Petersburg and Moscow but screened in certain provincial towns according to an anonymous petition sent to the Ministry of Internal Affairs.[107] Conviction rates under the anti-obscenity law reflect the zeal and abilities of local law enforcement. Between October 1911 and May 1915, 86 directors of publishing houses and newspaper editors across the Empire were tried under article 1001.[108] The Moscow Committee of the Press initiated over two-thirds of the cases, whereas committees in other major publishing centers of the Empire brought significantly fewer, including Kiev (20 per cent), Warsaw (nine per cent) and Odessa (four per cent). Just like Russian imperial governance in

[104] TsDIAUK, f. 442, op. 856, spr. 726, ark. 5.
[105] RGIA, f. 776, op. 22, d. 33, l. 345.
[106] RGIA, f. 776, op. 22, d. 33, l. 440.
[107] RGIA, f. 776, op. 22, d. 33, l. 442. Kuprin protested against the censorship of his film, RGIA, f. 776, op. 22, d. 33, l. 441.
[108] RGIA, f. 776, op. 22, d. 33, ll. 2-15.

general, efforts to suppress pornography across the Empire were dictated by the priorities of, and resources available to, provincial authorities.

Expanding definitions of obscenity

In Russia, as elsewhere in Europe, the broadening of category of obscenity was a political project. As H. G. Cocks has shown in the context of Britain, attempts to widen definitions of obscenity centered around protecting the heterosexual family from the "danger" of specific sexual practices and courtship rituals that became more visible in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as dating, homosexuality, pre-marital sex, and the use of commercial and public spaces (like magazines, public parks, and dance halls) as sites of courtship.[109] In Russia, the expansion of definitions of obscenity were tinged with the chaos of 1905, as the erotic became increasingly politicized and local authorities used the suppression of pornography in their efforts to target threats to the "moral, religious, and political order".[110] Medical experts and pedagogues became especially interested in the sexual behavior of young people as a method for diagnosing the future moral health of the Russian nation. Pornography allegedly caused widespread excessive sexual desire which set Russia on a path towards degeneration and civilizational decline. The increasing use of emergency law to suppress revolutionary and pornographic material further forged links between political degeneracy and moral degeneracy in official imagination. The expansion of definitions of obscenity also came at a time when the tsarist government grappled to impose control over an increasingly noisy and consumerist public sphere. In the wake of 1905, the requirements for starting up new periodicals were relaxed, and the number of magazines, periodicals and newspapers swelled, as did their

[109] Cocks, "Saucy Stories", 467-469.
[110] Paul W. Goldschmidt, "Article 242: Past, Present and Future" in *Eros i pornografiia v russkoi kul'ture/Eros and Pornography in Russian Culture*, ed. M. Levitt and A. Toporkov (Moscow: Ladomir, 1999), 469.

readership.[111] The partial repeal on pre-publication censorship for newspapers and periodicals in November 1905 meant that censorship committees could only act retroactively by ordering the confiscation of the already-published material and by prosecuting the author, publisher or printer in court.[112] After the dust had settled on the revolutionary fervor, the tsarist government reversed some of its statutes on the freedom of the press and instituted repressive measures to prevent the circulation of contentious material.[113] However, the rapid development of the mass circulation press and the sparsity of the tsarist bureaucracy meant that there was a significant gulf between the state's ambitions and the corresponding reality.

In the years after 1905, both state actors and civil society activists broadened definitions of pornography to include developments in popular medicine, including rudimentary contraceptive devices and popular educational brochures on sex, and anatomy. These brochures and devices became increasingly visible and available at the turn of the twentieth century because of broader developments in communication and consumer culture. In this period, reforming physicians regarded the popularization of medical knowledge as an important component of preventing the spread of infectious diseases, so they delivered public lectures and wrote advice literature designed for mass consumption.[114] Personal health became a commodity to be bought and sold in commercial culture, as adverts for medical services, medicines, and advice literature exploited fears about disease and promised good health and

[111] Caspar Ferenczi, "Freedom of the Press under the Old Regime" in *Civil Rights in Imperial Russia*, ed. Olga Crisp and Linda Edmondson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 205-206; McReynolds, *The News under Russia's Old Regime*, 219-220.
[112] Otto Boele, *Erotic Nihilism in Late Imperial Russia: The Case of Mikhail Artsybashev's Sanin* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), p. 100; Jonathan W. Daly, "Government, Press, and Subversion in Russia, 1906-1917," *Journal of the Historical Society* (2009), 30, 34.
[113] On the ebb and flow of the tsarist repression of the printing industry between November 1905 and April 1906, see Mathew, *Greetings from the Barricades*, 105-133.
[114] Susan K. Morrissey, "Economy of Nerves: Health, Commercial Culture, and the Self in Late Imperial Russia," *Slavic Review*, 69, no. 3 (2010), 658; Lisa Epstein, "Dr Spock for the 1890s: Medical Advice Literature for Jews of the Russian Empire," *Shofar*, 17, no. 4 (1999): 1-19; Catriona Kelly, *Refining Russia: Advice Literature, Polite Culture, and Gender from Catherine to Yeltsin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 174-178.

self-improvement.[115] Due to the role of shame and the stigmatization of sexual behavior that was not heterosexual and within marriage, advice literature on sexual issues, as well as methods for the cure and prevention of venereal diseases, provided particularly fertile ground for commodification.[116]

In line with the broader official concern about the impact of images or text with explicitly sexual themes on public morality in the wake of 1905, on 11 August 1910 the Department of Police issued an empire-wide circular to all provincial governors instructing them to ensure that pharmacies and bookshops did not exhibit any "pornographic" pamphlets, devices, or medicines in their windows, because these items "offend modesty and have a corrupting impact on public morality."[117] The Department of Police lamented the fact that these pamphlets and devices could not be seized as they had been approved by censorship committees and the medical censor. In an attempt to impose some form of censorship, the Department of Police encouraged regional governors to impose a fine of 25 roubles, or a sentence of seven days' imprisonment, on booksellers who openly displayed these items in their shop windows.[118] The All-Russian Union of Booksellers and Publishers wrote to the Ministry of Internal Affairs complaining that the circular would prevent the sale of books that are essential for higher education courses, such as textbooks on gynecology, obstetrics, and venereal diseases.[119] The Department of Police promptly dismissed the objection on the grounds that even the names of the textbooks "undoubtedly had a corrupting influence on the younger generation."[120]

[115] This is what Susan K. Morrissey refers to as the "medical marketplace", Morrissey, "Economy of Nerves," 658-669.
[116] On the explosion of such adverts in the boulevard press, see Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness,* 360-367.
[117] GARF, f. 102, op. 67, d. 38, l. 10.
[118] GARF, f. 102, op. 67, d. 38, l. 9.
[119] GARF, f. 102, op. 67, d. 38, l. 42.
[120] GARF, f. 102, op. 67, d. 38, l. 44.

The expansion of the category of obscenity was centered on issues of access, which became especially concerning in light of Russia's unique and rapid confrontation with modernity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[121] More and more people from across the social spectrum were able to access print and visual media in the early 1900s because of mass rural-to-urban migration, urbanization, rising literacy, and crucially, the explosion of the mass circulation press both in Russian and local languages after 1905.[122] As newspapers and journals enjoyed wider circulation, the government attempted to impose restrictions on advertising. On 13 December 1908, the GUDP issued an empire-wide circular to remind all provincial governors that adverts for medical advice literature, treatments, and devices could only be printed in newspapers and periodicals with the prior permission of the medical authorities and the police.[123] On 8 June 1910, GUDP issued a second circular outlining exactly which advertisements should be considered pornographic and ought to be censored. Books about sexual perversion, prostitution, and "unnatural inclinations"; books that were advertised for "adults only"; pregnancy-prevention devices; impotence cures; and adverts advertising possibilities for extramarital sex were all absolutely forbidden.[124] Marriage advertisements could not feature detailed physical descriptions, nor could adverts posted by models willing to pose for artists or photographers.[125] Access was the key issue here, as the GUDP insisted in a second circular from June 1911 that all adverts were now subject to pre-publication censorship as they had the potential to "mislead gullible readers, mainly from the underdeveloped (*malorazvitnye*) classes of the population."[126] The official justifications for censorship reflect

[121] Nead, *Victorian Babylon,* 105-189; Sigel, "Filth in the Wrong People's Hands", 873-878.
[122] For example, the number of Estonian-language newspapers and periodicals more than doubled between 1905 and 1914, Toivo U. Raun, "The Estonians" in *Russification in the Baltic Provinces and Finland, 1855-1914,* ed. Edward Thaden (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 336. Similar trends appeared in Latvian-language publishing after 1905, Andrejs Plakans, *The Latvians: A Short History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 106.
[123] RGIA, f. 776, op. 22, d. 33, l. 161.
[124] RGIA, f. 776, op. 22, d. 33, l. 67.
[125] On marriage advertisements in late imperial Russia, see Stephen Lovell, "Finding a Mate in Late Tsarist Russia", *Cultural and Social History,* 4, no. 1 (2007): 51-72.
[126] GARF, f. 102, op. 67, d. 38, l. 53.

the more general ethos of tsarist paternalism. Paternalism underwrote interactions between those in authority and the lower classes, who were typecast as defenceless and heavily dependent on those in authority for material assistance and moral direction.[127]

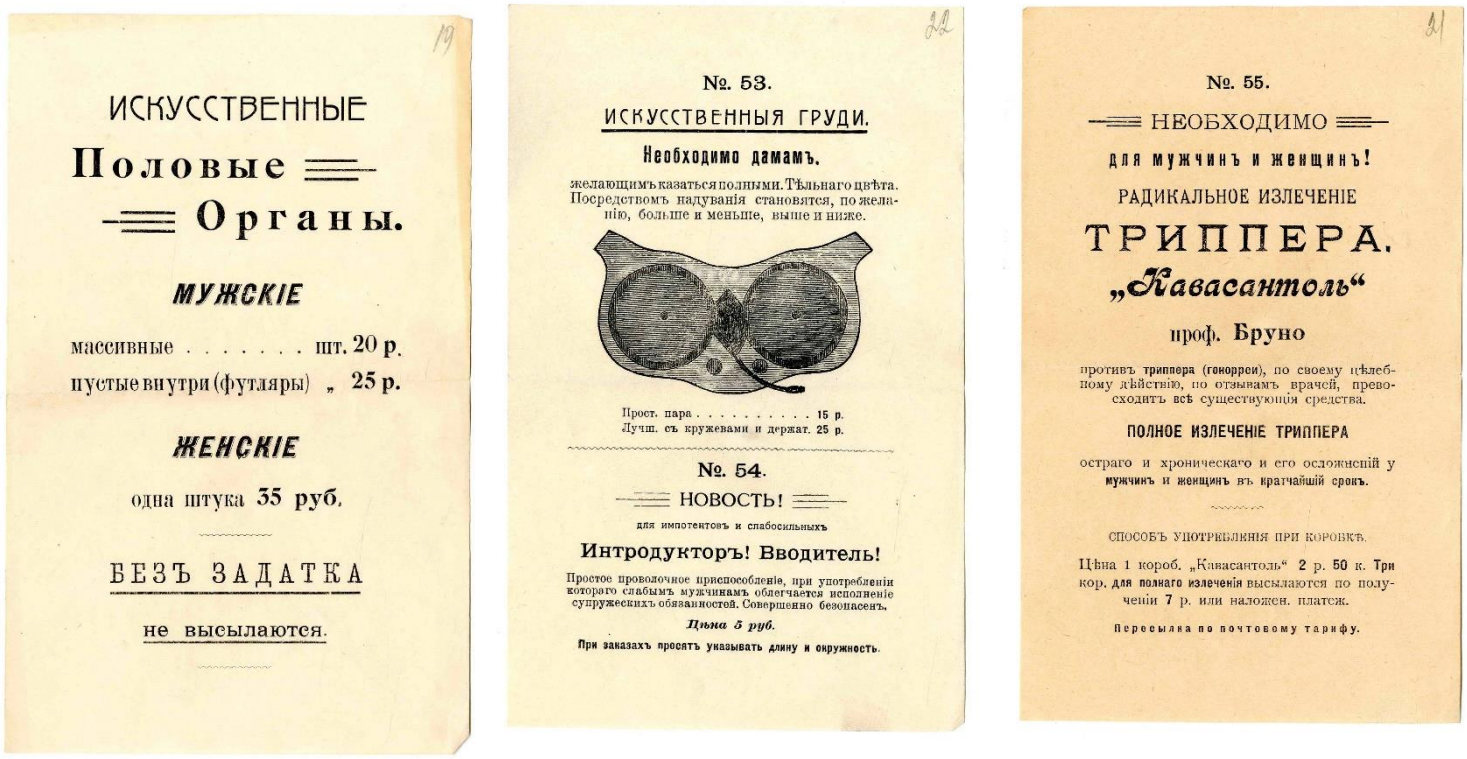
The tsarist government were not the only party handwringing about the increasing visibility of pornography in shops and the popular press after 1905. Certain journalists supported the categorization of medical texts and devices as pornographic and called for their suppression, couching their concerns in the language of civilizational decline and concern for the purity of the Russian nation. A 1911 article in the right-wing, monarchist, and antisemitic newspaper Zemshchina branded adverts for contraceptive devices and abortion doctors as a Jewish conspiracy to "pervert the Russian people to the marrow of their bones" and deliberately reduce the birth rate.[128] Russkoe znamia published a letter penned by the chairman of one of the URP's branches in the capital, which condemned the exhibition of contraceptives and medical textbooks on sex, masturbation, and pregnancy in shop windows.[129] The letter called for readers of Russkoe znamia and other right-wing newspapers to bring this matter to the attention of the Duma and city authorities. Although the far-right were loudest, they were not the only voices calling for the suppression of popular medical books and devices. In March 1914, the liberal newspaper Rech' published an article calling for the introduction of substantial fines and even imprisonment for editors who allowed "pornographic" adverts to appear in their newspapers and journals.[130] The Ministry of Internal Affairs also received a handful of letters from concerned urban residents. In 1910, an anonymous letter sent a newspaper advert clipping to the Department of Police begging them to investigate the source of this "corruption of

[127] Elise Kimerling Wirtschafter, *From Serf to Russian Soldier* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 96; Yanni Kotsonis, *States of Obligation: Taxes and Citizenship in the Russian Empire and the Early Soviet Republic* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2014), 54.
[128] Quoted in Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness*, 305.
[129] GARF, f. 102, op. 63, d. 101, l. 43.
[130] GARF, f. 102, op. 67, d. 38, l. 114.

humanity" and prevent the advert from falling into the hands of anybody who could be "easily tempted."[131] In May 1912, Ivan Kolomietsev, a man living in Odessa, wrote to the Ministry of Internal Affairs to discuss what he described as "one of the most terrible aspects of modern Russian life" that was corrupting families and young people. He called for the absolute prohibition of any adverts for "sexual literature" or venereal disease treatment, as well as the imposition of extremely strict penalties for editors printing these "pornographic" adverts, including extremely steep fines of between 500-3000 roubles.[132]

The social, cultural, and technological developments of the early twentieth century made the Department of Police's attempts to "purify" shop windows and GUDP's attempts to censor advertisements largely ineffective. Removing popular medical pamphlets and contraceptive devices from shop windows certainly did not cull demand. Many firms chose to advertise their products in newspapers and periodicals and take advantage of the explosion of the mass circulation press in the post-1905 era. Adverts for venereal disease treatments, "miracle cures" for impotence, methods for preventing pregnancy, equipment for breast-enhancement, and books on all sorts of issues related to sex and sexuality covered the back pages of newspapers and journals. The development of consumer culture and the Russian internal and international postal system granted those looking to buy such items a degree of anonymity. Rather than entering a shop to make a purchase, people could fill out an order slip and have their items delivered to their address or dedicated post box.

[131] RGIA, f. 776, op. 22, d. 33, l. 63.
[132] RGIA, f. 776, op. 22, d. 33, l. 133.



ИСКУССТВЕННЫЕ
Половые Органы.

МУЖСКІЕ

массивные . . . . . шт. 20 р.
пустые внутри (футляры) „ 25 р.

ЖЕНСКІЕ

одна штука **35 руб.**

БЕЗЪ ЗАДАТКА
не высылаются.

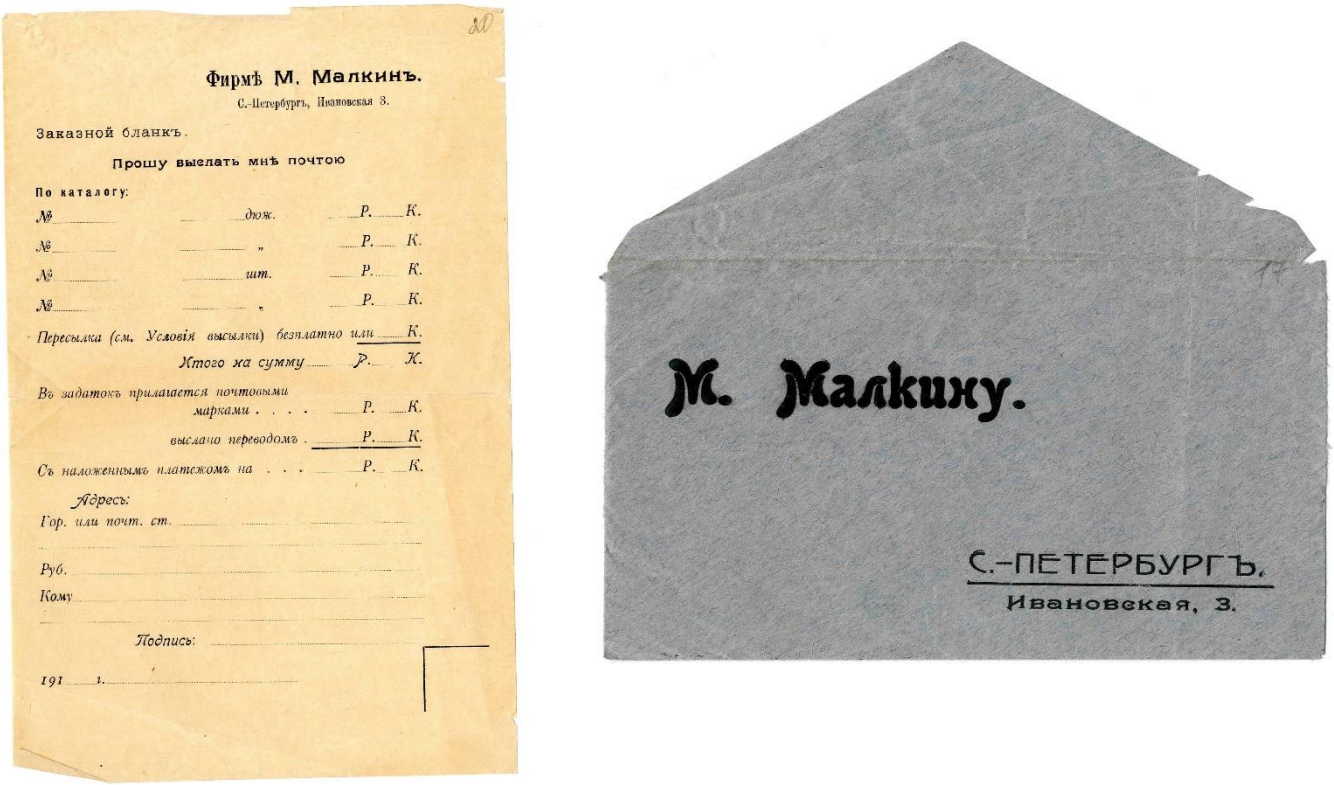
№. 53.
ИСКУССТВЕННЫЯ ГРУДИ.
Необходимо дамамъ.
желающимъ казаться полными. Тѣлнаго цвѣта. Посредствомъ надуванія становятся, по желанію, больше и меньше, выше и ниже.

Прост. пара . . . . . 15 р.
Лучш. съ кружевами и держат. 25 р.

№. 54.
НОВОСТЬ!
для импотентовъ и слабосильныхъ
Интродукторъ! Вводитель!
Простое проволочное приспособленіе, при употребленіи котораго слабымъ мужчинамъ облегчается исполненіе супружескихъ обязанностей. Совершенно безопасенъ.
Цѣна 5 руб.
При заказахъ просятъ указывать длину и окружность.

№. 55.
НЕОБХОДИМО
для мужчинъ и женщинъ!
РАДИКАЛЬНОЕ ИЗЛЕЧЕНІЕ
ТРИППЕРА.
„Кавасантоль“
проф. Бруно
противъ **триппера (гонорреи)**, по своему цѣлебному дѣйствію, по отзывамъ врачей, превосходитъ всѣ существующія средства.
ПОЛНОЕ ИЗЛЕЧЕНІЕ ТРИППЕРА
остраго и хроническаго и его осложненій у **мужчинъ и женщинъ** въ кратчайшій срокъ.
СПОСОБЪ УПОТРЕБЛЕНІЯ ПРИ КОРОВКѢ.
Цѣна 1 короб. „Кавасантоль“ 2 р. 50 к. Три кор. **для полнаго излеченія** высылаются по полученіи 7 р. или наложен. платежъ.
Пересылка по почтовому тарифу.

Advertisements for models of male and female genitalia (left), breast enhancement apparatus and impotence cures (center), and a “radical” treatment for gonorrhea (right).



Фирмѣ М. Малкинъ.
С.-Петербургъ, Ивановская 3.

Заказной бланкъ.

Прошу выслать мнѣ почтою

По каталогу:

№ ... дюж. ... Р. ... К.
№ ... „ ... Р. ... К.
№ ... шт. ... Р. ... К.
№ ... „ ... Р. ... К.

Пересылка (см. Условія высылки) безплатно или ... К.
Итого на сумму ... Р. ... К.

Въ задатокъ прилагается почтовыми марками . . . . Р. ... К.
выслано переводомъ . ... Р. ... К.
Съ наложеннымъ платежомъ на . . . ... Р. ... К.

Адресъ:
Гор. или почт. ст. ...
Руб. ...
Кому ...
Подпись: ...
191 ... г. ...

М. Малкину.
С.-ПЕТЕРБУРГЪ.
Ивановская, 3.

For the advert on the left, the attached mail-order form and pre-addressed envelope.

Source: GARF, f. 102, op. 67, d. 38, ll. 17-22.

Despite the insistence on the need to censor advertisements on the part of the government, certain journalists, and members of the wider public, there was a chasm between state ambitions and reality. Given the overburdening of the tsarist bureaucracy discussed earlier, it is highly likely that regional censorship committees simply did not have the available staff to censor the pages of advertisements that featured in the thousands of newspapers and periodicals that were printed each day, especially after 1905.[133] The Governor of Mogilev province (present-day eastern Belarus) complained that the local authorities just did not have enough time to censor "obscene" adverts and asked the central Department of Police to appoint a provincial official to supervise printing houses.[134] In response, the Department of Police reminded the Mogilev Governor that it was his responsibility to either appoint a provincial official (and presumably, find the money for his salary), or to add the task of advert censorship to the long list of duties performed by the local Police Chief.[135]

In August 1912, the St Petersburg Governor reflected on the challenges of advert censorship in the era of the mass circulation press. In a letter to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, he explained how hundreds of fines had extracted from the penny press for printing obscene adverts in 1912: Gazeta-Kopeika had been fined 53 times, Novoe Vremiia 36 times, and Peterburgskaia Gazeta 23 times.[136] However, because of the commercial success of these newspapers, the fines hardly acted as a deterrent and editors preferred to publish unauthorized adverts and then just pay the authorities after they were caught.[137] In July, an employee of the advert department at Birzhevye Vedomosti, a national daily newspaper with a liberal slant, was

[133] Weissman, "Regular Police", 47. On the limitations imposed upon censorship by manpower shortages, see Benjamin Rigberg, "The Efficacy of Tsarist Censorship Operations, 1894-1917", *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas,* 14, no. 3 (1966), 331-335
[134] GARF, f. 102, op. 67, d. 38, l. 27.
[135] GARF, f. 102, op. 67, d. 38, l. 33.
[136] GARF, f. 102, op. 67, d. 38, l. 88.
[137] Founded in 1908, *Gazeta-Kopeika* was the first newspaper to target lower-class Russians as its primary audience and it rapidly became the most popular newspaper in the Empire, Felix Cowan, "Popular Liberalism: Vladimir Anzimirov and the Influence of Imperial Russia's Penny Press", *Past Tense,* 5, no. 1 (2017), 12. On the circulation of these publications, see McReynolds, *The News under Russia's Old Regime,* 293-299.

fined just 40 roubles for 19 advert violations. As a mass-circulation newspaper, millions of copies of Birzhevye Vedomosti were sold on the streets of St Petersburg each year.[138] Paid advertisements were the financial backbone of Russia's commercially funded press, so it is unsurprising that editors chose to pay multiple fines and continue to print "obscene" adverts without police permission.[139] In autumn 1913, GUDP refused a request by the Department of Police to begin prosecuting editors who printed pornographic advertisements in their newspapers or periodicals under article 1001.[140] Despite repeated circulars emphasizing the importance of suppression, the imperial authorities just did not have the resources, or even the strong desire, to impose the censorship of advertisements in mass-circulation newspapers and periodicals.

Conclusion

In imperial Russia, the increasing availability of pornography in the early 1900s stoked anxieties about the negative consequences of modernization for social commentators and officials alike. Improvements in the postal system and the lowering of printing costs resulted in the circulation of erotic postcards and "obscene" cheap fiction. Adverts in the popular press signified the apparent unbridled sexual behavior occurring in urban centers. Young people were becoming cynical and immoral because of their exposure to pornographic materials. Russian commentators were not unique in their concern about the effects of pornography intended for mass consumption. When reflecting on the "price" of modernization, they drew on European-wide discourses of degeneration and civilizational decline. Efforts to suppress obscene material in the Russian Empire linked closely with anti-obscenity government initiatives in Britain, France, Germany and their colonies.

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[138] McReynolds, *The News under Russia's Old Regime,* 296.
[139] On the development of paid advertising in the Russian mass circulation press, see McReynolds, *The News under Russia's Old Regime,* 24-29.
[140] RGIA, f. 776, op. 22, d. 33, l. 363, 368.

The 1905 revolution and the legal and social changes that followed in its wake set the Russian Empire apart from wider European trends in the suppression of pornography. The social consequences of the 1905 cemented the links between apparent political and moral degeneracy, as far-right organizations and provincial officials largely placed the blame for the circulation of pornography on Jews. The mass circulation press developed comparatively later in the Russian context because of the rigidity of tsarist press controls. After the partial abolition of pre-publication censorship and relaxation of requirements for starting up periodicals, stories, images, and adverts with sexual themes appeared with greater frequency. In the years after 1905, the tsarist authorities struggled to impose limits upon what they had been forced to unleash. Controlling the content of newspapers and periodicals was impossible because of the sheer number of publications and the sparsity of the tsarist bureaucracy. The substantial wealth generated by the mass circulation penny press limited the impact of fines for the publication of contentious material. Furthermore, the decentralized nature of Russian imperial governance became even more pronounced after 1905 as emergency powers were extended further across the Empire. Under the conditions of emergency law, provincial authorities had substantial latitude in enforcing anti-pornography initiatives within their province, which resulted in patchwork suppression across the Empire based on the priorities of, and resources available to, local authorities. As well as social, political, and cultural transformation, the events of 1905 marked a revolution in terms of the distribution and suppression of pornography in the Russian Empire.