

Selling Sex in the City: A Global History of Prostitution, 1600s–2000s

Studies in Global Social History

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Selling Sex in the City: A Global History of Prostitution, 1600S–2000S

Edited by

Magaly Rodríguez García
Lex Heerma van Voss
Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk



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Selling Sex in World Cities, 1600s–2000s: An Introduction

*Magaly Rodríguez García, Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk and
Lex Heerma van Voss*

Christian Grey's biological mother was Ella, a drug-addicted sex worker. Christian and Ella lived in extreme poverty in Detroit and both were badly abused by Ella's pimp. Christian was 4 years old when his mother committed suicide; he spent four days with her dead body until the pimp found them and called the police. In later life, Christian only referred to his mother as "the crack whore".

The background of one of the main characters of the best seller *Fifty Shades* trilogy is characterized by platitudes that are all too often believed to be "typical" of prostitution: poverty, male abuse, economic exploitation, drugs, decadence, and trauma. Yet the extent to which these representations of prostitution are supported by sound empirical evidence has since the last decades of the twentieth century increasingly been questioned by scholars, activists, and sex workers who call for the integration of commercial sex in the realm of labour. This book seeks to engage in this ongoing debate by means of a global and comparative history of female prostitution in cities worldwide from 1600 to the present.

Notwithstanding the large number of national studies on particular aspects of prostitution (policies, attitudes, and labour market), no international comparison over a significant span of time has ever been attempted. We start in the early modern period in order to gauge whether practices and attitudes regarding prostitution have altered throughout the last four centuries around the world. By including the precolonial situation, we aim to observe to what extent prostitution changed with the settlement of Europeans in overseas territories. Although the distinction between "premodern" and "modern" prostitution is perhaps not very sharp, we presume that the important political, military, and socioeconomic changes that took place from ca. 1600 onward have had a profound impact on the sale of sex. The long historical and broad geographical approach of our project permits us to draw some general conclusions regarding the extent to which the practice of prostitution and societal reactions to it have been influenced by processes of colonization, industrialization, urbanization, the rise of nation-states, nationalism, and war, as well as revolutions in the

realms of politics, transport, and communication. Furthermore, the increased organization of prostitutes in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, as well as the increased scholarly attention that has been paid to prostitution and the main actors in the sex industry (prostitutes, pimps, brothel keepers, traffickers, and clients), have encouraged us to extend the research to the present. The focus on *female* prostitution in *urban* settings is justified on the one hand because commercial sex has nearly always been an urban phenomenon involving women servicing men, and on the other hand because the information available is limited, as male and transgender prostitution in the past, as well as rural prostitution, have been even more elusive than female sex work.

The project follows the research model used in earlier comparative projects carried out by the International Institute of Social History (Amsterdam, the Netherlands) on the history of dock and textile workers.¹ In the first phase of the project we solicited a set of urban studies on the history of prostitution in different countries for the period between 1600 and the present. To facilitate international comparisons, the authors of these urban overviews were requested to systematically address a number of topics/questions that were listed in a framework document. The latter is included below as an appendix to this introduction. In the second phase of the project, we invited a number of authors to write thematic comparative essays based on the collection of urban overviews. In the third stage of the project, the authors of the urban and thematic papers, as well as other experts on prostitution (in total nearly forty researchers from around the world) came together at the conference “Selling Sex in the City: Prostitution in World Cities, 1600 to the Present”, which took place at the International Institute of Social History from 25 to 27 April 2013. This volume contains the revised versions of a selection of the papers presented at that conference. More information about the book’s structure and the regions and themes contained therein will be provided at the end of this introductory note. Priority is given first to a justification of the choices we have made for this collective research project.

Even though the participants in the project were not explicitly required to adopt a particular approach to prostitution, we requested that they focus not only on the policies, societal attitudes, and structural factors that have influenced the sex industry but also on prostitutes’ profiles and culture, as well as on working and living conditions. We—and many of the authors involved in this

1 These projects resulted in the publication of two edited volumes: Sam Davies *et al.* (eds), *Dock Workers: International Explorations in Comparative Labour History, 1790–1970* (Aldershot, 2000) and Lex Heerma van Voss, Els Hiemstra-Kuperus, and Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk (eds), *Ashgate Companion to the History of Textile Workers, 1650–2000* (Farnham, 2010).

and other scientific studies—understand prostitution to be a form of work and therefore attempt to achieve a comprehensive overview of this activity from a global labour history perspective. This approach is linked to our understanding of work, which goes beyond the exclusionary concepts of labour that became dominant from the nineteenth century onward. For instance, writing in the 1830s, French nobleman Adolphe Granier de Cassagnac divided the proletariat into four groups, “the workers, the beggars, the thieves and the public women”, implying an understanding of only the first category to be “real” workers. In his view, “the worker is a proletarian, because he works in order to live and earns a wage; the beggar is a proletarian, who does not want to work or cannot work, and begs in order to live; the thief is a proletarian, who does not want to work or beg, and, in order to make a living, steals; the prostitute is a proletarian, who neither wants to work, nor beg, nor steal, and, in order to live, sells her body.”² Around the same period, the Communist League articulated the desire of “respectable” and “free” workers (meaning male wage earners) to distinguish themselves from slaves and other unfree labourers, the self-employed and the *lumpenproletariat*. And although Karl Marx himself seems to have been rather ambiguous about prostitutes and their relation vis-à-vis the working class,³ most nineteenth-century commentators defined survival activities such as prostitution as unproductive, work-shy, deviant, or even criminal.⁴

This narrow conceptualization of work, which led to the institutionalization and idealization of wage labour, has increasingly been challenged. Already at the end of the 1800s, new terms were introduced to describe activities that take place outside or at the edge of the conventional labour market. The political scientist Roterling, for example, referred to activities that are perceived as a public nuisance and that are distinct from “decent” or “formal” work as

2 Adolphe Granier de Cassagnac, *Histoire des classes ouvrières et des classes bourgeoises* (Paris, 1838), p. 30. See also Jan Lucassen, “Writing Global Labour History c. 1800–1940: A Historiography of Concepts, Periods and Geographical Scope”, in *idem* (ed.), *Global Labour History: A State of the Art* (Bern, 2008), pp. 39–90, 51.

3 As Marcel van der Linden, *Workers of the World: Essays towards a Global Labour History* (Leiden, 2008), p. 22, footnote 15 argues, “When [Marx] discusses the relative surplus population in *Capital*, he regards prostitutes as an important part of the ‘actual lumpenproletariat’ (*Capital*, I, p. 797). Elsewhere, especially in the *Theories of Surplus Value*, I, pp. 166 and 186, Marx says that prostitutes, if they work for a brothel keeper, perform (unproductive) wage labor, like actors or musicians, and thus are, by implication, part of the proletariat in the narrow sense of the word.”

4 Sebastian Conrad, *et al.*, “Die Kodifizierung der Arbeit: Individuum, Gesellschaft, Nation”, in Jürgen Kocka and Claus Offe (eds), *Geschichte und Zukunft der Arbeit* (Frankfurt [etc.], 1999), pp. 449–475; van der Linden, *Workers of the World*, pp. 10, 266–268.

“negative work”.⁵ But the expansion of the concept of work has only recently become popular among scholars and activists. Over the last decades, terms such as “precarious labour” and “informal” and “irregular work” have been used to depict (respectively) poorly paid, short-term, and unstable occupations, jobs excluded from the formal economy, and income-generating activities to which “a heterodox or even asocial character is attributed inasmuch as they lack general approval.”⁶ These novel conceptualizations have enabled the inclusion of reproductive or “female activities” such as care work and domestic service within the world of labour.⁷

The labour approach to prostitution follows this recent shift in the social sciences. In particular, historians have been of crucial importance in the removal of prostitution from the literature of crime and deviancy and the inclusion of prostitutes in the history of work.⁸ Yet, to paraphrase Timothy Gilfoyle, new academic interpretations of prostitution hardly undermine traditional views on commercial sex.⁹ Broadly speaking, we can identify four trends (which are not necessarily mutually exclusive) within societal analyses and the scientific study of prostitution.¹⁰ The deviant framework—much in vogue in

5 “Die negative Arbeit”, Von Landesgerichtsdirektor Rotering zu Beuthen (Oberschlesien), *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Strafrechtswissenschaft*, 16 (1896), pp. 198–223, 198, quoted in Sigrid Wadauer, “Work, Non-Work and Negative Work”, paper presented at the XIV International Economic History Conference, Helsinki, 2006, p. 2, available at: www.helsinki.fi/iehc2006/papers2/Wadauer.pdf; last accessed 7 July 2017.

6 Thomas Buchner and Philip R. Hoffmann-Rehnitz, “Introduction: Irregular Economic Practices as a Topic of Modern (Urban) History—Problems and Possibilities”, in *idem* (eds), *Shadow Economics and Irregular Work in Urban Europe: 16th to Early 20th Centuries* (Vienna, 2011), pp. 3–36, 18; Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh, *Off the Books. The Underground Economy of the Urban Poor* (Cambridge, 2006).

7 See for example, Dirk Hoerder, Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk, and Silke Neunsinger (eds), *Towards a Global History of Domestic and Caregiving Workers* (Leiden, 2015).

8 Timothy Gilfoyle, “Prostitutes in History: From Parables of Pornography to Metaphors of Modernity”, *The American Historical Review*, 104 (1999), pp. 117–141, 120. According to Judith Walkowitz, there seems to be a consensus among American and British historians who treat prostitutes as “workers and agents in history” and who interpret prostitution as a form of labour, not necessarily “noble or dignified labor, but labor nonetheless.” Judith Walkowitz, “History and the Politics of Prostitution: Prostitution and the Politics of History”, keynote address delivered at the second meeting of the COST Action “Comparing European Prostitution Policies: Understanding Scales and Cultures of Governance”, Salamanca, 11 September 2014.

9 Gilfoyle, “Prostitutes in History”, p. 120.

10 Joyce Outshoorn, “Introduction: Prostitution, Women’s Movements and Democratic Politics”, in *idem* (ed.), *The Politics of Prostitution. Women’s Movements, Democratic States and the Globalisation of Sex Commerce* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 1–20, 6–9. Since the list of works

the modern period but certainly not defunct in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries—departs from the assumption that prostitution creates a law and order problem because it gives rise to all kinds of uncivilized, asocial, criminal, and unhealthy behaviour. Scholars, social workers, activists, and public authorities who support this view define prostitution in terms of deviant behaviour that needs to be controlled, regulated, or prohibited.¹¹ In the morality view, prostitution is perceived as a sin and a social evil or as symbolic of the double sexual standard for men and women.¹² Somewhat linked to the former, the oppression model holds that prostitution comes about through gender inequality and poverty. Its proponents insist that disadvantaged socioeconomic circumstances and gendered power relations force women into prostitution. Their “appalling” condition thus exposes them to exploitative situations as well as violence and human trafficking. Within this approach, the “prostituted woman” is not criminalized but victimized. Since these women are not seen as persons who exchange sexual services for money or other benefits but as victims who are compelled to sell their bodies in patriarchal societies, prostitution is often defined as rape or sexual slavery.¹³ The sex work paradigm also departs from a socioeconomic and gender analysis but contrary to the oppression view, it stresses the agency of the people involved in prostitution. It focuses on the opinions and motivations of the concerned actors who implicitly or explicitly perceive prostitution as an alternative way to make a living, often preferable to other strenuous, dangerous, and low-paid jobs.

on prostitution that represent these trends is enormous, we will only cite here a few examples of each of them.

- 11 Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero, *La donna delinquente, la prostituta et la donna normale* (Torino, 1893); this work has been translated in its totality by Hahn Rafter and Mary Gibson: *Criminal Woman, the Prostitute and the Normal Woman* (Durham, 2004). See also, Sybil Neville Rolfe, “Biological Aspects of Prostitution”, in *idem*, *A Social Problem Group* (London, 1937); Hilary L. Surratt *et al.*, “Sex Work and Drug Use in a Subculture of Violence”, *Crime & Delinquency*, 50 (2004), pp. 43–59.
- 12 William Acton, *Prostitution, Considered in its Moral, Social and Sanitary Aspects, in London and other Large Cities. With Proposals for the Mitigations and Prevention of its Attendant Evils* (London, 1857); *Prevention of Prostitution. A Study of Measures Adopted or Under Consideration Particularly with Regard to Minors* (Geneva, 1943).
- 13 Kathleen Barry, *Female Sexual Slavery* (Englewood Cliffs, 1979); Carole Pateman, “Defending Prostitution: Charges against Ericsson”, *Ethics*, 93 (1983), pp. 561–565, 562; Ashwini Tambe, *Codes of Misconduct. Regulating Prostitution in Late Colonial Bombay* (Minneapolis, 2009); Sheila Jeffreys, *The Idea of Prostitution* (North Melbourne, 1997); *idem*, *The Industrial Vagina: The Political Economy of the Global Sex Trade* (London [etc.], 2009). How men and transgender persons involved in commercial sex fit within this analytical framework is unclear.

The labour approach to prostitution has been influenced by various intertwined forces, the first of which is the increasing participation of women in public protests. Even though the beginning of the sex workers' movement is commonly located in the 1970s, evidence exists of prostitutes organizing protests and stating their demands to the authorities already by the end of the nineteenth century. In British territories, Indian prostitutes protested against the harsh regulation system; in imperial Russia, they demanded health examinations of clients, not just prostitutes; in New Orleans in 1907, prostitutes organized a successful strike against rent increases; and in the 1930s, Argentinian women involved in prostitution used printed media to call for better working conditions and respect for prostitutes as workers. In interwar Germany, prostitutes developed various strategies to resist abuse and gain more control over their working conditions; some even formed their own union, the Association of the Legal Prostitutes of Hamburg and Altona. In the United States too, early trade unions like the Industrial Workers of the World approached prostitution as work and had prostitutes as members.¹⁴ Then, as the political and cultural changes brought about by the 1960s and '70s led to a further strengthening of the feminist movement, prostitutes in different parts of the world became more vocal and appropriated the language of human rights to create more stable structures. The introduction of the terms "sex work" and "sex worker" has been an important semantic shift signifying the growth of a movement that understands commercial sex in terms of labour and expects state protection.¹⁵

Obviously, stretching the concept of labour to include societal phenomena such as prostitution within the legal parameters of work can have political and socioeconomic consequences that (with a few exceptions) not even secular, highly sexualized societies seem prepared to cope with. On a theoretical level, this conceptual expansion can also have implications for the social sciences. As Yvonne Svanström questions, "How far can the work-concept be stretched

14 Eileen Boris and Heather Berg, "Protecting Virtue, Erasing Labor: Historical Responses to Trafficking", in Kimberley Kay Hoang and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas (eds), *Human Trafficking Reconsidered. Rethinking the Problem, Envisioning New Solutions* (New York, 2014), pp. 19–29, 21; Gregor Gall, *An Agency of their Own: Sex Worker Union Organizing* (Winchester, 2012), p. 13; Donna J. Guy, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family and Nation in Argentina* (Lincoln, 1991), p. 200; Victoria Harris, *Selling Sex in the Reich: Prostitutes in German Society, 1914–1945* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 61–64.

15 Jo Bindman, "Redefining Prostitution as Sex Work on the International Agenda" (Anti-Slavery International, 1997), available at: <http://www.walnet.org/csis/papers/redefining.html#text>; last accessed 7 July 2017.

without losing its meaning?”¹⁶ Should all remunerated activities, including begging, petty crime, surrogate pregnancy, and so on, as well as unpaid occupations such as elder and child care, housekeeping, subsistence farming or volunteer work be treated as work irrespective of how the people involved or society at large perceive these tasks?

John Budd offers a broad conceptualization which makes it possible to understand all such activities as work: “work is defined [...] as purposeful human activity involving physical or mental exertion that is not undertaken solely for pleasure and that has economic or symbolic value.”¹⁷ True, the boundaries between work and non-work/leisure are often blurred, especially when entertainment, sexuality, and emotions are involved. But if we understand work to be the “production of useful objects or services”,¹⁸ then prostitution is a form of labour. There is no reason why overtly or less overtly sexualized activities such as acting, modelling, professional dancing, massaging, and so on should be viewed as work/service and prostitution should not. The working and living conditions of prostitutes are often substandard and degrading but as the contributions to this book evidence, this situation seems to come about due to a lack of state protection, outright repression, and stigma rather than from an intrinsically harmful nature associated with prostitution. Moreover, detrimental physical and psychological effects can occur in all kinds of occupations. As Kimberly-Anne Ford has demonstrated in her comparative study of hospital work and prostitution in Montreal, the stress levels and assault rates among orderlies and prostitutes were surprisingly similar.¹⁹

Hence if we treat prostitution as the provision of sexual services, shouldn't we, once and for all, get rid of the old terms and systematically use “sex work” and “sex worker” instead? We choose not to, and use both “sex work/er” and “prostitution/prostitute” nearly interchangeably throughout this book. Even though some authors have a preference for one over the other, sex work (in the narrow sense) is used here as a synonym for prostitution. This brings us to

16 Comments on the papers of the session “Selling Sex in the City 1600–2000: Comparison”, European Social Science History Conference, Vienna, 23 April 2014.

17 John W. Budd, *The Thought of Work* (Ithaca, 2011), pp. 2–3.

18 Marcel van der Linden, “Studying Attitudes to Work Worldwide, 1500–1650: Concepts, Sources, and Problems of Interpretation”, *International Review of Social History*, 56 (2011), pp. 25–43, 27.

19 Kimberly-Anne Ford, “Evaluating Prostitution as a Human Service Occupation”, in James E. Elias *et al.* (eds), *On Whores, Hustlers, and Johns* (Amherst, NY, 1998), cited in Lena Edlund and Evelyn Korn, “A Theory of Prostitution”, *Journal of Political Economy*, 110 (2002), pp. 181–214, 188–189.

another intricate issue: a justification for the terms used and the definition of prostitution.

At the start of the project that led to this publication we did not offer the participants a definition of prostitution, but we asked them to pay attention to the overlapping of legal and cultural conceptualizations throughout place and time. In other words, we asked them to make clear what in the city or town discussed a prostitute was considered to be, and what kind of activities constituted prostitution and which ones did not. As the authors of this book demonstrate, the variety of sexual arrangements or “loose behaviours” that public authorities and private actors have perceived to be outright or close to prostitution is immense. We prefer the simplest possible definition. A barebones definition of prostitution would be that it is the provision of physical sex for payment and this is done with no prospects for marriage. The latter is included to distinguish prostitution from long-term socially accepted relationships that involve sexual exchange and financial arrangements.²⁰ Payment is intentionally imprecise so that it can include other forms of remuneration besides money, and to leave the distinction between “treating”²¹ and payment to the cultural norms of the time and place in question. That the sex should be physical is included to distinguish prostitution from paid sexually-charged services like stripping, phone sex, or pornography. All these forms of commercial sex are included in the (broadly understood) term “sex work”.

Recently, other notions have been introduced to describe situations in which an upfront monetary transaction does not take place, like sex-tourism relations and sexual-economic relationships with teenagers or young men and

20 Edlund and Korn, “A Theory of Prostitution”, pp. 181–214, 183–184, from which we borrow the basic elements of our definition, also claim that sex in prostitution is, from the man’s/client’s point of view, non-reproductive. This is useful in their analysis, where they compare marriage with the selling of reproductive sex, with prostitution as the selling of non-reproductive sex. For the long-term and global approach taken up in this project, this distinction seems too narrow. It assumes, for instance, that effective contraceptive measures and/or knowledge about them were/are always available, and unnecessarily excludes the practice of short-term marriages from prostitution, or forms of prostitution that mimic marriage.

21 The custom of “treating” became popular at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries in New York. It referred to the trade of sexual favours for theatre tickets, drinks, and other small presents by working-class women or “charity girls”, as they were known in underworld slang. Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn of the Century New York* (Philadelphia, 1986); Elizabeth Alice Clement, *Love for Sale: Courting, Treating and Prostitution in New York City, 1900–1954* (Chapel Hill, 2006).

women, where gifts such as trips, meals, phones, drugs, or school tuition are seen as being compensation for the services rendered. According to Kamala Kempadoo, the notion “transactional sex” is more useful in describing the activities of persons who are located outside the sex industry. Transactional sex can be read as “the umbrella term for all acts, including but not limited to sex work, where sexuality is exchanged for material and other non-sexual benefits.”²² Similarly, Amalia Cabezas challenges the concept of sex work as the only viable tool for understanding interactions between tourists and locals in Cuba and the Dominican Republic. She argues that important issues such as affection, companionship, and intimacy are absent in the terms “prostitution” and “sex work”. For this reason, Cabezas chooses to use the term “tactical sex”, which serves as a better means of understanding the “complex circulation of sex and affect”. The importance of gifts is emphasized, as they represent an “important feature of exchange and solidarity” and can transform the sexual relationship into one of courtship and love.²³

Neologisms like sex work, transactional sex, or tactical sex stress the self-perception of the actors concerned and avoid the stigma surrounding prostitution. As with “charity girls”,²⁴ people involved in transactional or tactical sex do not define themselves as “prostitutes” or “sex workers” but rather as “escorts”, “entertainers”, “business girls”, “beach boys”, “friends”, and so on; and, people engaged in the unambiguous exchange of sex for money today tend to prefer the term “sex worker”.²⁵ Yet the new terminology has its limitations. As Kamala Kempadoo admits, “the notion of tactical sex closely approximates what has been described [...] as transactional sex, even while the definitions of both

22 Kamala Kempadoo, *Prostitution, Sex Work and Transactional Sex in the English-, Dutch- and French-Speaking Caribbean: A Literature Review of Definitions, Laws and Research* (Greater Georgetown, 2009), p. 14.

23 Amalia Cabezas, *Economies of Desire: Sex and Tourism in Cuba and the Dominican Republic* (Philadelphia, 2009), pp. 120, 122.

24 See footnote 21.

25 Not all persons involved in prostitution like the term “sex worker”. Some perceive it as being a politically-correct word that does nothing to de-stigmatize prostitution. Others seem to dislike it because it would transform prostitution into an ordinary occupation; in their view, it is the taboo that makes it appealing and profitable. However, most of them acknowledge the political strength of the term, which can help to improve their working and living conditions. Melissa Hope Ditmore, “Introduction”, in *idem* (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Prostitution and Sex Work* (Westport, 2006), pp. xxv–xxxvii. These points were also made during a study-day on prostitution organized by the city of Antwerp, Belgium (June 2014), to which public authorities, social workers, prostitutes, and academics (including Magaly Rodríguez García) were invited to participate.

remain fuzzy.”²⁶ Furthermore, the boundary between transactional/tactical sex and prostitution/sex work is not always clear.

According to Amalia Cabezas, the term “tactical sex” makes it possible for us to acknowledge that commodification and affection are not mutually exclusive, but this can also be said of unequivocal sex work. Sufficient empirical evidence exists which testifies that prostitutes in past and present societies have often offered much more than fast and unceremonious sexual intercourse, and that their relations with loyal clients frequently involved friendship and even affection.²⁷ Transactional sex is said to respond to the interest of new needs (the “commodities of modernity”), rather than basic ones.²⁸ However, past and contemporary prostitutes have often justified their involvement in commercial sex in terms other than pure economic survival. The proponents of these new terms also aim to avoid the so-called essentialism of words like prostitution and sex work. They correctly point out that these activities (particularly when practised by women) have since ancient times been understood in terms of identity, not mere occupations. But this is not inherent in prostitution. In numerous (past and present) cultures, the link between one’s/somebody else’s job and identity is very strong.²⁹

This conceptual overview demonstrates that there is no single word that encompasses the complexity of commercial sexualities.³⁰ The new lexicon is a

26 Kempadoo, *Prostitution, Sex Work and Transactional Sex*, p. 15.

27 A recent study on purchasers of sex conducted at Simon Fraser University, Canada, found that male clients often value companionship as much as sex. Chris Atchison, “Report for the Preliminary Findings for John’s Voice: A Study of Adult Canadian Sex Buyers”, 2010, available at: <http://www.johnsvoice.ca/>; last accessed 7 July 2017. When the oldest prostitute from Brussels retired in 2011, she told the press her life story. During the thirty-five years she spent behind a window in the red-light district, she had had five long relationships with men who had been her clients before. Paul Demeyer, “Sonia (59) heeft haar laatste klant ontvangen”, *Nieuwsblad*, 2 March 2011, available at: <http://www.nieuwsblad.be/cnt/gvi3716p8>; last accessed 7 July 2017. Stories of sex workers establishing affectionate bonds with clients abound in ego documents and Internet blogs.

28 Suzanne Leclerc-Madlala, “Transactional Sex and the Pursuit of Modernity”, *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies*, 29 (2003), pp. 213–233.

29 “Except for the sexist language that should not be seen as excluding women, noted sociologist Everett Hughes’s observation from 1971 remains relevant today: ‘A man’s work is one of the things by which he is judged, and certainly one of the more significant things by which he judges himself.’” Quoted in Budd, *The Thought of Work*, p. 149.

30 For a long-term overview of the notions that have been used to refer to the sex trade in different times and societies, see: Magaly Rodríguez García, “Defining Commercial Sexualities, Past and Present”, in Kath Browne and Gavin Brown (eds), *Routledge Research Companion to Geographies of Sex and Sexualities* (Surrey, 2016), pp. 321–329.

welcome warning against the myths, generalizations, and oversimplifications that abound whenever commercial sex is discussed. This has been achieved through the bottom-up approach of research initiatives that include the points of view of the people directly involved in these activities. Yet the danger of deconstructing the use of sexuality in the exchange of material or non-material benefits is that some “sexual-affective-economic activities”³¹ become romanticized as feelings or companionship are stressed at the expense of economic considerations. After all, we should keep in mind that authorities, jurists, doctors, and social workers were and are not the only ones who seek to construct commercial sexualities within the scope of single terms such as “fornication”, “whoredom”, or “prostitution”. The actors who are involved themselves contribute to the creation of new discourses which attempt (but often fail) to draw a radical distinction between prostitution, sex work, sexual barter, and transactional or tactical sex. Indeed, as Amalia Cabezas compellingly states, “the exchange of goods and money for sexual services is not an unambiguous commercial endeavour but a discursive construction that is contested and in motion, changing across time and space.”³²

So for the sake of clarity, the traditional words “prostitution/prostitute” will be continued to be used here. Prostitution is more straightforward than the terms sex work, transactional sex, treating, and so on, even though all of them refer to “a sexual exchange for money or other valuables.”³³ It is also a concept that appears in the legislation and popular writings of most countries. Admittedly, as various authors in this book point out, “prostitution” and “prostitute” (and its foreign equivalents) became widely used only after the end of the eighteenth century to differentiate the sale of sex from simple fornication and adulterous behaviour. But their origins lay in antiquity. Both words are based on the Latin terms *prostituere* or *prostaré* which referred to methods and places of solicitation: standing in front of a brothel.

Another reason why the maintenance of these terms seems to be justifiable is that they reflect the stigma that has characterized prostitution throughout most of history, or perhaps more accurately, the history of prostitutes. As Lena Edlund and Evelyn Korn state in their theory of prostitution, “while attitudes toward prostitution have vacillated between condemnation and *laissez-faire*, the prostitute herself has suffered a consistently poor reputation.”³⁴ Indeed, although some forms of high-level prostitution in earlier times commanded

31 Kempadoo, *Prostitution, Sex Work and Transactional Sex*, p. 15.

32 Cabezas, *Economies of Desire*, p. 4.

33 Ditmore, “Introduction”, p. xxv.

34 Edlund and Korn, “A Theory of Prostitution”, pp. 207–208.

respect and prestige, most societies have treated prostitutes with contempt. At times, they were seen as being part of the working class but the efforts made to differentiate “good” from “bad” women seem to have been ubiquitous. From antiquity to the present, the use of distinguishable clothing or ornaments and zoning laws have served the purpose of singling out and keeping sex workers at a safe distance from “respectable” society.

The poor reputation of prostitution has deep roots. Throughout time and space the notions used to describe commercial sexualities have nearly always involved a condemnation of atypical sex acts. In spite of the geographical and time differences in the way the sex trade has been practised and policed, the available literature demonstrates that sexual desire has been deemed disruptive in most cultures. As it became increasingly commodified with the rise of industrial societies, the nation-state, and globalization, commercial sex became a constant preoccupation of elites and the bourgeoisie. Particularly women using sex for purposes other than (future) procreation were (and still are in many places) openly or less openly incriminated.³⁵ Female promiscuity has been commonly condemned in all patriarchal societies as it threatens the ability to ascertain paternity on the part of men and, from women’s point of view, to secure faithful and healthy husbands or partners. Moreover, the nexus between female licentiousness and financial or material gain exacerbates the anxiety of men in their traditional roles as family heads and breadwinners. In short, the “female capacity of opportunistic promiscuity threatens the very premise of the patriarchal family, and the prostitute is a constant reminder of this ability.”³⁶

However, since the nineteenth century the vilification of sex workers has increasingly made room for victimization. The increasing commercialization of sexual activities in capitalist societies seems to have run parallel with an increased sense of moral opprobrium, either because it is associated with wantonness, unruly behaviour, and laziness or because it is understood to be a violation of women’s dignity. Indeed, the notion of the “fallen woman” could refer to the sinful or unruly behaviour for which she is responsible, but also to situations of vulnerability in which women fall prey to malevolent men. Since the second half of the nineteenth century, women involved in prostitution

35 Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité: La volonté de savoir* (Paris, 1976); Robert Barker, Kathleen Wininger and Frederick Elliston, *The Philosophy of Sex* (New York, 1984); Nina Peršak and Gert Vermeulen, “Faces and Spaces of Prostitution”, in *idem* (eds), *Reframing Prostitution. From Discourse to Description, from Moralisation to Normalisation?* (Antwerp, 2014), pp. 13–24.

36 Edlund and Korn, “A Theory of Prostitution”, p. 208.

have been increasingly perceived as victims in western countries where the feminist movement gained ground. In Great Britain, feminists and libertarians helped publicize a series of sexual scandals in the 1880s which ended with the reporting on Jack the Ripper and the murder of five prostitutes. William Stead's publication of newspaper articles about the abduction of English girls who were then sold to continental brothels, in addition to the media attention given to the Ripper murders, rendered all men suspect and strengthened the notions of urban danger and female fragility.³⁷ The link between (migration for) prostitution, male violence, economic oppression, and trafficking was established in this way; by the end of the nineteenth century, a movement for the suppression of the "white slave traffic"³⁸ emerged in Britain and spread internationally. Since the early twentieth century, national and international initiatives to curtail female trafficking have gone in crescendo, and the view of prostitution as a harmful activity in which women are the main victims has become increasingly influential.³⁹

The idea of "unusual sexuality" and the perception of sex workers as threats or victims have not only reinforced the bad reputation of prostitution, but they have also made it more difficult to study. Until recently, very few persons directly involved in the sex trade left first-hand accounts of their activities and motivations. Scientific analyses containing information about the social backgrounds and the working and living conditions of prostitutes in the past are usually based on sources (such as police records, judicial files, medical reports, data collected by relief institutions, newspapers clippings, and so on) that are inevitably incomplete and biased. What is more, in contrast to the analysis of other forms of work, it appears that the study of prostitution is also heavily influenced by emotions and personal views about female sexuality

37 Judith Walkowitz, "Jack the Ripper and the Myth of Male Violence", *Feminist Studies*, 8 (1982), pp. 542–574.

38 The term "white slavery" was used in the early 1800s to denounce the plight of sailors of "white" nations captured by pirates in the North of Africa. Only by the end of the nineteenth century had the term become feminized and linked to the traffic of women for prostitution. In 1921, the League of Nations replaced the racialized term "white slavery" with "traffic in women and children".

39 This trend has not progressed in a linear way towards repression. Instead, waves of strong anti-trafficking and anti-prostitution campaigning can be discerned from the late 1800s until the end of the 1930s and again since the last decades of the twentieth century. The last wave has run parallel to a movement that demands the recognition and redefinition of prostitution as sex work.

and intimacy.⁴⁰ Because sexuality evokes both empowerment and vulnerability, the bodily contact involved in prostitution can be seen as a reminder of women's capacity to adapt to harsh life circumstances, or as the quintessential symbol of female oppression. In both cases, the reputation of the trade is to a greater or lesser extent tarnished as the participants' consent is repeatedly put into question.

Many authors, policy makers, and activists argue that consent in prostitution is impossible or at least highly problematic. Inspired by radical feminism, some claim that prostitution is always coercive because no person can ever consent to rape. Women's consent to prostitution would simply be another sign of their "multi-layered oppression" and submission to male supremacy and violence.⁴¹ This is the logic behind the criminalization of purchasing sex, a move that was first made in Sweden at the end of the 1990s followed by a few other countries in subsequent decades and passed by the European Parliament as a non-binding resolution in 2014.⁴² Others do not go as far as to equate prostitution with rape or sexual slavery but stress the gendered socioeconomic factors that push many women into prostitution. Even observers who treat prostitution as a form of work often specify that it is *not* a job like any other or create new concepts to draw a line of demarcation between sex work and other sexual-economic relationships. By doing so, they unwillingly reinforce the poor reputation of prostitution as well as the idea that real consent to this kind of unconventional occupation is unlikely.⁴³

Since consent, agency, and coercion are dealt with in two separate chapters in this book, we wish here only to specify why the issue is so important to sex workers and highlight the argument that consent to sex work is no less possible than consent to other (substandard or stigmatized) jobs. As stated above, some

40 We are thankful to Jan Lucassen for bringing this point to our attention during the European Social Science History Conference, Vienna, April 2014. Hendrik Wagenaar and Sietske Altink, "Prostitution as Morality Politics or Why it is Exceedingly Difficult To Design and Sustain Effective Prostitution Policy", *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, 9 (2012), pp. 279–292, argue that prostitution policy can be understood as an instance of morality politics. As such, much of prostitution policy is influenced by ideology, is emotionally charged, and is resistant to empirical evidence.

41 Jeffreys, *The Idea of Prostitution*, pp. 135–137.

42 "Punish the Client, Not the Prostitute", available at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/content/20140221IPR36644/html/Punish-the-client-not-the-prostitute>; last accessed 7 July 2017.

43 We would like to thank the members of the COST Action "Comparing European Prostitution Policies: Understanding Scales and Cultures of Governance" who raised this point during the second Action meeting, Salamanca, 10–13 September 2014.

writers have argued that prostitution is so traumatizing that it is impossible to *really* consent to it, and that by consequence prostitution always lacks consent. Yet there is no lack of (past and contemporary) statements by women who insist that they work in the sex industry voluntarily. We do not deny that some women are forced to work in the sex trade. We also acknowledge that many women (and men) accept jobs under unfavourable circumstances, and only have unattractive options from which to choose. Many workers, both historically and today, have had to accept jobs which involved risks (including sexual harassment) or were unhealthy or demeaning.⁴⁴ Hence we see no reason to treat sex work as a special case, unequal to all other kinds of work,⁴⁵ or to disregard the voices of women who say that sex work was their choice among the options available to them. Acknowledgement of the existence of consent and agency in prostitution strengthens the view of prostitutes as workers and could facilitate the legalization of sex work and subsequent protection of the trade's employees.⁴⁶

44 Economic constraints force millions of men and women into situations that are not necessarily of their liking and that are often harmfully exploitative. At its most abstract, all forms of labour can be described as coercive, as work implies a choice between two disagreeable alternatives and in extreme cases between two evils. According to Robert J. Steinfeld and Stanley L. Engerman, "Labor—Free or coerced? A Historical Reassessment of Differences and Similarities", in Tom Brass and Marcel van der Linden (eds), *Free and Unfree Labour: The Debate Continues* (Bern, 1997), pp. 107–126, no real distinction exists between free and slave labour in terms of a requirement to work in order to survive. In their view, the classification of labour into "free" or "unfree" is arbitrary. It is the law which determines "what kinds of coercive pressures are legitimate and illegitimate in labour relations."

45 As we write in the conclusion, we see prostitution as highly sexualized and highly gendered. In this characterization, it would perhaps be a better argument to treat sex work as a special category rather than dwell on the coercive, unhealthy and demeaning character of the occupation, but in our opinion treating sex work as incomparable with other kinds of work which often exhibit similar characteristics is not warranted either.

46 Barbara Sullivan, "Rethinking Prostitution and 'Consent'", in F. Castles and J. Uhr (eds), *Proceedings of the 2000 Conference of the Australasian Political Studies Association* (Canberra, 2000), pp. 1–7, argues that for a long period sex workers have been unable to press charges when they were raped, as they were seen as always being available to men. In the countries she has researched (the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand), this changed in the 1980s and '90s. This new trend, as well as sex workers' increased involvement in public debates, are proof that the women concerned "negotiate consent within a particular set of power relations and are able to distinguish between their consensual work as prostitutes and non-consensual rape" (p. 3). If prostitution is seen as always involving rape, there is a risk that this change can become undone again. See also

However, this has not convinced the advocates of the moral and oppression approaches to prostitution, who claim that women are either made to lie about their consent or have deluded themselves into believing that they do of their free will what they are really forced to do at home or abroad. Indeed, the issue of consent has been raised in relation to sex migration since the end of the nineteenth century. Even though the conflation of prostitution and “white slavery” was predominantly made in relation to underage white girls,⁴⁷ the idea that no woman, regardless of her age, could consent to travel abroad and become engaged in prostitution became increasingly popular from the interwar period onward. During the 1920s, the League of Nations still made a differentiation between consenting adult women and underage children taken abroad for prostitution; the latter were always treated as victims of traffic, consent not being a defence.⁴⁸ By the 1930s, however, the League strengthened the argument that “even if a woman over age freely consents to being the object of the traffic, in the majority of cases she is not fully aware of the disaster to which she is being led.”⁴⁹ Subsequent conventions approved by the League and the United Nations made the consent of women irrelevant.⁵⁰ In the year 2000, the United Nations approved the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress

Barbara Sullivan, “Rape, Prostitution and Consent”, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 40 (2007), pp. 127–142.

- 47 In 1910, the International Convention for the Suppression of White Slave Traffic was signed, and it included the offence of procuring adult women by means of fraud, violence, or other forms of compulsion, and women under the age of twenty even with their consent, for immoral purposes abroad.
- 48 In 1921, the International Convention for the Suppression of Traffic in Women and Children supplemented the provisions of earlier international agreements by extending the protection to women of twenty-one and to minors of either sex.
- 49 League of Nations Traffic in Women and Children Committee, Minutes of the Twelfth Session, Third Meeting, Geneva, 7 April 1933, p. 5, CTFE/12th Session/PV.3, League of Nations archives, United Nations Office at Geneva.
- 50 The 1933 International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women of Full Age covered the offence of procuring, enticing or leading away even with her consent, a woman or girl of full age for immoral purposes to be carried out in another country. In 1937, the League drafted a Convention for Suppressing Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, intended to fill the gap in the existing conventions by protecting adults of either sex against procurement, even when they consented and were not taken abroad. The outbreak of World War II prevented its approval by the League’s Assembly, but many of the main ideas included in the draft convention were taken up by the 1949 UN Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others. Magaly Rodríguez García, “The League of Nations and the Moral Recruitment of Women”, *International Review of Social History*, 57 (2012), pp. 97–128.

and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, commonly known as the Palermo Protocol, and defined the crime of human trafficking as follows:

“Trafficking in persons” shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.

Article 3(b) of the Palermo Protocol specifies that the consent of a victim of trafficking is deemed irrelevant if any of the means cited above have been used.⁵¹ What was new about the Palermo Protocol was that it introduced a definition of trafficking in international law and that the issue of coercion and deceit are therein included. However, the definition is so broad that it can include cases in which the nature of coercion or control over another person is difficult to determine.

The problem with this broad understanding of trafficking and its blending with the migration of women who are in “a position of vulnerability” is that it reifies the mental binaries of victim/perpetrator without taking into account the fluidity and complexity of labour relationships in the sex trade (as well as in other economic activities). This approach easily negates the agency of migrant workers who often respond to push factors “rather than the pull factor of trafficker enticement.”⁵² It also simplifies labour arrangements which often result in both progress and subjugation as well as improvements in workers’ economic opportunities, and at the same time subjects them to exploitative working conditions.⁵³

51 Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/Protocol-TraffickingInPersons.aspx>; last accessed 7 July 2017.

52 Ronald Weitzer, “New Directions in Research on Human Trafficking”, *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 653 (2014), pp. 6–24, 16.

53 Kimberley Kay Hoang and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, “Introduction”, in *idem*, *Human Trafficking Reconsidered*, pp. 1–18, 7–9. See also Lex Heerma van Voss, “The Worst Class of Workers: Migration, Labor Relations and Living Strategies of Prostitutes around 1900”, in Marcel van der Linden and Leo Lucassen (eds), *Working on Labor: Essays in Honor of Jan Lucassen* (Leiden [etc.], 2012), pp. 153–170.

Human trafficking is therefore an ambiguous notion that requires further empirical research⁵⁴ and that has, in our view, no linear relation with prostitution. Just like issues of concepts, policies, race, ethnicity, class, health, violence, space, the role of war, and male concentrations in industrial, military, and administrative hubs, forced (migration for) prostitution is a theme that appears in all the contributions to this book but receives no special treatment in a separate comparative chapter.

The volume is divided into two parts, one containing twenty-three urban overviews while the other includes eight thematic papers. All the authors of the urban essays were required to cover prostitution in the city or town in question between 1600 and the present, or for the time it existed if the city did not exist as a town of sufficient size for the full four centuries. As stated above, the authors were instructed to follow a framework document and to answer a set of questions on three broad themes. This explains the (relative) homogeneity of all the urban overviews. Since we were interested in how the history of sex work has been approached in different times and places, as well as in the various legal and cultural definitions used by state and non-state actors in each city, one section of each paper is devoted to historical contextualization, historiography, and definitions. A second theme is related to societal reactions regarding prostitution. Society is here broadly conceptualized and refers to the way that public authorities and private actors have responded to prostitution across time and space. Local, national, and international initiatives to control, regulate, and/or repress the sex trade, as well as the role played by religious and secular organizations in “redeeming” prostitutes or defending their interests, are included in the analyses. The third theme concerns the labour market for prostitution, more precisely the prostitutes’ social profiles; political and socio-economic factors influencing the sex trade (urbanization, industrialization, colonization, war, demographic transitions, and revolutions in communications and transport); changes in working conditions (indoor or outdoor prostitution, payment systems, prostitution as a part- or full-time activity, relations to other forms of “female occupations”, and so on); the prostitute/employer/client-relationship; and sex workers’ culture (hierarchy, solidarity, organization, self-representation, and views on prostitution). The urban overviews are organized

54 On the difficulties of measuring the phenomenon and on the absence of the opinions of sex-work migrants in narratives of human trafficking, see: Paul Knepper, “Measuring the Threat of Global Crime. Insights from Research by the League of Nations into the Traffic in Women”, *Criminology*, 50 (2012), pp. 777–809; Brenda Oude Breuil *et al.*, “Human Trafficking Revisited: Legal Enforcement and Ethnographic Narratives on Sex Trafficking to Western Europe”, *Trends in Organized Crime*, 14 (2011), pp. 30–46.

in four regional sections: Europe, Africa and the Middle East, the Americas, and Asia-Pacific.

The willingness of the authors to respond to (most of) these issues facilitated the preparation of comparative papers on prostitution in relation to labour relations, working conditions, migration, colonization, agency, coercion, gender, and social profiles. Hence the thematic overviews are based on the results of the different urban papers but the authors were given the liberty to use the available literature and approaches they deemed necessary to discuss the theme under consideration. Inevitably, there is some overlap in the various themes, but we do not consider this to be a problem. On the contrary, the interrelation between various issues—for example, migration and working conditions or gender and colonization—adds to a better understanding of the complexity of prostitution.

The intricacy of the subject, combined with the almost complete lack of information for many periods, places, and actors, results in a global history that does not cover each corner of the globe or each period to the same degree. We have covered every region of the world, but sub-Saharan Africa is underrepresented. Information about many ex-colonies in the Americas, Africa, and Asia for the period before the nineteenth century, as well as on prostitution in rural or suburban areas is often unavailable. Similarly, historical data about male and underage prostitutes or on clients and third parties is even more scarce than material on female sex workers. Yet, as is demonstrated in the concluding chapter, the cities and themes included in this volume provide a solid basis for a global history of prostitution and we are confident that they also make a valuable contribution to a more comprehensive understanding of the world of labour.

Appendix 1: Framework Document for Urban Overviews

1. Introduction: A few paragraphs historiography, methodology and sources

2. Definitions: overlapping of legal and cultural definitions throughout place and time: This section should make clear what in the town (country, culture) discussed a prostitute was considered to be; what activities constituted (also) prostitution (e.g. adultery and which did not (e.g. sexual services from a slave to her master); which sexual services were considered close to or distinct from prostitution?

3. The labour market for prostitution:

Push and pull factors

Urbanization and industrialization

Proletarianization and pauperization

Gender segregation in the “regular” labour market

Demographic transition (delayed marriages and family formation)

Concentrations of males with money to spend: mines, garrison towns, naval bases, ports ...

War

Migration

Women's economic emancipation: decline of prostitution? (possible to measure?)

Communication and transport revolutions and their influence on prostitution

Changes of working conditions throughout time and place

Indoor, outdoor soliciting

Payment systems (exchange of sex for any valued commodity/sexual barter: also considered prostitution?)

Independent work or under protection of madams, pimps or escort agents?

Prostitution during wartime and near military concentrations in times of peace

Prostitution as casual or permanent employment: part- or full-time activity?

Relation to other forms of sex work (dancing, stripping, massage) or related professions (masseuse, nightclub hostess)

Prostitutes' social profiles

Religious, racial and ethnic backgrounds

Education level

Employment prior or parallel to prostitution

Family situation (married; unmarried; children ...)

Age structure (age of beginning and end of prostitution): temporary or life-long activity?

Prostitute/employer/client-relationship

Conditions of compliance and traces of defiance (formal and informal activism) towards clients, employers and/or labour intermediaries (pimps, madams, brothel keepers, escort agents, owners of massage parlours or barber shops ...)

Material conditions of subservience imbedded in a wider structure of gendered, economic, class or racial subservience?

Prostitutes' culture

Hierarchy

Did issues of race, ethnicity and class play a role in the shaping of hierarchy? And vice versa: did prostitution help produce racial and class hierarchies?

How did location, types of clients, levels of protection (madams, pimps, escort agents, etc.) and earnings influence the shaping of hierarchies?

Solidarity: Did social constructs based on race, religion, class and age encourage or discourage group solidarity?

Self-presentation and prostitutes' attitudes towards prostitution: survival, inclination, emancipation, desire for luxury consumption, attraction to easy earnings, disdain of "normal" work ...?

4. Society and prostitutes:

State and non-state persecution and violence

State regulation/prohibition/tolerance

Prostitutes' physical and psychological health

Non-state actors' activism: religious and secular social workers; feminists

Effects of women liberalization (tolerance of pre-marital sex): decline of prostitution?

Increased acceptance of prostitution as a way of life?

5. (Optional) Special cases:

Child prostitution

Male and homosexual prostitution

Prostitution in non-urban areas

PART 1

Urban Overviews



SECTION 1

Europe



Selling Sex in Amsterdam

Marion Pluskota

Amsterdam, now the capital of the Netherlands, was founded in the twelfth century, and it grew rapidly during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries thanks to the development of its port and colonial ventures. The city suffered a decline from the mid-eighteenth century onwards but with industrialization picking up at the end of the nineteenth century, Amsterdam regained its status as an influential European city. In parallel with liberal legislation on certain drugs, Amsterdam also has a worldwide reputation regarding prostitution. The red-light district and the whole city to a certain extent appear in contemporary popular culture as the epitome of permissiveness and luxury. It has attracted international attention as indicated by the fact that millions of tourists visit the city every year. Amsterdam caters for international sex tourists, and in the global market and global imaginary, the city's red-light district has acquired a reputation comparable to that of Thailand with its open and visible sex merchandizing. From a legal point of view, contemporary Amsterdam (and the Netherlands in general) is an interesting case study on legalized prostitution, showing the drawbacks and positive aspects of national and municipal efforts to control and supervise prostitution in a legal environment greatly influenced by globalization. The history and reputation of prostitution in Amsterdam render it unique, and the abundant sources available make it possible to trace the evolution of this trade and its relations with the city, its citizens, and the official institutions which have governed urban spaces. Because of this long history and the different policies that have been implemented over the centuries, the links between prostitution and urban space can be studied much more effectively than in most other cases. From the micro-scale to global interactions, Amsterdam's history of prostitution shows how location, migration, and the global market have influenced prostitutes' work, whilst having a non-negligible impact on the city's economy.¹

1 Lotte van de Pol, *The Burgher and the Whore: Prostitution in Early Modern Amsterdam* (Oxford, 2011); Michaël Deinema and Manuel B. Aalbers, "A Global Red-Light City", in Michael de Waard (ed.), *Imagining Global Amsterdam: History, Culture, and Geography in a World City* (Amsterdam, 2012), pp. 273–287.

Historiography and Sources

Despite its long history, the historiography on Amsterdam prostitution is imbalanced, as is shown by the fact that the Middle Ages and early modern period have been little researched. One history of prostitution in Amsterdam is the well-known book by Lotte van de Pol which gives interesting insights into the role of prostitution in the seventeenth and eighteenth century port economy of the city. However, no recent academic work has focused on the early modern period although various sources exist which could be used to study prostitution in the city in depth.² *Confessie boeken* (sentencing records which include the testimonies of parties accused of crimes) and the other judicial archives which were extensively used by van de Pol offer various details about prostitutes' lives in the port city. These sources can be complemented with a study of the literature of the time. Indeed, both Dutch and international travellers wrote about the harbour district of Amsterdam and complimented (or wrote scathingly about) the entertainments available and the presence of prostitutes on the streets and in public houses.³ For example, *Het Amsterdamsch Hoerdom* was published in 1681 and reprinted nine times. Translated into French and German, it was used as a template for *London Jilt* (1683). These works of fiction followed a literary trend which started at the end of the seventeenth century and exploded in the eighteenth century with a proliferation of novels featuring prostitutes as their main characters, and sometimes the books verged on pornography.⁴ Though the various adventures of the main protagonists are fictitious, many authors seemed to have relied on their personal experiences when they described the places their characters inhabited, allowing for a more nuanced representation of seventeenth-century music houses and

2 van de Pol, *The Burgher and the Whore*; J.F. van Slobbe, *Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis en de bestrijding der prostitutie te Amsterdam* (Amsterdam, 1937); Sijmons Diet, "Een noodzakelijk kwaad, maar voor wie? Prostitutie in de tweede helft van de negentiende eeuw", in *Jaarboek voor Vrouwengeschiedenis* (1980), pp. 65–110; Petra de Vries, *Kuisheid voor mannen, vrijheid voor vrouwen* (Amsterdam, 1997); Petra de Vries, "Josephine Butler and the Making of Feminism: International Abolitionism in the Netherlands (1870–1914)", *Women's History Review*, 17 (2008), pp. 257–277.

3 van de Pol, *The Burgher and the Whore*, pp. 9, 19; J.H. Bose, "Had de mensch met één vrouw niet connen leven...", in *Prostitutie in de literatuur van de zeventiende eeuw* (Zutphen, 1985).

4 See for example Anonym, *D'Openhertige Juffrouw* (Amsterdam, 1680), a sixteenth-century century "sex manual" republished regularly in the seventeenth century; Pietro Aretino, *The School of Whoredom* (London, 2003); Inger Leemans, *Het woord is aan de onderkant* (Nijmegen, 2002); Gert Hekma and Herman Roodenburg, (eds), *Soete minne en helsche boosheit, seksuele voorstelling in Nederland 1300–1850* (Nijmegen, 1988), pp. 109–144.

eighteenth-century brothels. Prostitutes and brothel scenes were also often painted by Dutch artists in the seventeenth century, despite the Calvinist influence on artistic creation. Although the representations did not correspond to a realistic depiction of prostitution, elements in the paintings give information about the environment surrounding exchanges with prostitutes.⁵

The few studies on prostitution in early modern Amsterdam have focused on the representation of prostitutes but the relations between the authorities, inhabitants, and prostitutes have not been studied in depth (with the exception of the work by van de Pol). This lack of a reflection on social control is somewhat counterbalanced by studies on prostitution in nineteenth-century Amsterdam. Indeed the moral and legal status of prostitutes changed after the French invasion of 1806. The French system of municipal regulation was put in place by French officials in garrison towns and to a certain extent also in Amsterdam during the French presence. However, the municipal authorities in Amsterdam were not keen on strictly regulating prostitutes and the French system was quickly abandoned, although other Dutch cities such as The Hague kept it in place. The existing historiography has tended to focus on the relations between the municipality, the police, and prostitutes; indeed, despite the lack of official regulation, the police kept an eye on prostitutes.⁶ Petra de Vries has published various studies on the discrepancies between legal municipal systems and how they influenced the development of the abolitionist movement in the Netherlands. De Vries' works also show how concerns about the white slave trade (linked with the abolitionist movement) led to the closure of Amsterdam's brothels in 1897 and state-wide prohibition on brothel-keeping in 1911. Studies have shown that both officials and the population in general were not in favour of the harsh treatment of prostitutes and the authorities tended to apply the regulations loosely; the closure of brothels (*Bordelenverbod*) has been seen by historians as a measure to prevent trafficking without criminalizing prostitutes.⁷ Research on the ban on brothels has shown how men and women adapted to this regulation and how certain places, such as cigar-shops, became façades for brothels.⁸

Contemporary Amsterdam is a particularly useful ground for anthropologists, sociologists, geographers, and researchers working in the fields of criminology

5 Lotte van de Pol, "Beeld en wekelijkheid van de prostitutie in de zeventiende eeuw", in *Ibid.*

6 Martin Bossenbroek and Jan Kompagnie, *Het mysterie van de verdwenen bordelen* (Amsterdam, 1998).

7 de Vries, *Kuisheid voor mannen, vrijheid voor vrouwen*; de Vries, "Josephine Butler and the Making of Feminism"; An Huitzing, *Betaalde Liefde* (Bergen, 1983), p. 57.

8 Bossenbroek and Kompagnie, *Het mysterie van de verdewenen bordelen*, pp. 302–303.

and law.⁹ Since the early debates in parliament on the legalization of prostitution in the Netherlands, which was officially enacted in 2000, both the national government and the city of Amsterdam have commissioned various research projects about the pros and cons of the legalization of prostitution and brothels from human and economic perspectives.¹⁰ Contemporary research has often been based on interviews, and photographs, documentaries, films, and biographies have also been used to collect information on prostitution in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Official data has been collected by the city council, the government, and independent researchers, but it is still difficult to analyse and compare certain findings, notably on human trafficking. The number of women trafficked in the Netherlands is not definitively known, but the main issue with studies on trafficking relates to the various definitions and methodologies used to calculate the extent of trafficking; for example, certain studies published before the legalization of prostitution in the Netherlands considered most foreign women as having been trafficked even though they went to the Netherlands willingly.¹¹ These discrepancies in definitions (trafficking can also involve local women) make it difficult for researchers to give a clear picture of the reality, all the more as the media have been known to relay misleading information.¹²

Indeed, some researchers have been interested in demystifying certain ideas that the media have reported about human trafficking, coercion in prostitution, and pimping. The Dutch character known as the “loverboy”, for instance, came into being at the beginning of this century as the result of the unease

9 Phil Hubbard, “Afterword: Exiting Amsterdam’s Red Light District”, *City*, 16 (2012), pp. 195–201, 195.

10 See for example, Beke’s research and Anton van Wijk *et al.*, *Kwetsbaar beroep, onderzoek naar de prostitutiebranche in Amsterdam* (Amsterdam, 2010) which was commissioned by the government; available at: <https://www.amsterdam.nl/projecten/project-1012/publicaties-project/externe-onderzoeken/kwetsbaar-beroep/>; last accessed 7 July 2017; Marcel Buster, *Straatprostitutie & vrouwennachttopvang in Amsterdam* (Amsterdam, 2007), which was commissioned by the Amsterdam municipality; Dirk J. Korf *et al.*, *Tippelen na de zone, straatprostitutie en verborgen prostitutie in Amsterdam* (Amsterdam, 2005); Sasja Biesma *et al.*, *Verboden bordelen, evaluatie opheffing bordeelverbod: niet legale prostitutie* (Groningen, 2006).

11 For instance, Fanny Polania Molina and Marie-Louise Janssen, *I Never Thought This Would Happen to Me* (Rotterdam, 1998).

12 Frank Bovenkerk and Marion Van San, “Loverboys in the Amsterdam Red Light District: A Realist Approach to the Study of a Moral Panic”, *Crime, Media, Culture*, 7 (2011), pp. 185–199; Marion Van San and Frank Bovenkerk, “Secret Seducers”, *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 60 1 (2013), pp. 67–80.

caused by young Dutch girls falling under the “spell” of young men (usually, but not always, a second or third generation child of immigrants) who would then force them into prostitution. However, such so-called “loverboy” practices are not in any way different from other pimping methods, nor have cases of forced prostitution increased over time.¹³ It should also be noted that researchers’ interviews with prostitutes and pimps have produced results that contradict the aims and missions of municipal projects.

Though contemporary prostitution in Amsterdam is well known, the main subject(s) of research have been the women working behind the windows, which is a specific type of prostitution, as well as women working in registered brothels and adult entertainment venues where live sex acts are performed. These women are part of the legal area of prostitution and therefore are more accessible to the police, social workers, and researchers but unregistered prostitution is the fastest growing type in Amsterdam and research on these women remains difficult.¹⁴ Through registration with the Chamber of Commerce (*Kamer van Koophandel*—KvK) women have been granted the status of independent workers and employees, and they are taxed; while women working at licensed houses were compelled to register, a study carried out in 2005 showed that 70 per cent of the women working at licensed houses were not registered with the tax office.¹⁵ Moreover, these figures do not include women who worked with escort services or from home, as these forms of prostitution were not covered by the lifting of the ban on brothels in 2000. This issue is now covered by new legislation that was enacted in 2014 (see below). Although there are some figures on street prostitutes, women working as escorts and independently outside the red-light areas, as well as former prostitutes, have not been the subject of academic research yet. It is unclear how women working without being registered and registered women working in the windows compare. The links between different working spaces deserve further analysis;¹⁶ for example, how do women move from one working space to another and how do they think of them? Changing work patterns and environments are most likely a career choice and the extent of prostitutes’ agency in this regard is difficult to evaluate. The most recent report on prostitution in Amsterdam states

13 Bovenkerk and Van San, “Loverboys in the Amsterdam Red Light District”; Bovenkerk and Van San, “Secret Seducers”; and for the general public, H. Korterink, *Echte mannen eten wel kaas* (Amsterdam, 2010).

14 van Wijk *et al.*, *Kwetsbaar beroep*, p. 213.

15 Helga Dekker *et al.*, *Evaluatie opheffing bordeelverbod: De sociale positie van prostituees, 2006* (Amsterdam, 2006), p. 30.

16 Note the exception of Lucie van Mens, *Prostitutie in Bedrijf* (Rotterdam, 1997).

that social mobility between working spaces can be quite high (for instance between brothel prostitution and window prostitution), but more academic research on this topic would be welcome,¹⁷ as would work on the issues of segregation by age, gender, and nationality, and further studies on prostitutes' life-cycles in any given period should be encouraged.

What Defines Prostitution in Amsterdam?

Prostitution has never been a uniform, clearly defined business. Over time its definition has changed, influenced by external and internal factors. Prostitutes themselves differentiate between amateurs and professionals, and historically a *hoer* (whore) was a woman who had sexual intercourse outside of marriage but not for money.¹⁸ Fornication and adultery were considered degrading behaviours and as such were frowned upon by the community. The exchange of money was not the main concern of the authorities in the early modern period; however, it is under the terms *hoer* and *hoererij* that prostitutes can be found in the Amsterdam archives. Van de Pol noticed a semantic shift in the expressions used by the court and in prostitutes' testimonies over the years. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, prostitution started to be considered a livelihood distinct from immoral behaviour and adultery.¹⁹ The uniqueness of Amsterdam in comparison to other cities such as Paris or Florence was its strict Calvinist culture which forbade sexual relations between unmarried people; prostitutes could therefore be arrested for having sexual encounters without being married but the exchange of money was not the decisive factor. As such, we can find them in the judicial archives but as the Amsterdam municipality had a very limited "police force", restraining the growth of prostitution appears to have been very difficult.²⁰

The term prostitute will be used in place of "whore" (*hoer*) and sex worker in this chapter, although all of them can be seen as being anachronistic. The term "prostitute", which was not in use in official regulations until the nineteenth century, refers to a more neutral term than "whore", whereas the expression "sex worker" reflects a postmodernist idea of prostitution as a form of labour to which rights and regulations can be applied. Contemporary sex workers,

17 van Wijk *et al.*, *Kwetsbaar beroep*, p. 33.

18 van de Pol, *The Burgher and the Whore*, pp. 5–6.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

20 Available at: <http://publications.nichibun.ac.jp/en/item/symp/2001-03-30/pub>; last accessed 7 July 2017.

some of whom are union members, demand labour rights and defend their way of earning money. The notion of the “pressure group” is often associated with the expression “sex worker”; they consider themselves, as do the state or state authorities for example in the Netherlands, Germany, and Nevada where prostitution is legal, to be a particular group of workers. Such a characterization in the early modern period was more or less absent. Historically, while some prostitutes defended their right to work, there were no large national or international pressure groups as is the case today. Admittedly, the French system of regulation created a new category of workers based on the authorities’ perceptions of prostitution, but we do not know to what extent this change of attitude also applied to these women; did they consider themselves to be members of one specific group of workers or did they keep defining themselves as seamstress, washerwomen, or milliners? The absence of the proof of a common reference between nineteenth-century prostitutes or of a pressure group led by prostitutes makes “sex worker” look like an anachronism when applied to periods before the end of the twentieth century.

The basic understanding of the prostitudinal exchange since the nineteenth century has involved the exchange of money for a sexual act and in this study that is taken up within the scope of such acts between men and women. This demarcation unfortunately leaves aside men and transgender individuals working in the sex industry, as well as the people whose initial work contracts did not include sexual relations with a client, such as strippers and other performers.²¹ The sexual encounter is often preceded by an act of soliciting by which a person accosts someone in order to offer sexual services. While selling one’s body for sex has never been legally condemned in Amsterdam, soliciting has often been targeted by legislators, notably within the framework of “disorderly behaviour”. This distinction is based on moral considerations; the act of soliciting is understood to be an interaction visible to the public and occurring in the public sphere. The sexual intercourse and the exchange of money that follow soliciting are deemed to be private matters that are usually kept out of the public eye.²² Because of this distinction, sexual exchanges for money cannot be supervised as effectively as the processes that occur before sexual intercourse and payment.

Definitions of prostitution also vary according to the location of the prostitutes. In contemporary Amsterdam the working spaces of prostitution took

21 See for example Christine Harcourt and Basil Donovan, “The Many Faces of Sex Work”, *Sexually Transmitted Infections*, 81 (2005), pp. 201–206.

22 Joyce Outshoorn, “Policy Change in Prostitution in the Netherlands: From Legalization to Strict Control”, *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, 9 (2012), pp. 233–243, 234.

and still take multiple forms, from street work to private clubs and homes. The international reputation of Amsterdam for prostitution led to the diversification of entertainment venues open to both tourists and locals. Live sex shows, strip clubs, massage parlours, and theme nights in brothels cater for all types of customers. According to the woman's status and her labour relations, she is more or less mobile in the city and can use one working space to solicit and another to have sexual intercourse. The working space often defines the type of prostitutional exchange offered, or in other words, the sexual services provided. These range from a hand job to a full night with a "girlfriend experience" which appends emotions to an otherwise impersonal sexual encounter.

Different categories of prostitutes existed in Amsterdam throughout the centuries. Streetwalking has always been considered to be the lowest type of prostitution; these women solicit on the street and either go to a hotel or have sex in the client's car. In earlier times, they used parks, alleys, and empty buildings, as it may still happen nowadays. There is no fixed time limit but quick sexual encounters mean more clients in one day/night. The prices are lower than in other settings as no rent is involved (less than €50). Streetwalking is forbidden in Amsterdam but it is known that a few women (around 45 women in 2009) still work the streets.²³ It is not always known if they are independent or working for a pimp. A window prostitute solicits and provides her services in the same working space; that seems to be the most desirable place of work for prostitutes as, once they move from private clubs to window prostitution, they tend to never go back to the brothels.²⁴ As Sabat explains, window prostitution is "enabled by contemporary economic values that simulate efficiency, productivity and fast consumption"; a "suck and fuck" costs €50 for twenty minutes and is the most common service provided.²⁵ Some other forms of sexual activities can be bought from window prostitutes for a higher fee but not every woman offers those services; in general, sexual intercourse is performed with a condom. The rent of a window for a day's work (usually an 8-hour shift) varies from €80 to €150 (2014 prices), depending on the day of the week, the time of the day, and the location of the window. Ashworth *et al.* have pointed out the similarities between "shoe shopping" and choosing a prostitute; the display and atmosphere surrounding the women improve the customers' experience and commodify, to the extreme, the bodies of the women (and men) behind these windows.²⁶ The concept of the window display has been in existence since the

23 van Wijk *et al.*, *Kwetsbaar beroep*, pp. 111–112.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 58.

25 Magdalena Sabat, "From Red Light to Black Light", *City*, 16 (2012), pp. 158–171, 158.

26 Gregory Ashworth *et al.*, "The Red-Light District in the West European City: A Neglected Aspect of the Urban Landscape", *Geoforum*, 19 (1988), pp. 201–212, 208.

late 1950s, a time when brothels were officially banned, although already between the two World Wars prostitutes could be seen loitering near their doors and windows.²⁷ Since the 1950s, the well-known windows have offered the ambivalence of public and private spheres in Amsterdam. The women are visible to the public whilst being in a private environment. Despite being on display, they remain in control of their interactions with the public and can choose to ignore customers and other pedestrians. The windows can be seen as a dual environment that is both private and public but which remains the prostitute's own space. Ideally, she has total control over who is allowed to enter her room. Under the terms of the regulation enacted in the year 2000, window prostitutes were required to be registered with the municipality (not the police), but that did not bring pimping to a halt (see below).²⁸

Women working at brothels tend to solicit in the bar area (if there is one) before moving to a private room with a client or they can be on display in an anteroom for the customer to choose. Brothels or contemporary "private clubs" are defined as establishments where men can meet prostitutes and perform sexual acts, usually in a private room. When a woman works in a totally enclosed environment such as a brothel, she is most likely under the supervision of a third party and therefore compelled to give away some of her wages (to her employer or protector). This also means that she cannot make the working space her own. Early modern taverns, inns, and other non-licensed places referred to as bawdy-houses (and some music houses) served as the precursors of brothels. The meaning of "brothel" became restricted over time; the process of the privatization of prostitution over the centuries meant that brothels came to systematically offer rooms to their customers. Live-in prostitutes were common in the nineteenth century as part of attempts to regulate prostitution and supervise establishments where prostitution occurred, but in the early modern period "fetched whores" counted for a fifth of the arrests in brothels.²⁹ Nowadays in Amsterdam, brothels are clubs or *privéhuis* where men can meet prostitutes and have sexual intercourse in one of the rooms of the house. A man, a woman, or a couple can be in charge of the establishment; prostitutes themselves are rarely the owners (except when they own a *privéhuis*, a house shared with other prostitutes), but they can work as employees or independent workers, in the latter case paying a fee to use the premises. Brothel owners

27 Sabat, "From Red Light to Black Light", p. 160; Fred Stemvers, *Meisjes van plezier: de geschiedenis van de prostitutie in Nederland* (Weesp, 1985), p. 119.

28 Wim Huisman and Edward Kleemans, "The Challenges of Fighting Sex Trafficking in the Legalized Prostitution Market of the Netherlands", *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 61 (2014), pp. 215–228, 227.

29 van de Pol, *The Burgher and the Whore*, p. 27.

tend to employ women as independent workers in order to avoid paying taxes. Current legislation is meant to give sex workers sufficient autonomy but research has shown that some women often have to surrender much of their independence to the owner; this is particularly the case for non-EU nationals or minors who are working as prostitutes illegally without a work permit.³⁰ These women are often dependent on their employers as they need protection from the police and the risk of deportation.

In the upper levels of the prostitution hierarchy there are escorts who work independently or are employed by an agency to cater to specific clients. Their work tends to be less regular than women working in the windows and in sex clubs but their wages are often higher; they meet fewer clients than the other prostitutes and offer their company as well as sexual services. Their working spaces vary and they are much more mobile during their shifts than a window prostitute or streetwalker (their services can include accompaniment to a dinner, party, or room). It can be more difficult for them to refuse certain sexual acts and they are often more vulnerable than window prostitutes, as they are working in environments which afford them less social control; in the same way, their mobility within the city can make their encounters with clients unsafe, as they might not be able to choose the meeting place. However, working in the upper hierarchy of prostitution has its advantages in the sense that the women are often less subject to the control and supervision of the authorities and police. In Amsterdam before the legislation enacted in 2014, some escorts working with unregulated agencies or prostitutes based from home worked in a grey area with looser social ties; indeed these women were not working in a regulated environment and therefore had less contact with the authorities. Although they were required to register as independent workers for tax purposes, few of them complied. Independent workers were advised to register with the KvK under the title “prostitute”, “erotic service provider”, or “personal service provider”; since the KvK registers are public, prostitutes were also advised to register under a professional name as their home address was also available to the public.³¹ Such employees must be registered with the tax office and in this way they can enjoy the same rights as other workers (including retirement pension, sick leave, and unemployment benefits). However, this lack of privacy explains why many single women have worked as independent escorts or worked from home; in that way, they could ensure that their privacy was

30 Lisa Sanchez, “Sex and Space in the Global City”, in Richard Warren Perry and Bill Maurier (eds), *Globalization under Construction* (Minnesota, 2003), pp. 151–178.

31 Available at: <http://www.amsterdam.nl/zorg-welzijn/programma/algemene-artikelen/inschrijven-kamer/>; last accessed 7 July 2017.

respected and no trace of their profession was registered in official documents. However, the new legislation promulgated in 2014, the aim of which was to change this situation, stated that these women have to register with the tax bureau. This change in the legislation was meant to cover this area of prostitution which was not regulated and thus leaves women open to certain risks (in terms of dependence on a third party).

Mapping Amsterdam's Prostitution over the Centuries

The geography of prostitution in Amsterdam is particularly interesting as we can follow, to a certain extent, the spatial development and regression of many districts in relation to prostitutes' working spaces. Indeed there exists a link between the prostitudinal spaces and socio-economic development of the districts, especially before the invention of cars, which led to a dispersion of prostitutes in the urban landscape. In 1925, Burgess *et al.* defined the specificities of urban spaces where "vice" developed and stated that these were most likely zones of transition where social and economic development came to a halt and a clear decline was experienced both structurally and morally with increasing rates in crime, poverty, degradation, and disease.³² However, Amsterdam's areas of prostitution have not experienced the same socio-economic evolution and it appears that the relationship between prostitution and urban space is more complex than a mere correlation between a zone of transition and the development of prostitution. Red-light districts in Amsterdam have not been displaced according to the transitional zone theory. On the contrary, we see in Amsterdam a historical continuity in the use of urban space for purposes related to selling sex; thus, the notion of spaces of transition, though relevant in certain periods, cannot be considered to be a fundamental element of the location of red-light districts in Amsterdam. Prostitution grew in the city centre (from the Middle Ages to today) in the newly built residential district of the Pijp (especially from the end of the nineteenth century onwards), or more recently in 1996 around the new harbour. As will be seen below, many variables need to be taken into account if we want to understand the locations of prostitution. Confinement has never been strongly imposed by the municipality, although the authorities tried to maintain certain boundaries between the districts. However, for these boundaries to be respected prostitutes have to implicitly agree with the municipality's legislation; indeed from an economic

32 Robert E. Park *et al.*, *The City* (Chicago, 1967), p. 54.

point of view, it is unlikely that women would agree to move if this meant losing customers.

Starting at least in the Middle Ages, prostitutes could be found in the city centre near the port. First, only two streets were allocated to prostitution but the trade quickly expanded at the same pace as the maritime trade and economic development of the city. Catering for mariners was a lucrative affair, so these women remained close to the port in what is now known as the red-light district of De Wallen (including Zeedijk Street, which nowadays is more reputed for its bars and restaurants than for prostitution). But the trade also extended towards the Dam, Rokin, and the Nieuwe Stadhuis in the seventeenth century, and the Kalverstraat, which adjoins the Dam square, became a cruising lane by the twentieth century. Indoor prostitution in the nineteenth century was concentrated in these areas but with the closing of the brothels in 1897, prostitution moved to new districts, as well as to hotels and cover-up businesses. As de Wildt and Arnoldussen explain, spatial dispersal and the use of non-specific premises meant that prostitution blended into the everyday urban landscape.³³ At the end of the eighteenth century, the newly-built Plantage district saw a rise in outdoor prostitution, whilst the northern part of the Pijp became another red-light district when new social housing was built in the mid-nineteenth century. Rembrandt and Thorbeckeplein could be visited at night although streetwalking had been forbidden starting in 1889. The presence of a park in this district meant that prostitutes could bring their customers there, which was impossible in the old city centre as it was overcrowded and had few quiet dark alleys suitable for sexual intercourse. The geography of prostitution in Amsterdam confirms Symanski's argument; he showed how the geography of prostitution is based on the proximity of customers (economic opportunities) and the working space available, with disused buildings, parks, and abandoned spaces being particularly attractive for streetwalkers.³⁴

Despite an increase in car ownership in the 1950s and 60s, streetwalkers did not move outside the city but remained inside the Singels around Leidseplein and Utrechtsestraat and also behind the train station. In the meantime, the relative indifference of the authorities and the local community in the de Wallen and Nieuwmarkt districts meant that prostitution continued to develop in this environment.³⁵ In an attempt to regulate streetwalking, the Amsterdam

33 Annemarie de Wildt and Paul Arnoldussen, *Liefde te koop: Vier eeuwen prostitutie in Amsterdam* (Amsterdam, 2002).

34 Richard Symanski, *The Immoral Landscape: Female Prostitution in Western Societies* (Toronto, 1981).

35 Deinema and Aalbers, "A Global Red-Light City", p. 284.

municipality opened a *tippelzone* (streetwalking zone) in 1996 near the new port, in the West-Eilanden district and on Theemsweg, which was reserved for streetwalkers and their clients who picked them up by car. Due to its limited success in terms of control and safety, it was closed in 2003. Street prostitution is officially illegal in Amsterdam although researchers found that in 2007 around fifty women were still practicing streetwalking (this figure dropped to forty-five in 2009). The decrease of streetwalking is linked with the development of the internet and new technologies which make it possible for women to find clients online and get in touch with them in a less visible way. Many of the street prostitutes went to work either in the escort business or worked from home and dispersed around the city.³⁶

Window prostitution can be found in the de Wallen district in the Pijp (behind the Rijksmuseum) and de Singel (between Raadhuisstraat and Centraal Station) whilst brothels are spread all over the city. Each urban space offers specific services and is used in a different manner; the old city centre, close to the train station and constant streams of tourists, promotes window displays and wild, often homosocial entertainment. Though sex workers are spread around the city, the de Wallen district remains the main red-light district and is considered nowadays to be a very safe area: the police patrol the streets on a regular basis and renewed social control has emerged, and it has been nurtured by the sex-workers themselves, the men they employ for their safety, the inhabitants of the district, and the people working in this district but not in sex work (for example at pubs, coffee-shops, and other such establishments). To a certain extent, this form of social control resembles the atmosphere in the 1950s and '60s,³⁷ although the crowds, displays, and working conditions have changed. The most famous brothels which cater for a more distinguished clientele have moved out of the red-light district and can be reached by car or taxi. While streetwalkers and window and brothel prostitutes are linked to specific urban spaces, escorts are more mobile than other sex workers and they have unlimited access to the urban space. The geography of Amsterdam prostitution is therefore defined by three variables: the proximity of customers (or ease of access), the type of customers targeted, and the type of prostitution offered. These elements explain the concentration, or on the contrary the spread, of prostitution in the urban environment and must be taken into account by the authorities when they try to implement new laws targeting the location and development of prostitution.

36 van Wijk *et al.*, *Kwetsbaar beroep*, pp. 111–113.

37 Sabat, "From Red Light to Black Light", p. 161.

The Historical Development of Legislation on Prostitution

The growth of Amsterdam in the seventeenth century brought about many economic and social opportunities for city dwellers and migrants, and most likely rates of prostitution increased accordingly. Indeed the urban environment always had a specific allure for migrants because it offered work, opportunities, money, and anonymity. Amsterdam grew steadily from the low Middle Ages to the eighteenth century, and in the first half of the seventeenth century it was considered to be the economic centre of Europe. Maritime traffic brought money to the city and the Dutch East India Company was a constant recruiter of young men for its ships. The territorial and commercial expansion of the Low Countries abroad also led to the expansion of the city; new quays, warehouses, buildings, and canals were built, for which both skilled and unskilled labour were needed. More women were also needed in domestic services such as in the clothing industry but they also worked in food services and as charwomen, as well as in other areas of the informal economy.³⁸

Favourable economic development encouraged male and female migration from the countryside (usually single young migrants) but that process was not reversed when the economy of the country started to weaken at the end of the seventeenth century. Marked by crises in the textile industry and maritime rivalries with England, the Amsterdam market and international exchange gradually slowed down at the same time as the economic situation in the countryside deteriorated; nonetheless, migration patterns towards urban centres did not follow the same downward trend.³⁹ Men could still enlist with the Dutch East India Company but for women, their chances of finding work were decreasing and this may well have swelled the ranks of prostitutes. Amsterdam, like many early modern cities, had an unfavourable gender ratio due to the number of men going to sea while women's migrations ended in the city. It is therefore likely that these socio-economic changes led to an increase in prostitution.

Between 1600 and 2000, the municipality followed a policy of "regulated tolerance", a term coined by Chrisje Brants. Starting out with a *laissez-faire* attitude at the end of the Middle Ages, the reformed municipality enacted legislation against prostitution in 1578 which sought to "protect" family honour. However, its impact was limited and despite pressure from the reformed

38 Lotte van de Pol and Erika Kuypers, "Poor Women's Migration to the City: The Attraction of Amsterdam Health Care and Social Assistance in Early Modern Times", *Journal of Urban History*, 32 (2005), pp. 44–60, 48.

39 *Ibid.*

Church to condemn prostitutes, they did not have the financial and administrative means to enforce the law. Except during the time of French control and the period following the closing of the brothels, the city council rarely enforced its own regulations.⁴⁰ Hubbard and Whowell have noted the importance of legislation in the displacement and re-location of red-light districts in recent history,⁴¹ but from an historical point of view, this argument has limited relevance as the combined coercive power of the municipality and the police nowadays are not comparable to what authorities could do in the early modern period or even in the nineteenth century. The municipality may have an impact on the locales of prostitution nowadays, as it has sufficient financial means to impose its control, but early municipal authorities never had enough resources to influence the development and distribution of prostitutes around the city. Other forms of social control created at the level of the district by the neighbourhood residents and prostitutes “regulated” where prostitution was practised.

The first real increase in the number of prostitutes getting arrested occurred in 1670, when music halls multiplied and the municipality felt that its international reputation was under threat by the licentiousness that seemed to be common in those establishments.⁴² However, those efforts were short-lived and after 1710 the municipality decided to focus more on the procuresses and people benefiting from the revenues of prostitution.⁴³ With the introduction of the French penal code in 1811, only the pimping of minors was criminalized but at the local level the police actively carried out their duties. Starting in 1806, there was an increasing number of French troops in the Netherlands, so the director of the police, Devilliers Duterrage, introduced the French regulatory system to prevent the spread of syphilis, and the registration of prostitutes and medical check-ups were made compulsory. The prostitutes had to be examined by a surgeon and carry a red card which contained their personal details. However, in 1813 the regulation was abandoned in Amsterdam although there was still a drive to find ways to better control prostitutes.⁴⁴ Officials and the police tacitly agreed that the removal of prostitutes to brothels made it

40 Chrisje Brants, “The Fine Art of Regulated Tolerance in Amsterdam Prostitution”, *Journal of Law and Society*, 25 (1998), pp. 621–635, 622–623.

41 Phil Hubbard and Mary Whowell, “Revisiting the Red Light District: Still Neglected, Immoral and Marginal?” *Geoforum*, 39 (2008), pp. 1743–1755, 1753.

42 Slobbe, *Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis en de bestrijding der prostitutie*, p. 28; van de Pol, *The Burgher and the Whore*, pp. 36–42.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

44 Slobbe, *Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis et de bestrijding der prostitutie*, pp. 37–38.

easier for them to keep tabs on the women; to a certain extent, prostitution appeared to be necessary for the city and, more importantly, could not be eradicated.⁴⁵ While some cities and garrison towns in the Netherlands chose to keep the regulation system, the decision made in Amsterdam to repeal the laws on the regulation of prostitution can be seen as the result of a traditional view of prostitutes and their role in the economy of the city. However, even if the municipal authorities did not impose strict control over prostitutes, the police could arrest and confine prostitutes to a hospital if they appeared to be diseased.⁴⁶ This form of supervision was implemented in an attempt to reduce the spread of venereal diseases, but by the end of the nineteenth century it became apparent to hygienists and municipal authorities that the system was an overall failure.

The moral panic over the “white slavery” that erupted at the end of the nineteenth century brought a whole new dimension to the issue of controlling prostitutes.⁴⁷ Josephine Butler and various men’s and women’s associations petitioned governments to end the traffic of (white) women. Drawing upon these fears of white slavery, the Amsterdam municipality followed the advice of the abolitionists and in 1897 the city’s brothels were closed down on the grounds that they encouraged the traffic of women and procuring was heavily punished. The result was that prostitution (prostitutes, pimps, and intermediaries) was driven underground, leading to a new distribution of prostitution in the city. Women started working at cover-up businesses such as massage parlours, cigar stores, and cheap hotels.⁴⁸ The brothel ban was nationalized in 1911 but prostitution continued unabated and the ban created a grey zone as prostitutes moved to new locations to meet customers and worked in an illegal environment.⁴⁹ Some women continued to work in the city centre whilst others, possibly under the supervision of ex-brothel owners, moved out to other districts. Prostitution benefitted from a certain degree of indifference on behalf of the municipality after the Second World War, and the 1950s saw an increase in women soliciting from their windows in the de Wallen district. However, the atmosphere of the red-light district started going downhill by the end of the 1970s as organized crime started taking more control of the streets and with

45 de Vries, *Kuisheid voor mannen, vrijheid voor vrouwen*, p. 28.

46 Annet Mooij, *Out of Otherness* (Amsterdam, 1998), p. 53.

47 Petra de Vries, “White Slaves’ in a Colonial Nation: The Dutch Campaign Against the Traffic in Women in the Early Twentieth Century”, *Social & Legal Studies*, 14 (2005), pp. 39–60, 52.

48 Bossenbroek and Kompagnie, *Het mysterie van de verdwenen bordelen*.

49 Vries, “White Slaves’ in a Colonial Nation”, p. 56.

the arrival of hard drugs and junkies, some of whom were prostitutes.⁵⁰ The red-light district became a no-go area and streetwalking increased.⁵¹ Victims of the AIDS epidemic and junkie prostitutes became a serious issue for public health.⁵²

As in many other western cities, the city centre of Amsterdam in the 1980s suffered from pauperization as the middle classes left the decrepit centre for suburban areas. The red-light district, which had previously been inhabited by working class families and was used as a working space for prostitutes in the 1960 and 1970s, gradually fell into disrepute. In parallel with the exodus of families to suburban areas and a decrease of demographic diversity, the level of social control based on neighbourhood ties also declined. The district was gradually taken over by organized crime which invested in the decrepit buildings and turned them into cover-up businesses for prostitution and gambling. Facing such large-scale prostitution and drug crimes, the municipality, in consultation with the police, decided to take action against the illegal business that was carried out in the district. By the mid-1990s, the renewal of licenses for entertainment businesses was restricted and the municipality passed a number of laws which allowed for the repossession of buildings where illegal activities were engaged in, in an attempt to reduce organized crime in the city centre.⁵³ Similarly, discussions were held to determine how to cut ties between prostitution and organized crime. Since the banning of brothels in 1897, prostitutes had been tolerated as long as they worked “alone” and no procuring was involved. However, pimping and brothels continued to exist and were gradually tolerated by the authorities as well but the police struggled to regulate activities that were officially forbidden.⁵⁴ The rise of criminality in the 1980s put a strain on the municipality and forced it to revise its position

50 Wim Huisman and Hans Nelen, “‘Gotham’ unbound Dutch Style”, *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 48 (2007), pp. 87–103, 95; see also J. Anneke van den Hoek *et al.*, “HIV Infection and STD in Drug Addicted Prostitutes in Amsterdam: Potential for Heterosexual HIV Transmission”, *Genitourinary Medicine*, 65 (1989), pp. 146–150; Harry J. van Haastrecht *et al.*, “HIV Prevalence and Risk Behaviour Among Prostitutes and Clients in Amsterdam: Migrants at Increased Risk for HIV Infection”, *Genitourinary Medicine*, 69 (1993), pp. 251–256.

51 Liza Nell and Jan Rath, “Ethnic Groups in Amsterdam’s Public Spaces”, in Liza Nell and Jan Rath (eds), *Ethnic Amsterdam: Immigrants and Urban Change in the Twentieth Century* (Amsterdam, 2009), pp. 23–40, 28.

52 Brants, “The Fine Art of Regulated Tolerance”, pp. 627–628.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 632; Hubbard and Howell, “Revisiting the Red Light District”, p. 1748.

54 Joyce Outshoorn, “Policy Change in Prostitution in the Netherlands: From Legalization to Strict Control”, *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, 9 (2012), pp. 233–243, 234.

regarding prostitution. By legalizing prostitution and brothels at the end of the 1990s, the city council and the police hoped to supervise the trade and reduce the *main-mise* of organized crime in the business. The de Wallen district was equipped with CCTVs and the police patrolled more often, gradually making the old streets safer for pedestrians and the women working there.

The increase of organized crime and other serious offences in the Netherlands prompted debates in parliament, and the Amsterdam municipality pushed for the legislation to be changed so that the police could take control of the district and reduce the nuisances caused by prostitution and drug markets. One of the first such attempts was the opening of a *tippelzone* in 1996. The *tippelzone* offered walled car park spaces and a place for prostitutes to meet and visit social workers and doctors. The municipality wanted to reduce criminal activities in connection with prostitution, in particular streetwalking, such as drug sales, human trafficking, and child abuse.⁵⁵ The municipality then had to deal with disagreements about how to relocate prostitution; sex workers were not willing to leave the streets and the prostitutes whom the authorities hoped to see relocated in the *tippelzone* remained in the city centre whilst new prostitutes, often illegal immigrants, came to work in the new official area.⁵⁶ Registration and the legalization of prostitution in 2000 revealed the extent of illegal prostitution occurring in the *tippelzone*; the majority of women working in this area were illegal immigrants from outside the EU. Fears of trafficking darkened the image of the *tippelzone*. While this zoning was meant to improve security for streetwalkers and remove pressure on them from criminal organizations, research showed that improvements in prostitutes' working conditions had been limited. The failure of this project led to its cessation in 2003.

Official debates and pressure from women's movements led to the legalization of prostitution at the national level in 2000. Huisman and Kleemans have summarized the assumptions of the parliament that prompted the vote to lift the ban in the following terms: the illegal aspects of prostitution could be reduced if rules were implemented to define what was allowed and the various actors and institutions could become jointly responsible in efforts to improve conditions for prostitution.⁵⁷ Prostitution was defined as sexual intercourse in exchange for money between two (or more) consenting adults. Brothels were

55 Sander Flight *et al.*, *Evaluatie tippelzone theemsweg, effect extra beheersmaatregelen* (Amsterdam, 2003), available at: http://publicaties.dsp-groep.nl/getFile.cfm?file=1SFTippel_Evaluatie_tippelzone_Theemsweg_Amsterdam2003.pdf&dir=rapport; last accessed 7 July 2017.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

57 Huisman and Kleemans, "The Challenges of Fighting Sex Trafficking", p. 217.

also legalized and women could therefore work legally for an intermediary and be wage earners instead of just self-employed. The legislation also encouraged the registration of prostitutes as a specific type of worker (independent worker or employee) for tax purposes. Members of the EU could work legally as prostitutes, but legalization did not apply to people from outside the EU. The new legislation also granted new rights to prostitutes and instituted new requirements; the windows and rooms in brothels had to be fitted with a minimum of conveniences and a panic button had to be installed. Medical check-ups were encouraged but not compulsory, and free screenings for venereal diseases were offered. In terms of labour rights, women who were registered with the tax office could access social benefits and should, in theory, be entitled to sick leave and unemployment benefits. In practice, researchers showed that the administrative and legal status of prostitutes remained precarious, especially in relation to their employers who often refused to declare them as employees.⁵⁸ In parallel, the authorities' requirements concerning the women's working conditions applied only to window and brothel prostitution (as well as street prostitution before the closing down of the Theemsweg), meaning that much prostitution remained unregulated, such as (some) escort services and home prostitution. Recent figures have shown that these last two forms of prostitution are practised by a third to half of the total number of prostitutes in Amsterdam.⁵⁹ The lack of control over this type of prostitution led to a revision of the legislation in 2013 and 2014. Along with raising the age of entry into prostitution to 21, the new legislation required that escorts and home-based prostitutes register with the tax office or the KvK to ensure that they have access to social services and give the authorities more control over the women, with the aim of reducing trafficking.

More than a decade after the legalization of prostitution, the authorities managed to come to terms with the failures of some aspects of the legislation. For instance, the working conditions of prostitutes have not improved as expected; pimps are still present in the red-light district and although the women are registered as independent workers, some give a large share of their earnings to pimps. Secondly, as mentioned above, the non-regulated trade encourages the illegal prostitution of minors and illegal immigrants, over which control is relatively hard to impose. Police resources are stretched and although parts of the illegal business were shifted to the unregulated sector, to a certain extent the legalized market remains an informal economy marked by illegal

58 *Ibid.*

59 van Wijk *et al.*, *Kwetsbaar Beroep*, p. 202.

practices.⁶⁰ Verhoeven and van Gestel's article on police efforts to gain insights into traffic rings shows that the majority of trafficking cases prosecuted by the police occurred in the regulated branch of prostitution.⁶¹ Lastly, the discrepancies between the databases and the aims of the police and the KvK/tax office have prevented them from joining forces to fight illegal forms of prostitution.

This short account of the historical changes in Amsterdam's legislation on prostitution shows how the municipality has tried to impose a certain form of control over prostitutes when their actions or behaviour have had negative effects on the image and reputation of the city. A dialogue was not set up between the prostitutes, municipality, and police, and no single voice stood up for these women prior to the end of the twentieth century. Even the Dutch abolitionist movement remained estranged from the reality of prostitution and what the women really needed and wanted;⁶² official control was clearly imposed upon them rather than being the product of a consensus between the various actors involved. It was not until the 1970s that sex workers' unions were created with the aim of working with the authorities to improve the working conditions of prostitutes. In the early 1980s in Amsterdam, the licensing of prostitution was advocated by the de Graaf Foundation to improve sex workers' working conditions; the idea was well received by the media and the public, and this was followed by parliamentary recommendations.⁶³ In 1985, the first international meeting of sex workers was held in Amsterdam and this led to the creation of the International Committee for Prostitutes' Rights (ICPR).⁶⁴ Sex workers, by signing the World Charter for Prostitutes' Rights, took a public stand to defend their right to work and to receive the same social benefits as other workers; also, they opted for the decriminalization of adult prostitution and encouraged the changing of attitudes towards prostitution in order to lessen the social stigma linked with this form of work. Emphasis was also placed on the freedoms that should be granted to prostitutes so that they can live and work where they wish, and regular dialogues between the authorities, prostitutes, and professionals such as lawyers, doctors, and social workers were

60 *Ibid.*, p. 221; Maite Verhoeven *et al.*, "Legale Sector, Informele Praktijken", *Cahiers Politie-studies*, 29 (2013), pp. 115–130.

61 Maite Verhoeven and Barbara van Gestel, "Human Trafficking and Criminal Investigation Strategies in the Amsterdam Red Light District", *Trends in Organized Crime*, 14 (2011), pp. 148–164.

62 de Vries, "White Slaves in a Colonial Nation", p. 53.

63 Jackie West, "Prostitution: Collectives and the Politics of Regulation", *Gender, Work and Organization*, 7 (2000), pp. 106–118, 112.

64 Teela Sanders *et al.*, *The Sociology of Sex Work. Prostitution: Sex Work, Policy and Politics* (London, 2009), pp. 96–98.

encouraged. Nevertheless, the debates between the Amsterdam municipality and prostitutes have not always been successfully resolved and recent policies on the red-light district show a clear negation of sex workers' voices.

One of the most recent initiatives to control prostitution is called Project 1012. It was launched in 2007 and it aims to gentrify the red-light district; as part of this, the municipality promotes events distinct from sex work such as fashion displays and art exhibitions.⁶⁵ These events are held in building windows bought by the municipality on nearby streets. The officials' goal was to close down 40 per cent of the 482 windows open in 2007; currently 290 of them are still open.⁶⁶ It appears that the municipality has succumbed to the laws of the global market and the need to present to the world "a varied and high quality image for the city approach area", which happens to be the district close to the station and the city centre.⁶⁷ This has led to a reappraisal of prostitution's position in the urban environment and the municipality has started to regard window prostitution as an aesthetic and "moral" issue. Indeed the association between the display of scantily clad women with the global image of the city goes against the municipal promotion of familial tourism. To back up their concerns about the aesthetic display of window prostitutes, officials looked into the extent of the relation between human trafficking and prostitution, and fears of organized crime came flooding back. Recent researchers' appraisals of the situation tend, however, to highlight the municipality's debatable assumptions and encourage more in-depth dialogues with the district's main workers.⁶⁸ Prostitution is not always linked with criminality, nor does it create a criminogenic environment. This division between prostitution and criminality had already been highlighted by Reckless in 1926 and was stated again by Ashworth *et al.* in 1988.⁶⁹ Likewise, a recent study on crime rates in and around the *tippelzone* when it was still open shows that although fears about criminality rose, criminality itself did not increase; on the contrary, the closure led to

65 Available at: http://www.amsterdam.nl/gemeente/organisatie-diensten/sites/project_1012/1012/; last accessed 7 July 2017.

66 Available at: <https://www.amsterdam.nl/projecten/project-1012/aanpak-project-1012/gebieden/>; last accessed 7 July 2017.

67 White paper *Heart of Amsterdam* (Amsterdam, 2009), quoted in Deinema and Aalbers, "A Global Red-light City?", pp. 273–274.

68 Huisman and Nelen, "'Gotham' unbound Dutch Style", pp. 87–103; Gail M. Zuckerwise, "Governmentality in Amsterdam's Red Light District", *City*, 16 (2012), pp. 146–157, 153.

69 Walter Reckless, "The Distribution of Commercial Vice in the City: A Sociological Analysis", *Publications American Sociology Society*, 20 (1926), pp. 164–176; Ashworth *et al.*, "The Red-Light District in the West European City", p. 210.

an increase of offences in the neighbourhood.⁷⁰ The art and fashion initiatives were launched to bring a new public to the district and to recreate social diversity, but this process has had a direct impact on prostitutes' working spaces and conditions; the rents of the windows have increased and it has become more difficult to find available windows. Prostitutes who were not able to meet the new requirements were forced to leave the district and start streetwalking or work from home. By gentrifying the district, the municipality is excluding some of its workers and forcing them to work in a risky environment, a situation that the municipality initially wanted to avoid when they agreed to legalize prostitution. By marginalizing some prostitutes, they are also fuelling the non-regulated market of prostitution, which is, unsurprisingly, the most difficult market to control and the fastest growing sector of prostitution in Amsterdam.⁷¹ As Deinema explains, Project 1012 affects the visibility of prostitution and attacks its aesthetics but does not have an impact on the excesses of illegal prostitution and human trafficking.⁷²

Social Profiles of Amsterdam Prostitutes

Single women always represented the majority of prostitutes in Amsterdam but widows and sailors' wives, more commonly called "grass widows", must not be forgotten when looking at the early modern period. Prostitution became a part of female economic strategies early on⁷³ and since two-thirds of the sailors on East Indian Company ships never returned, it can be assumed that many married women suffered from early widowhood.⁷⁴ Turning to prostitution in the early modern period was often part of poor women's economy of make-shift. The ease of entering and leaving the sex trade meant that poor women could rely on it when in distress. Indeed women's access to the labour market in the early modern period in the Netherlands was relatively free compared to other European countries and this facilitated entering and leaving prostitution. Prostitutes came mainly from the poorest classes, as is the case nowadays, and single female migrants in Amsterdam could be in a precarious situation as well-paid jobs were reserved for burghers' wives and daughters. Entering domestic service was the wisest choice but without letters of recommendation

70 Paul Bisschop *et al.*, "Effect van Toppelzones Op Lokale Criminaliteit", *Tijdschrift van Criminologie*, 54 (2012), pp. 320–334.

71 van Wijk *et al.*, *Kwetsbaar beroep*, p. 213.

72 Deinema and Aalbers, "A Global Red-Light City", p. 284.

73 Olwen Hufton, *The Poor in France* (Oxford, 1974), p. 355.

74 van de Pol and Kuypers, "Poor Women's Migration to the City", p. 46.

or contacts, it was difficult for women to settle in the city; in addition, wages for prostitution were higher than what could be earned with unqualified jobs, especially for women. When Amsterdam started industrializing in the mid-nineteenth century, the work offered to women remained poorly paid compared to men's work. Families tended to be more secure financially than single women, as long as both parents were employed, leaving unemployed single women in a precarious situation.

Prostitution was also a last resort job for women left by their husbands or lovers.⁷⁵ Prostitutes both in the early modern period and nowadays in Amsterdam have tended to come from disrupted family environments marked by the death of one or both parents, violence at home, remarriage, abandonment by the husband, and unwanted pregnancies, and any combination of these can be a trigger to enter prostitution. Van de Pol and Kuipers noted that unwanted pregnancy was a serious push factor for women migrating to Amsterdam in the early modern period.⁷⁶ Women could receive some financial help and deliver their infants safely at no cost but complicated circumstances may have pushed them to find money in prostitution or, if they were already prostitutes, to continue their trade in Amsterdam. The situation is similar for contemporary Dutch prostitutes who are often victims of violence and flee abusive relationships; with few resources, they enter prostitution as a quick means to earn some money to survive.⁷⁷ It is interesting to compare the familial environments of migrants with Dutch prostitutes. Women from Africa or eastern Europe do not always come from a disrupted familial environment but do suffer from poverty. Family contact can be very frequent and a system of remittances may be put in place or they can serve as an intermediary for taking up prostitution, which is less often the case with native prostitutes.⁷⁸ The few Dutch women who in recent decades entered prostitution because of their difficult situation as single mothers usually try to hide it from their children.⁷⁹ Foreign women may also have children of their own whom they left behind in their countries of origin. Some women went to western Europe knowing they would become prostitutes,⁸⁰ whilst others ended up working in the trade because they could not find another job. However, their entry into the prostitution market often reveals a different economic approach to the job; while prostitution is often a

75 van de Pol, *The Burgher and the Whore*, p. 150.

76 van de Pol and Kuipers, "Poor Women's Migration to the City", p. 57.

77 Bovenkerk and van San, "Loverboys in the Amsterdam Red Light District", p. 186.

78 Rutvica Andrijasevic, *Migration, Agency and Citizenship in Sex Trafficking* (Amsterdam, 2010), p. 73.

79 van Wijk *et al.*, *Kwetsbaar beroep*, p. 173.

80 Dina Siegel, "Mobility of Sex Workers in European Cities", *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research*, 18 (2012), pp. 255–268, 261–262.

last resource for indigenous women, foreign women may choose to do it as an economic springboard to escape a difficult economic environment.

Contemporary legal prostitution in Amsterdam facilitates the setting up of fixed-term contracts with brothel owners or window renters, and prostitution is carried out on a full- or part-time basis for a fixed amount of time. As with any other employee, if the woman stops working before the end of her contract she will not be entitled to unemployment benefits but will receive the help of a social worker to find a new job in another sector if she so desires. Although employment contracts are legal, women tend to be registered as independent workers as a “compromise” between brothel owners and prostitutes. This is often part of an economic strategy which is based on earning the maximum amount possible in a short time. It also shows what these women think in general of this form of work: they do not wish to pursue it after a few years and they see it as transitional, although it may also reflect contemporary views on beauty and sex appeal. Rarely did older prostitutes earn much, nor do they today. The less “attractive” a woman becomes, the less likely she is to get customers.⁸¹ Nevertheless, relationships can be formed over the years between regular customers and prostitutes and to some extent these can compensate for a decrease in the number of a woman’s customers. Ageing prostitutes also tend to practise prostitution differently, for example leaving a window to rent a flat and using small ads (or specialist agencies) to find customers. In the early modern period, ageing prostitutes tended to fall into the lower classes of prostitutes, such as streetwalkers, or they became domestics in the brothel in which they used to work. Also, getting married was often an opportunity to get out of prostitution (as it is today). The development of the welfare state may have helped create a way out of prostitution for ageing prostitutes or single mothers, although in many cases prostitution may offer a better income than social welfare.

Prostitution and Health

As in any early modern city, Amsterdam prostitutes suffered greatly from venereal diseases, as did their customers. From the start of the epidemics of syphilis onwards, the municipality took charge of those who were afflicted by sending them to the *Pesthuis*.⁸² We know now that early modern remedies were ineffective and tended in the long run to weaken the immune system of the patient.

81 Of course, the notion of attractiveness is very subjective and cannot be generalized.

82 van de Pol and Kuypers, “Poor Women’s Migration to the City”, p. 53.

However, the treatment offered by this institution was considered to be better than what was sold by quack doctors, and people from the entire Dutch Republic went to Amsterdam to be cured. Different establishments were used to accommodate the diseased, though at the beginning of the seventeenth century no strict distinctions were made yet between the patients; some were sent to the *Spinhuis* and others to the *Aalmoezeniershuis* (both workhouses).⁸³ The *Spinhuis* was for women only and many prostitutes went there to be cured. The authorities were concerned with the spread of the disease as many sailors and soldiers had contracted it or risked getting it in the taverns on the Zeedijk. In the French period (early nineteenth century), the authorities sought to control the illness by requisitioning a hospital to treat the diseased.⁸⁴ Only with the discovery of penicillin in the twentieth century did syphilis start to regress, however. Still, it was not long before the sex trade was plagued with the epidemic of AIDS that began in the 1980s in correlation with an upsurge in hard drug consumption. AIDS contamination through sexual encounters and by sharing infected needles had serious consequences on prostitutes' health in the two last decades of the twentieth century.⁸⁵ Campaigns to promote the use of condoms and clean needles were set up by the municipality, and counselling, medical help, and condoms were dispensed freely to prostitutes. Nowadays, the majority of legal prostitutes use condoms and the risk of catching a venereal disease is extremely low. However, it is known that some prostitutes agree to have sex without protection for varying reasons such as to earn more money, or because they do not know that they can refuse non-protected sex or are prevented from doing so by a third party.

The impact of prostitution on women's physical health has been studied for a long time but the psychological effects have only recently been looked at. The importance of studying psychological effects in prostitution relates to the question of the integrity of the body in a work context.⁸⁶ Recent research in other contexts (where prostitution is not legal) has shown that a large number of prostitutes (between 67 per cent and 72 per cent) suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder due to the violence they face quite regularly (from their pimp or clients, stressful situations at work, and confrontations with the police).⁸⁷

83 Johan Wilhelm van der Valk, *Bijdrage tot de kennis van de geschiedenis der syphilis in ons land* (Amsterdam, 1910), p. 130.

84 *Ibid.*, pp. 151–152.

85 van den Hoek *et al.*, "HIV Infection and STD in Drug Addicted Prostitutes in Amsterdam", pp. 146–150.

86 See Kathleen Barry, *The Prostitution of Sexuality* (New York, 1996).

87 See for example Hyunjung Choi *et al.*, "Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Disorders of Extreme Stress (DESNOS) Symptoms Following Prostitution and Childhood

The long-term psychological effects of prostitution have not been studied enough and more research in this field is necessary so that we can understand if the legalization of prostitution has a positive effect on working conditions and the mental well-being of the women. Indeed, in relation to psychological pressure, the impact of social stigma on this type of work has not been eliminated yet despite the legalization of prostitution in Amsterdam. Analyses on the cultural representation of prostitution also need updating to better define the evolution of public mentalities and attitudes since legalization. The debates in the 1980s and recent research have shown that the Dutch population generally supports the legalization of prostitution but this does not mean that prostitution is accepted as a career; in short, the legalization of prostitution has not made it a respectable job. Many women working behind the windows confess to living a double life, as their families are unaware of their job.⁸⁸ Hiding their profession has a direct impact on their mental well-being; prostitutes have themselves internalized this social stigma and want to “protect” their families against the shame that would befall them if they and the community found out. Long-term psychological studies looking at the women’s perspectives on their occupations and their lives in and out of prostitution would greatly benefit our understanding of prostitution’s impact. Indeed it is not well known what women think of their past lives after getting out of prostitution and how they reflect upon their experiences. The constant exchanges over the years between society’s perceptions of prostitution and women’s own judgments about their jobs need to be better understood to reveal the internalization process at stake in (former) prostitutes’ minds.

Migration, Recruitment and Trafficking in Amsterdam

As mentioned earlier, the development of Amsterdam into a major international port in the seventeenth century led to a major migration influx not only from the countryside but also from neighbouring countries such as England, the southern Netherlands, Germany and Norway. Therefore prostitutes’ ethnic

Abuse”, *Violence Against Women*, 15 (2009), pp. 933–951; Melissa Farley and Howard Bar-kan, “Prostitution, Violence, and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder”, *Women & Health*, 27 (1998), pp. 37–49; Melissa Farley, “Prostitution in Vancouver: Violence and the Colonization of First Nations Women”, *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 42 (2005), pp. 242–271.

88 This explains their reluctance to be photographed and filmed. See Manuel Aalbers, “Big Sister Is Watching You!': Gender Interaction and the Unwritten Rules of the Amsterdam Red-Light District”, *Journal of Sex Research*, 42 (2005), pp. 54–62.

backgrounds were not homogenous, and women of many nationalities took part in Amsterdam's prostitution market. In the early modern period, on average 30 per cent of prostitutes were from abroad.⁸⁹ Stachhouwer noted that in the first third of the twentieth century only 17.5 per cent of them were foreigners,⁹⁰ but the recent opening of borders and the improvement of transportation has led to an increase of the number of women who migrated to the Netherlands. These days the number of Dutch prostitutes working behind the windows has fallen to under 16 per cent.⁹¹

The origins of prostitutes changed according to the process of globalization happening at the time, ease of transportation, and the opening of borders. Prostitutes moving to Amsterdam could be sent there by a procuress, and the mobility of prostitutes in the early modern period attests to the mobility of female migrants in general.⁹² While European women were the main immigrants in the early modern period (notably German women), migration patterns changed after the Second World War. South American women and women from the former Dutch colonies of Indonesia and Surinam, as well as other countries in South East Asia, migrated to Amsterdam, followed in the 1980s by West African women.⁹³ After the fall of the Berlin wall, the number of women coming from the former USSR exploded and since the legalization of prostitution in 2000, European women are allowed to register as prostitutes in the city; when Romania and Bulgaria entered the European Union in 2007, two countries that have GDPs which are relatively low compared to other eastern European countries, women migrated to Amsterdam from those countries and they are now the largest group of prostitutes in Amsterdam.⁹⁴ Women from outside the EU can still work as prostitutes, but they need to have a work permit which can be obtained only under certain conditions, such as knowledge of the Dutch language. Without having official papers and a secure place to stay, migrant prostitutes are more likely to work for a third party with little

89 Lotte van de Pol, *Het Amsterdams hoerdom* (Amsterdam, 1996), p. 103.

90 Jan Dirk Feiko Stachhouwer, *Criminaliteit, prostitutie en zelfmoord bij immigranten in Amsterdam* (Amsterdam, 1950), p. 85.

91 van Wijk *et al.*, *Kwetsbaar Beroep*, p. 32.

92 van de Pol and Kuypers, "Poor Women's Migration to the City", p. 44.

93 Van San and Bovenkerk, "Secret Seducers", p. 68; Marriane Marchand and Boukje Berents, "Migration, (Im)mobility, and Modernity", *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 27 (1998), pp. 955–981, 955–956; Siegel, "Mobility of Sex Workers in European Cities", pp. 261–262.

94 Manuel Aalbers and Magdalena Sabat, "Re-Making a Landscape of Prostitution: The Amsterdam Red Light District", *City*, 16 (2012), pp. 112–128, 121.

social and economic independence.⁹⁵ The diversity behind the windows is striking and a representative picture of the globalization process in action.

The issue of trafficking is inherently linked with the study of female migration, and the legality of prostitution has made the city an important migration destination for eastern European women who can easily enter the Dutch labour market as members of the EU. Because of these major influxes of young women, human trafficking issues were raised at the municipal and international levels. Human trafficking is defined by the UN as “the recruitment, transport, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a person by such means as threats or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud or deception for the purpose of exploitation; exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”⁹⁶ This definition is broad and encompasses a wide range of crimes, from coercion to fraud and bodily exploitation.

Trafficking in the sense that women are moved from one place to another and forced to work as prostitutes for someone else can also be found in earlier periods, although evidence of large-scale criminal networks has not yet been demonstrated. Van de Pol described the first brothel owner to be put on the scaffold in Amsterdam in 1706; she was a German “bawd” who had held a Danish girl prisoner and forced her to have sex with a Jew.⁹⁷ Testimonies of prostitutes being held against their will or being deeply in debt with their “bawds” and therefore unable to leave the brothel show up occasionally in early modern judicial archives but they are individual stories, not the result of international criminal organizations.

At the end of the nineteenth century, new light was cast upon the threat of trafficking in women. Abolitionist movements in the Netherlands sought to eradicate all forms of prostitution and they started a national campaign against brothels. In 1903, 3,000 people gathered in Amsterdam in front of the *Paleis voor Volksvlijt* to condemn brothels as an essential component of the white slave trade.⁹⁸ The image of the prostitute and the white slave merged and the moral panic that arose at the turn of the century had a major impact on the population of Amsterdam as it was relayed by the press of the time. Although brothels had been banned in Amsterdam since 1897, it quickly came

95 *Ibid.*

96 Available at: <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/what-is-human-trafficking.html>; last accessed 7 July 2017.

97 van de Pol, *The Burgher and the Whore*, p. 96.

98 de Vries, “White Slaves’ in a Colonial Nation”, p. 52.

to light that prostitution (and brothel owners) had merely relocated to more neutral and less stigmatized places. To what extent women were trafficked to and from Amsterdam is unknown; testimonies of sordid arrangements between intermediaries were recorded by the police or by men sent by various institutions (abolitionist associations, religious associations, and governments) to investigate the reality of forced prostitution in Amsterdam; a report dating from 1901 written by a policeman named Balkenstein for instance mentioned underage French girls being sent to Amsterdam with fake documents to work in a brothel.⁹⁹ As a consequence, these reports and references in the newspapers to captive women fuelled anger against brothel owners, leading to the national legislation of 1911 which was against brothels and the trafficking of women. Notably, in the six months following the ban only one case of trafficking was prosecuted. Rather than being indicative of large international criminal networks organizing the trafficking of women, the reported cases seemed to concern relatively small numbers of women from neighbouring countries.

The rate of trafficked women in Amsterdam nowadays is still difficult to gauge; the legislation in place is meant to prevent the registration of women who do not want to work as prostitutes; however, it is unclear how the authorities ascertain that pressure or if threats have been made. Although more women than previously thought willingly choose to enter the prostitution market, the social networks built up by prostitutes remain dependent on the labour relations into which the prostitutes have entered; cases of migrant prostitutes having very little contact with their colleagues or the outside world because of confinement imposed by their pimps are not rare, even in Amsterdam.¹⁰⁰ Various investigations about the trafficking of women working in the legalized market have been carried out; the Sneep case of 2007 for instance involved a Turkish gang accused of running a prostitution ring in Belgium and the Netherlands (including Amsterdam), and Verhoeven and van Gestel mention three other cases of trafficking and exploitation, all of which occurred in Amsterdam.¹⁰¹ All these cases of trafficking happened within the scope of the legal regulated market of prostitution behind the windows.¹⁰² Criminal organizations use the legal framework to commit crimes, often successfully as suggested by the low number of busts that are made. In addition, numerous women do not register with the tax office and therefore have little contact with the

99 de Vries, *Kuisheid voor mannen, vrijheid voor vrouwen*, pp. 252–253.

100 van Wijk *et al.*, *Kwetsbaar beroep*, pp. 157–178.

101 Siegel, “Mobility of Sex Workers in European Cities”, p. 263; Verhoeven and Gestel, “Human Trafficking and Criminal Investigation Strategies”, pp. 148–164.

102 Huisman and Kleemans, “The Challenges of Fighting Sex Trafficking”, p. 223.

authorities. Another issue concerns the underground prostitution carried out by non-registered women.¹⁰³ Not every non-registered prostitute is a victim of trafficking but our lack of knowledge of this milieu leaves us without answers regarding the scale of trafficking in a country where prostitution is legal. Ethnicity, levels of education, and legal status are factors that influence women's ability to secure safe working conditions; the building-up of a network is often a strong element in the improvement of prostitutes' working conditions

One of the limitations of the definition of "trafficking" in the case of prostitution relates to the fact that some women choose voluntarily to enter the prostitution market and use smugglers to cross borders. The fact that they choose to work in prostitution has been documented in various studies; an early study showed that 50 per cent of the women who were recruited in central Europe knew they were going to work in prostitution.¹⁰⁴ Highly educated women from the former Soviet Union were interviewed in 2004 and they all claimed to be travelling voluntarily to the Netherlands to work as prostitutes, as did almost all of the thirty Dominican and Colombian women interviewed by Janssen.¹⁰⁵ Siegel also studied the horizontal and vertical mobility of foreign prostitutes in the Netherlands; she claims that the choice of prostitution as a career path, the "attraction of sex work in Europe", has been too often dismissed for a more acceptable discourse on women's trafficking.¹⁰⁶ This of course does not mean that the psychological effects of prostitution are less strong for migrant women but from an economic point of view, prostitution offers more opportunities than most of the other jobs available to them either in their native countries or even in Amsterdam.

Foreign women entering the prostitution market are often helped by third parties and although the literature usually refers to the contemporary pimp or trafficker as a male figure, the role of women in recruiting must not be ignored. The concepts of trafficking and traffickers do not really encompass what the women who willingly became prostitutes go through; migrant smuggling in certain cases could be a more adequate definition of the crime committed by the third party. Siegel and de Blank worked on women intermediaries

103 van Wijk *et al.*, *Kwetsbaar beroep*, p. 178.

104 Judith Vocks and Jan Nijboer, "The Promised Land: A Study of Trafficking in Women from Central and Eastern Europe to the Netherlands", *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research*, 8 (2000), pp. 379–388, 383.

105 D. Siegel, "Recent Trends in Women Trafficking and Voluntary Prostitution: Russian-Speaking Sex-Workers in the Netherlands", *Transnational Crime*, 4 (2005), pp. 4–23; Marie-Louise Janssen, *Reizende sekswerkers: Latijns-Amerikaanse vrouwen in de Europese prostitutie* (Apeldoorn, 2007).

106 Siegel, "Mobility of Sex Workers in European Cities", pp. 261–262.

in the Netherlands before and after the legalization of prostitution and they showed that women could also be at the head of traffic scandals, though most of the women involved in procuring or sexual offences were either “supporters” or “partners in crime” together with a man.¹⁰⁷ For instance, in the 1980s Nigerian women who migrated to the Netherlands and eventually became prostitutes convinced male “supporters” to help them smuggle women into the Netherlands by lending them money.¹⁰⁸ Van de Pol showed a similar interaction between the sexes in the early modern period: both men and women were involved in the running of brothels, although it was easier for men to have access to capital, credit, and living spaces.¹⁰⁹ Both sexes have been and are involved in prostitution and this puts into perspective the gender differentiation that is often made in studies on prostitution: there exists a dialogue between men and women in this trade in which power relationships are not unidirectional and evolve according to attitudes and economic rationales.

Conclusion: Prostitution in Amsterdam, Urban Spaces, and Global Images

Prostitution develops to a greater extent in urban areas than in rural environments for different reasons: the proximity and number of potential customers who reside in or visit a city; the anonymity offered to urban citizens and the resulting disappearance or diminution of the feeling of shame; the ease with which prostitutes create new and parallel networks; and, the higher wages that can be earned in a city.

Working space is, as mentioned earlier, one of the main elements of the definition of prostitution. By changing places and swapping spaces of work, prostitutes must contend with varying sets of working conditions and labour relations but they must also deal with different types of danger. The risk/benefit ratio varies according to the type of space they are working in. As a result of the communication revolution, prostitutes can more easily work independently from their homes or by meeting customers in hotel rooms. The internet and before that small ads in newspapers and sex shop windows mean that there is no need for an intermediary between the woman and the client. Working under such conditions nevertheless has its own dangers: the social

107 Dina Siegel, “Women Who Traffic Women: The Role of Women in Human Trafficking Networks—Dutch Cases”, *Global Crime*, 11 (2010), pp. 436–447, 440.

108 *Ibid.*, pp. 444–445.

109 van de Pol, *The Burgher and the Whore*, p. 25.

control and security that exists among window prostitutes in the red-light district and in well-run brothels is absent when working alone and it is important for the woman to create and maintain links and contacts with friends to avoid being stuck in a dangerous situation with a customer.

State and municipal legislation pertaining to prostitution must be based on thorough research about the interactions between working spaces and the above-mentioned variables so that prostitutes can have a safe working environment. Over the centuries, soliciting became more and more privatized; while early modern prostitutes would solicit in public by walking on the street or by standing at the door of a tavern, this practice changed towards the end of the seventeenth century with the opening of music houses, and this pattern re-emerged in the mid-eighteenth century and later on in more or less regulated brothels. These places became linked with the presence of prostitutes. Even if they were primarily intended to offer musical entertainment and to encourage male sociability, customers in these houses knew that the women present were potential prostitutes; their behaviour in this specific space was also an indication of their availability. Via ear-to-mouth dissemination of information (particularly effective, as the reputation of Amsterdam music houses crossed borders), soliciting gradually moved indoors.

This also means that in this earlier era entertainment, homosociality, and sexuality's boundaries were blurred; not everyone entering a tavern in de Wallen in the seventeenth century was looking for a prostitute or went there for female company. The division was not as clear as today, when people entering certain bars in the de Wallen district go there aiming to enjoy a performance of a sexual nature. Homosociality can be, and often still is, a component of the establishments' atmosphere but it differs from seventeenth century inns which could be sporadically, according to its clientele and probably the time of the day, characterized as a brothel. The sexual component of certain establishments was not as obvious and visible as in today's red-light districts.

The same process of privatization and specialization became visible after the attempt to regulate prostitution in nineteenth-century Amsterdam. The women were then linked to a specific space and therefore their working practices changed. This does not mean that streetwalking and outdoor solicitation disappeared; poor or casual prostitutes could still be seen on the streets, as was the case in the red-light districts in the 1980s or nowadays along Amsterdam's old docks. Working space clearly defines prostitutes' categories and it affords them more or less agency in refusing customers, keeping their earnings, or avoiding the police.

Quite early on compared to other European cities, Amsterdam's officials recognized the importance of prostitution and the economic advantages it

provides. But in contemporary Amsterdam, the dialogue between prostitutes and the municipality still seems to be inexistent, despite the financial gains it provides for the city. Hubbard argues that the red-light district in Amsterdam is “by no means a typical red-light district.”¹¹⁰ This is true in the sense that sex is not advertised to such an extent in other European cities, nor is it a distinct part of tourists’ “must-see” experiences, except perhaps for Pigalle in Paris. But even if the landscape and global imaginary linked to Amsterdam’s red-light district of De Wallen is somewhat different, the prostitution market is very similar to what can be seen in other settings. What appears to be the same is the distinction between spaces and within that scope there are variations based on where a woman (or man) works, the existing labour relations, working conditions, and the risk/benefit ratio. Space and location therefore have a direct impact on prostitutes’ experiences and must be taken into account when new policies are introduced. The closing down of windows by the municipality and to a certain extent the gentrification of the red-light district run counter to prostitutes’ needs and right to security; new legislation should do more to ensure that these women are able to work in a safe environment.

110 Hubbard, “Afterword”, p. 196.

Selling Sex in a Provincial Town: Prostitution in Bruges

Maja Mechant

Introduction

At first glance, Bruges—a provincial town in Belgium—and prostitution may appear to be worlds apart. With its mediaeval and mediaeval-esque buildings, cobblestone streets, and canals, Bruges is known as a picture-perfect tourist destination. Its charms attract people from all over the world, but unlike in Amsterdam, the must-sees in Bruges do not include the red-light district. Moreover, visitors who are not deliberately on the lookout for prostitutes are unlikely to have spotted a single one in the last decade because commercial sex is simply not part of the scenery.¹ Of course, that is not to say that the sex trade is non-existent or that it has always been as small-scale and inconspicuous as it is now. As is the case elsewhere, prostitution evolved in tandem with the city's size and economy, and at the end of the Middle Ages, Bruges was one of Europe's largest, most thriving urban centres, and commercial sex was readily available.² However, unlike most of the cities discussed in this volume, Bruges' past is not characterized by progressive growth, urbanization, or industrialization, or by a concomitant increase in its prostitution sector. Rather, contemporary Bruges is a small provincial town, and as such it is an interesting case study because it affords us the opportunity to see how prostitution evolved in a languishing urban centre during the early modern and modern eras.

There is less literature on the sex trade in Bruges than there is for larger cities. Only one monograph has been published on the subject to date, namely

* I am grateful to Thomas Donald Jacobs for reading this paper, improving it, and giving advice regarding my use of English, which was truly a great help. I am also grateful to the editors of this volume for their comments on an earlier version of this article.

- 1 Despite the nuanced differences between “prostitute” and “sex worker”, I have occasionally used them synonymously in this chapter because of linguistic variations.
- 2 Guy Dupont, *Maagdenverleidsters, hoeren en speculanten: Prostitutie in Brugge tijdens de Bourgondische periode (1385–1515)* (Bruges, 1996), pp. 161–162.

Guy Dupont's work regarding prostitution during the Burgundian period (1385–1515).³ The aim here, however, is to provide a long-term overview of the seventeenth century and onwards. In doing so, I will rely on unpublished research and data collected by myself, masters students, and Pasop, a non-profit organization that works with prostitutes in the region.⁴ The availability of information means that my emphasis here is on the evolution that took place between the second half of the eighteenth century, the second half of the nineteenth century, both World Wars, and the present day. Under discussion are the push and pull factors involved in the trade, the legal norms concerning prostitution, the social profiles of sex workers, their dependency on their employers, and their working conditions. Not all of these topics are analysed in depth for all the periods covered due to the limitations of the primary source material, which include normative sources, registration lists, police and court records, interviews, and social statistics. Each type of source has particular advantages and disadvantages, but discussing these in detail here would take us too far from the matter at hand. What is important to keep in mind is that the availability of a specific source largely depends on the legal framework of the era. However, before examining the legislation, I will first outline the context, as well as the factors that have influenced the supply and demand of commercial sex.

The Bruges Context

As mentioned in the introduction, while prostitution was widespread in Bruges at the end of the Middle Ages, the situation has since greatly altered. Two periods proved decisive in bringing about this change. The first came at the end of

3 *Ibid.*

4 Maja Mechant, "Vrouwen met een uitzonderlijke overlevingsstrategie? De levenslopen van prostituees in Brugge (1750–1790)" (ongoing doctoral research, Ghent University); Israel Mertens, "Prostitutie in Vlaanderen: een sociografische en kwantitatieve studie van het prostitutieel kader. Brugge en Gent, 19^e/begin 20^e eeuw" (Unpublished M.A., Ghent University, 1981); Bernard Schotte, "Bestrijding van *quat gedragh* te Brugge in de 18de eeuw (1724–1774)" (Unpublished M.A., Ghent University, 1982); Vania Vande Voorde, "Prostitutie te Brugge tijdens de Eerste en de Tweede Wereldoorlog" (Unpublished M.A., Ghent University, 2007). Pasop, established in 1990, provides medical and social services to sex workers in the Belgian provinces of East and West Flanders. I am very grateful to Martine Claeysens for allowing me to look at Pasop's annual reports and for putting together tables pertaining to Bruges. I am equally indebted to Ans Traen, a doctor, and An Mortier, a nurse, for their willingness to share their knowledge and experiences when I interviewed them in Ghent on 12 June 2012.

Bruges' "golden age" in the fifteenth century, when the city's primary economic sectors, textile production and international commerce, dwindled, as did the numbers of businessmen and sailors. The population decreased from 42,000 inhabitants in 1477 to 29,000 just one hundred years later,⁵ and the sex trade shrank to meet the needs of the remaining locals as well as soldiers, merchants, and sailors. The second turning point came during the second half of the twentieth century when Bruges finally overcame its stagnation and increasingly was profiled as a tourist destination. Moreover, the development of Zeebrugge as a major European port shifted the focal point of the city's economic life away from Bruges proper.⁶ This reorganization, along with the city's new image as an affluent and wholesome tourist destination, led the sex workers who had been present in the heart of Bruges for centuries to relocate outside its mediaeval walls to the roadways around the town.

However, this is merely the long-term evolution, and a simplified picture of it at that. The era between the fifteenth and twentieth centuries was not a single uninterrupted run of financial desolation. Bruges did experience economic upswings, particularly during the region's peaceful interludes, and it would be imprudent to use the city's golden age as the yardstick for prosperity. For example, periodic improvements to the port and waterways brought repeated cycles of growth to the trade sector. When Ghent was reconnected with the sea around 1750, the canal shipping trade in Bruges thrived yet again.⁷ In fact, the end of the seventeenth century and the second half of the eighteenth century proved exceptions to the city's long-term economic stagnation. Textile production, although it had been in a state of crisis since the seventeenth century, remained important until it failed to industrialize in the nineteenth century. At that time it completely collapsed, resulting in the most sombre chapter of Bruges' history. Abject poverty became widespread, and the crop failures of the 1840s worsened an already dire situation.⁸ Bruges was known as the poorest city in nineteenth-century Flanders, and while this portrayal has

5 Heidi Deneweth, "Brugge, een veilige enclave in het krijgsgewoel", in Valentin Vermeersch (ed.), *Brugge* (Antwerp, 2002), pp. 100–107, 105.

6 Romain Van Eeno, "Een onomkeerbare evolutie", in Vermeersch, *Brugge*, pp. 142–155.

7 Ludo Vandamme and Jan D'hondt, "17^{de} en 18^{de} eeuw: Op zoek naar een nieuwe bestemming", in Marc Ryckaert, André Vandewalle, and Jan D'hondt (eds), *Brugge, de geschiedenis van een Europese stad* (Tielt, 1999), pp. 141–165, 144–151; Heidi Deneweth, "Brugge, een veilige enclave in het krijgsgewoel", pp. 100–107; Heidi Deneweth, "De twee gezichten van Brugge", in Vermeersch, *Brugge*, pp. 108–123.

8 Romain Van Eeno, "De confrontatie met een gewijzigde wereld", in Vermeersch, *Brugge*, pp. 124–131, 129; Romain Van Eeno, "Een politieke machtsverschuiving", in Vermeersch, *Brugge*,

been somewhat altered in the current historiography, there is no doubt that the city was extremely impoverished.⁹

As the analysis of prostitutes' wages below will make clear, these economic changes had an obvious impact on the demand and supply aspects of commercial sex, but until recently there was always a sizable call for such services in the city itself. Today's clients are more mobile and tend to seek their sexual gratification further away, but in the past the prostitution sector catered to both the local townsmen and the surrounding rural population. Their customer base was varied, consisting of youngsters, married men, and the clergy as well, the latter being a fairly large group in Bruges. The presence of itinerates such as sailors, traveling merchants, and military troops caused the supply to exceed local demand, and the latter group in particular fuelled the trade. Bruges became a garrison town in the seventeenth century, and soldiers of all ranks show up as clients in the source materials well into the twentieth century. Between 1865 and 1882, for example, Bruges' garrison consisted of about 1,200 men, a considerable number in a population of only 45,000.¹⁰

The constant demand by soldiers and other men for sex was met by a steady supply of impoverished women during all but the last period under discussion. In Bruges, as elsewhere, women's employment opportunities were limited, and what work there was did not pay well. For example, in the eighteenth century, lace makers and spinners—the most common occupations among Bruges' female population—only earned two to four pennies a day, while an unskilled male labourer received about twelve.¹¹ Moreover, Bruges was characterized demographically by a preponderance of females, a high age of marriage, and a large proportion of permanently unwed women.¹² This imbalance reached its peak at the start of the nineteenth century when only 36 per cent of women

pp. 132–141, 133–135; Jan D'hondt, "Een moeizame industriële en sociale ontplooiing", in Marc Ryckaert, André Vandewalle and Jan D'hondt, *Brugge*, pp. 167–189, 176–186.

9 Jan D'hondt, "Een moeizame industriële en sociale ontplooiing", pp. 176–186.

10 Mertens, "Prostitutie in Vlaanderen", pp. 189–190.

11 Yvan Vanden Berghe, *Jacobijnen en traditionalisten: de reactie van de Bruggelingen in de revolutietijd (1780–1794)* (Brussels, 1972), pp. 71–76; Conny Deneweth, "Vrouwenarbeid te Brugge in de achttiende eeuw" (Unpublished M.A., Ghent University, 1987), p. 108; Jan Denolf, "Brugge 1748: Een socio-demografische schets van een stedelijke samenleving rond het midden van de 18^e eeuw" (Unpublished M.A., Ghent University, 1981), p. 135.

12 Richard Wall, "The Composition of Households in a Population of 6 Men to 10 Women: South-East Bruges in 1814", in Richard Wall (ed.), *Family Forms in Historic Europe* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 421–474, 428–430; Mertens, "Prostitutie in Vlaanderen", p. 264; Sofie De Langhe, "Oude vrijsters; Bestaansstrategieën van ongehuwde vrouwen op het Brugse platteland, late achttiende—begin negentiende eeuw", (Unpublished Ph.D., Ghent University,

above the age of 15 were married, as opposed to 57 per cent of the men.¹³ So at any given time there were many single females who had to survive without the benefit of a spouse. And while Bruges did not attract many immigrants, foreigners did supplement the local labour force; prostitution was a mobile occupation and women involved in it could pass through many urban centres in the region since the distances involved were small. Those travelling between Ghent, Dunkirk, Lille, and Ostend all stopped in Bruges on the way.

The Legal Framework

Just as Bruges' socio-economic circumstances changed over the centuries, so too did the way in which the city dealt with prostitution. During the mediaeval and early modern eras, prostitution was handled via a combination of repression and tolerance. The proportions of repression and tolerance, however, fluctuated over both the short term and in the long run, although the terminology used sometimes makes this difficult to determine from the materials available. Prostitution as such is not discussed in Bruges' early normative sources, which only deal with adultery and encouraging fornication as criminal offences.¹⁴ In fact, no word even existed for a person selling sexual services, and the nearest equivalent—"whore"—was applied to any women engaging in extra-marital sex. Economic transactions were not entirely irrelevant, as the authorities did prosecute those who remunerated more often than women who had merely had premarital sex. However, the sources require careful reading in order to distinguish which was which. Eventually, professional "whores" evolved into a separate category over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth

2013), p. 8. The mean age at first marriage for women at the end of the eighteenth century was 27. This was calculated on the basis of a database constructed by volunteers at the Bruges archives, which contains 925 first marriages for 1796–1800, and 916 brides for which the age at marriage was known. According to the 1815 census, around one fifth of women never married at all; their exact numbers could not be determined, but the percentage of unmarried women above the age of 50 is estimated to have been between 18 per cent and 28 per cent. J. De Belder, L. Jaspers, C. Gyssels, and C. Vandenbroeke, *Arbeid en tewerkstelling in West-Vlaanderen 1814–1815, een socio-professionele en demografische analyse: Werkdocumenten* 6 (n.p., 1986), pp. 1392–1393.

13 Wall, "The Composition of Households", p. 431.

14 Joos de Damhouder, *Practycke ende handbouck in criminele zaeken*, republished by Jozef Dauwe and Jos Monballyu (Roeselare, 1981), pp. 144–159.

centuries¹⁵ as reflected by the appearance of the word “prostituting”, which gradually replaced “whoring” when the case involved commercial sex.¹⁶

Even so, actual prostitution was not always prosecuted. Tolerance prevailed during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and while brothel keepers were routinely fined, the collection pattern demonstrates that the fines were not meant to be punitive, but instead functioned as a form of taxation.¹⁷ Given Bruges’ status as a centre of international trade, the authorities may have found it convenient to allow a relatively free market for sexual gratification, and it seems that commercial sex was only cracked down on when excesses occurred. However, an increasing number of brothel keepers were prosecuted towards the end of the fifteenth century—perhaps not coincidentally, as Bruges was past its peak—and so tolerance gradually gave way to repression.¹⁸ It is not clear when this changed yet again, but it appears that tolerance once more dominated during most of the early modern period; in the mid-seventeenth century, a mere handful of brothel keepers and prostitutes were prosecuted and years could pass without a single arrest.¹⁹ However, this *laissez-faire* approach stands in sharp contrast with the eighteenth century, particularly during the second half, in which an average of nine prostitutes were prosecuted a year. This was quite a substantial number given that the average in Ghent—a city almost twice the size of Bruges—was only two a year.²⁰ Presumably this had more to do with the mechanisms of social control available in

15 Adultery could be prosecuted both by the secular and the ecclesiastical courts, but moral offences committed by the laity were increasingly—and eventually exclusively—dealt with by the former.

16 This evolution was also found elsewhere: Lotte Van de Pol, *Het Amsterdams hoerdom: Prostitutie in de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw* (Amsterdam, 1996), pp. 26–35; Ruth Mazo Karras, “Sex and the Singlewoman”, in Judith M. Bennett and Amy M. Froide (eds), *Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250–1800* (Philadelphia, 1999), pp. 127–145, 130–131.

17 Dupont, *Maagdenverleidsters, hoeren en speculanten*, p. 52.

18 *Ibid.*, pp. 159–162.

19 Marleen Mullie, “Zedendelicten te Brugge in de late 17^{de} en 18^{de} eeuw” (Unpublished M.A., Ghent University, 1995), pp. 84–87.

20 The average for Ghent between 1750 and 1779 was calculated on the basis of two other studies because the requisite information was not included in the criminal archives. Anne Marie Roets, “Rudessen, dieften ende andere crimen: Misdadigheid te Gent in de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw: een kwantitatieve en kwalitatieve analyse” (Unpublished Ph.D., Ghent University, 1987), 111, p. 1; Frédéric Van Waeijenberge, “Collocatie te Gent (1750–1779)” (Unpublished M.A., Ghent University, 1994), p. 124.

both cities than a difference in attitudes, and in any case Bruges had a larger police force.²¹

Nevertheless, the policy of repression was aimed at regulation rather than abolition, and as long as social norms were by and large respected, prostitution was tolerated to varying degrees. Many prostitutes were only brought to trial as the result of complaints or at the request of family members.²² And in many hearings, other prostitutes and brothel keepers were named who were not arrested afterwards. It seems that when the Bruges authorities deviated from this pattern it was because of a perception on the part of the authorities that the sector was growing too conspicuous. In some years, they raided brothel houses and arrested all the women present, which resulted in peaks in the prosecution rate of up to thirty-eight a year.

Indeed, visibility seems to have both triggered periods of repression and influenced policy towards prostitution in general. Eighteenth-century court records show that public solicitation was judged more harshly than prostitution hidden behind brothel doors, even though these houses were located in the centre of Bruges. When Louis Stevens was interrogated following an accusation of brothel keeping in 1770, the aldermen seem to have been most upset by the fact that he lured in customers by sending his girls out onto the streets to seduce men.²³ Moreover, there were a few city council resolutions concerning prostitution showing that Bruges' authorities had experimented with segregation at times. In 1491, nocturnal streetwalking in the town centre was prohibited and in 1624, an ordinance was adopted stipulating that "those keeping a brothel or dishonest house within the city would be confined and forced to

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- 21 Bruges' police force was well established by early modern standards. In 1757, the city's two permanent bodies of officers numbered 160 men in total, while Ghent had only forty-seven policemen in 1752. Although Ghent's force quadrupled in the decades after, it is clear that Bruges still maintained a relatively large police presence. A. Vandewalle, *Beknopte inventaris van het stadsarchief van Brugge* (Bruges, 1979), pp. 77–78; Mullie, "Zedendelicten te Brugge", p. 28; Piet Lenders, *Gent, een stad tussen traditie en verlichting (1750–1787)*, (Courtrai, 1990), pp. 383–385; Harald Deceulaer, "Implicaties van de straat: Rechten, plichten en conflicten in Gentse gebuurten (17de en 18de eeuw)", *Handelingen der maatschappij voor geschiedenis en oudheidkunde te Gent: Nieuwe Reeks*, 50 (1996), pp. 121–147, 137–139.
- 22 Fernand Vanhemelryck, "De criminaliteit in de Ammanie van Brussel van de late middeleeuwen tot het einde van het Ancien Regime (1404–1789)" (Unpublished Ph.D., Ghent University, 1968), pp. 164–165.
- 23 Municipal Archives of Bruges [hereafter MAB], 188, Criminele Informatiën, 2 June 1770, Louis Stevens.

move outside the old town to an area provided outside the city walls.”²⁴ These laws cannot have been valid for very long, as court records do not indicate that any such policies were put into practise. Nevertheless, they show that the authorities were looking to remove prostitution from public spaces, not put a stop to it. As in most places in the early modern period, prostitution in Bruges was judged a “necessary evil”, impossible to repress entirely but still requiring some form of control.

The same attitude prevailed into the nineteenth century but was translated into an entirely different policy: regulation instead of repression or segregation. Prostitution was allowed but could only take place in official brothel houses, and the prostitutes had to be registered and medically monitored. This approach was first put into practice in France at the start of the revolution, and under Napoleon it spread throughout much of Europe, including the southern Netherlands. Bruges, however, followed suit somewhat later. While Ghent already had an ordinance regarding the regulation of prostitution in 1809, the first such law in Bruges dates from 1839.²⁵ It stipulated that brothel houses had to request a license to operate, and prostitutes had to register in what was commonly called *het hoerenboek*—the book of whores. Furthermore, they were not allowed to solicit customers outside of the brothel and they had to undergo a weekly medical examination; if infected with a venereal disease, they were hospitalized. By 1841, the town had ten official brothels and twenty-two registered prostitutes. However, many more worked illicitly; there were at least seventeen clandestine houses of ill repute and forty-five illegal prostitutes at the time.²⁶ In order to come to grips with the problem, the authorities revised the legislation in 1871 to allow the police to register prostitutes on their own initiative.

Prior to World War II, Bruges adjusted the ordinances pertaining to prostitution three more times, in 1884, 1920, and 1939. And while regulation remained the primary focus of the new laws, both the changes that were made and how

24 Dupont, *Maagdenverleidsters, hoeren en speculanten*, p. 51; L. Gilliodts—Van Severen, *Essais d'archéologie Brugeoise: Mémoires de Bruges. Recueil de textes et analyses de documents inédits ou peu connus, concernant l'état social de cette ville, du quinzième au dix-neuvième siècle* (Bruges, 1920), III, p. 167.

25 Marie-Sylvie Dupont-Bouchat, “Verdraagzaamheid en repressie: Fascinatie en weerzin: Elkaar dwarsende blikken op de prostitutie in België (15de–20ste eeuw)”, in Kathleen Devolder (ed.), *Van badhuis tot eroscentrum: Prostitutie en vrouwenhandel van de middeleeuwen tot heden* (Brussel, 1995), pp. 63–66; Mertens, “Prostitutie in Vlaanderen”, pp. 34–39.

26 Koen Rotsaert, “Beteugeling van de prostitutie te Brugge in de 19^{de} eeuw”, *Brugs ommeland*, 41 (2001), pp. 154–174, 158–161.

the policies were enforced show that the influence of the abolitionist movement had grown. For example, clandestine houses were harshly suppressed several times at the end of the nineteenth century.²⁷ All brothels were abolished in 1939; prostitution was not punishable as such, but it was no longer permitted for third parties to profit from it.²⁸ The Germans had changed local policies during World War I, and during World War II they did the same, repealing the 1939 legislation. They shared the social and moral considerations of the abolitionists, but their policy was primarily concerned with ensuring that soldiers had access to a disease-free sexual outlet. It was believed that banning commercial sex outright would have affected morale and also encouraged homosexuality and clandestine prostitution. As such, strict regulations were put in place with regard to brothels and prostitutes servicing the troops, and other forms of prostitution were forbidden.²⁹

In 1948, regulations pertaining to prostitution throughout Belgium were formally declared null and void by the central government, which opted to take an abolitionist approach that has lasted to this day.³⁰ The end of regulation—the first national legislation about prostitution—was brought about for several underlying reasons. Attempts to control venereal diseases had not been effective, and it was considered immoral for the state to be involved with the sex industry at any level. This move was also in line with international trends, given that Belgium was one of the few countries still attempting to regulate prostitution.³¹ Yet while it remains legal, the legislation since passed is highly ambiguous in the sense that many related activities such as running a brothel and advertising are subject to prosecution, which means that the sector is still linked with criminality. Moreover, prostitution is still handled by municipal governments and local policies are not always in line with national law. In Ghent, for example, sex workers are registered and prostitution is tolerated within a specific neighbourhood; furthermore, renting windows so that prostitutes can showcase their bodies, while illegal according to the criminal code, is permitted in that area. In Bruges, on the other hand,

27 Rotsaert, “Beteugeling van de prostitutie”, pp. 167–173.

28 Vande Voorde, “Prostitutie te Brugge tijdens de Eerste en de Tweede Wereldoorlog”, pp. 53–67.

29 *Ibid.*, pp. 192–196.

30 Tina Van Loon, “Een moraalwetenschappelijke analyse van het Belgische prostitutiebeleid: 1830–2007”, *CEVI (Center for Ethics and Value Inquiry) working paper 2008*, pp. 1–25, 8, available at: <http://www.cevi-globalethics.ugent.be/file/14>; last accessed 1 August 2017.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

there is no divergence between legislation and local policy simply because the sector is so small.³²

The ambiguous and varied nature of Belgium's approach has been subject to critique from different angles. In 2013, the Minister of the Interior, Joëlle Milquet, while speaking at an international conference on human trafficking and sexual exploitation stated that the extant national legislation should be strictly adhered to.³³ Legal specialists and those actually working with sex workers, on the other hand, pled for change. While forced prostitution and human trafficking are issues that must be dealt with, they pointed out that the majority of sex workers are not working under such circumstances. They argued that the legislation was only created to address a minority of prostitutes, and that by concentrating on this group alone legislators have turned all sex workers into passive victims despite the fact that many are making their own decisions.³⁴ An analysis of the social profiles of prostitutes in Bruges supports the reformers' critiques.

Social Profiles

Foreign women are overrepresented in the sex trade, but that does not change the fact that prostitution is not just "migrant work" or solely the result of human trafficking. In smaller cities and places not characterized by much mobility, locals constitute the majority of the prostitute population. Indeed, less than 35 per cent of Bruges' current sex workers were born outside of Belgium. In the past, the number of foreigners was smaller, although given the city's appeal during the Burgundian period, it is likely that the number of immigrant prostitutes at that time was relatively large—an assumption that is thus far only supported by sparse data regarding the origins of brothel keepers.³⁵ When looking at prostitutes' origins in more recent centuries, improvements in transportation as well as globalization have had a clear impact (see

32 Interview with Emmanuel Warnier, Bruges Police, 12 July 2012.

33 "Milquet wil strengere toepassing prostitutiewetten", *De Morgen*, 30 September 2013.

34 Gert Vermeulen, "Zelfregulering via kwaliteitsnormen in de seksuele dienstensector?" in Gert Vermeulen (ed.), *Betaalseksrecht. Naar regulering of legalisering van niet-problematische prostitutie?* (Antwerp, 2007), pp. 15–26; Van Loon, "Een moraalwetenschappelijke analyse", pp. 1–25; Sylvia Sroka, "Prostitutie: roep om legalisering?" *RoSa, Documentatiecentrum en Archief voor Gelijke Kansen, Feminisme en Vrouwenstudies*, pp. 1–5, available at: <http://www.rosadoc.be>; last accessed 9 July 2012.

35 Dupont, *Maagdenverleidsters, hoeren en speculanten*. pp. 129–138.

Table 3.1). The number of foreign sex workers gradually increased, as did the distances travelled—a trend only interrupted by major wars and the resultant constraints on movement. Nineteenth-century Bruges had roughly the same number of foreign sex workers as today, but their origins were quite different. In 2011, 20 per cent of non-native prostitutes came from countries outside of the European Union and 12 per cent from western Europe, while in the nineteenth century one woman hailed from the United States and 97 per cent from neighbouring countries.³⁶ Clearly not all sex workers are migrants; nor is it reasonable to expect that they would be. Individual career possibilities are determined by a complex interplay of personal traits and circumstances. Indeed, one of the most decisive factors in determining what professional opportunities are available to people is their socio-economic background—an element that intersects with migrants' origins (Table 3.1) as they are often poor and, at least by the standards of their adopted country, poorly educated.

Nevertheless, the sparse evidence concerning the education of Bruges' sex workers confirms that the majority—regardless of their origin—have never been highly educated, although in the past, prostitutes were not exceptional in this regard. In the eighteenth century, the majority of the city's prostitutes were trained to work in the low-skilled textile industries, just as many other women in the region were. An educational gap does not appear until the nineteenth century, when 49 per cent of the prostitutes were found to be illiterate

TABLE 3.1 *Origins of Bruges' sex workers, 1750–2011.*³⁷

	1750–1790	1872–1909	1910–1921	1940–1945	2011
Bruges	42.2%	14.6%	61.8%	37.5%	
West Flanders	16.4%	20.3%	17.6%	38.7%	65.3%
S. Netherlands/ Belgium	33.2%	32.6%	17.6%	19.3%	
Abroad	8.2%	32.5%	2.9%	4.5%	34.7%
N	268	616	68	269	95

36 Alfons Theerens, "Op herbergbezoek te Brugge (1750–1850)" (Unpublished M.A., University of Leuven, 1981), p. 233.

37 Mechant (ongoing doctoral research based on eighteenth-century court records); Mertens, "Prostitutie in Vlaanderen", p. 68; Vande Voorde, "Prostitutie te Brugge tijdens de eerste en de tweede wereldoorlog", pp. 98–101 and 107; 2011 Annual Report, Pasop.

as opposed to 41 per cent of the total female population.³⁸ However, this divergence from the general populace only began to widen during the twentieth century. Specific figures for Bruges are not available, but in present-day Flanders the mean age at which prostitutes quit school is nearly 18, although education is compulsory until this age and the majority of teenagers go on to study at a university or take part in another form of higher education. Of course, this can partially be explained by general evolutions in education, such as increased access and greater diversity within the curriculum, but it does indicate that prostitutes have become a more distinct group within society.³⁹

Prostitutes' professional lives evolved in a similar fashion. During the early modern period, poorly paid jobs in textile production and the garment trade were the most common occupations among Bruges' prostitutes simply because that was the case for most women. Their numbers only declined in the nineteenth century after the collapse of the textile industry. Domestic service then became the single most important employment sector for young women and the number of servants who ended up in prostitution markedly increased. The common belief that domestic servants were particularly vulnerable to prostitution cannot be confirmed, but it may be explained somewhat by both differences in professions and a certain degree of compartmentalization within the prostitution sector. In the early modern period, domestic servants were better off than lace makers because they lived with their employers and were not dependent upon the vagaries of the market. However, servants had more to lose if they lost their position, and therefore turned more easily to work as full-time brothel prostitutes. Lace makers, on the other hand, were more likely to supplement their meagre incomes by occasional streetwalking.⁴⁰

38 Mertens, "Prostitutie in Vlaanderen", pp. 106–108.

39 In general, more than half of the dropouts and graduates in Flanders are 22 years of age when first employed, while only 7 per cent are 18 or younger: Maarten Tielens and Wim Herremans, "Schoolverlaters in hun eerste job: Een analyse op basis van het Datawarehouse AM&SM, Boordtabel jongeren", in *Rapport steunpunt werk en sociale economie*, p. 8, available at: <https://lirias.kuleuven.be/bitstream/123456789/326009/2/WSE>; last accessed 8 July 2012; Karolien van Nunen, Charlotte Gryseels and Guido Van Hal, *Effectonderzoek naar preventie bij sekswerkers* (Antwerp, 2012), pp. 135–136. The distinction can partly be explained by the finding that many sex workers originate from areas where only lower levels of education are readily available, yet this is not an entirely sufficient explanation given the fact that local prostitutes are also not as educated as other Belgians.

40 On the likelihood of women working in various sectors becoming prostitutes, see Van de Pol, *Het Amsterdams hoerdom*, p. 104, although Van de Pol does not distinguish between different kinds of prostitution.

Employment opportunities for women only became truly diverse in the twentieth century, and this is again reflected by sex workers' previous or other professions. At the start of the century, an increasing number of prostitutes worked at one point in manufacturing or catering, and by the turn of the century they had been joined by part-time cleaners, nurses, saleswomen, labourers, and others.⁴¹ So today, sex workers' professional backgrounds reflect the entire gamut of employment opportunities available to women in general, and this includes those in high-end jobs, although low-skilled and low-paid professions still predominate. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that women with a higher degree of education often occupy the profession's upper levels and tend to earn the most money in the sector. This is hardly surprising given that prostitution has always offered comparatively higher wages, which is the primary motivation for women joining the profession, even among those already earning a decent income. In the eighteenth century, the smallest recorded amount for the services of a prostitute was five pennies, whereas Bruges lace makers only earned two to four pennies a day.⁴² And today, Ghent's window prostitutes earn €50 in fifteen minutes, while the mean hourly wage in Belgium amounts €11.⁴³

Sex workers' ages also vary from individual to individual, but their mean ages reflect a clear trend towards prostitutes now being considerably older than their predecessors, as seen in Table 3.2. In the eighteenth century, the mean age of prostitutes at the time of their first arrest was 23, while the estimated mean now is 34. For the most part, this was a gradual shift. The nineteenth-century mean was 26, which then dipped slightly in the first half of the twentieth century to 25. This means that the bulk of the increase came in the second half of the twentieth century. This trend is related to shifts in the ages at which they joined and then left the profession.

Nearly three in four of all prostitutes in eighteenth-century Bruges were younger than 24–25 at the time of their first arrest, and the court records containing such information indicate that most had started in their late teens or

41 Van Nunen, *Effectonderzoek*, p. 136.

42 MAB, 188, Criminele informatiën, 4 March 1775, Angeline Meijers. On the mean wages of Bruges lace makers, see p. 3 of that text.

43 Interview with Ans Traen and An Mortier, Pasop, Ghent, 12 June 2012. Excluding extremes, the net monthly income in Belgium is €1909, or €90 a day in a month with twenty-one working days, or €11 an hour. Information available at: <http://www.vacature.com/blog/hoeveel-belgen-verdienen-gemiddeld-meer-dan-2000-euro-netto>; last accessed 8 July 2012.

TABLE 3.2 *Ages of Bruges' sex workers, 1750–2011.*⁴⁴

	1750–1790	1872–1909	1910–1921	1940–1945	2011
10–14	0.4%	–	–	–	–
15–19	27.8%	6.1%	17.2%	23.2%	4.3%
20–24	43.2%	43.1%	37.4%	35.1%	13.0%
25–29	13.2%	29.0%	28.3%	19.9%	18.5%
30–34	9.8%	14.1%	9.1%	12.2%	21.7%
35–39	2.6%	4.4%	3.0%	5.9%	13.0%
40 +	3.0%	3.3%	5.1%	3.7%	29.3%
N	266	610	99	271	92

early twenties, although a few had started as young as 14, and one even at 13. This remained unchanged in the nineteenth century; while 45 per cent of prostitutes began working in the sector before the age of 20, 38 per cent indicated they had started between the ages of 20 and 24.⁴⁵ The mean age at which present-day prostitutes working in East and West Flanders started, however, is 26. Changes in the legislation and alterations in the norms surrounding adulthood and the appropriate age at which to start working help explain this evolution. In the eighteenth century, there was no legal distinction between those who had turned 25—the actual age of majority at the time—and those who had not. People began working at much younger ages than today and were considered to be adults well before that time. In the early-modern era, women were seen as being adults from their mid-teens onward, a time when they were paid as adult labourers and no longer referred to as children.⁴⁶ Today, prostitution is legal for women who attain the age of majority—now 18—and people start working at much later ages.⁴⁷ Juvenile prostitutes still exist, but they are the

44 Mechant (ongoing doctoral research based on eighteenth-century court records); Mertens, “Prostitutie in Vlaanderen”, p. 56; Vande Voorde, “Prostitutie te Brugge tijdens de eerste en de tweede wereldoorlog”, pp. 78–79 and 82; 2011 Annual Report, Pasop.

45 Van Nunen, *Effectonderzoek*, p. 141; Mertens, “Prostitutie in Vlaanderen”, p. 58.

46 Amy M. Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England* (New York, 2005), p. 9.

47 For the legislation regarding prostitution by minors, see Stevens, *Strafrecht en seksualiteit*, pp. 518–519.

exception rather than the norm because the authorities are quick to intervene in such cases.⁴⁸

The stopping age has undergone a similar evolution. While nearly one in three contemporary sex workers are 40 or over, this was almost never the case in the eighteenth century. In his research on prostitution in eighteenth-century London, Randolph Trumbach argued that prostitutes stopped when they got too old because once youth and beauty were gone, the clients disappeared.⁴⁹ And for the eighteenth century, this does indeed seem to have been true. The few older prostitutes operated at the margins of the sector. For example, 45-year-old Marie Bosan clearly had trouble finding clients as the aldermen stated that “she not only called the married men and youngsters in, but children of ten to twelve years as well.”⁵⁰ Today, physical ageing takes its toll more gradually thanks to better living conditions, hygiene, and cosmetics, as well as improvements in and greater access to medical care, and while the increase in sex workers’ ages may not be entirely related to these developments, they certainly play an important role. In any case, the ageing of the prostitute population has had important consequences, such as extending the length of their careers in the profession and changes in their family circumstances.

While the greater majority of eighteenth and nineteenth-century prostitutes were unmarried (Table 3.3), today more than half are in a long-term

TABLE 3.3 *Marital status of Bruges’ sex workers, 1750–1945.*⁵¹

	1750–1790	1872–1909	1910–1921	1940–1945
Unmarried	81.7%	81.7%	57.6%	58.1%
Married	7.0%	7.2%	27.1%	30.1%
Married but living alone	7.7%	7.2%	8.5%	5.2%
Divorced	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%	3.1%
Widowed	3.5%	3.9%	5.1%	3.5%
N	284	180	59	229

48 Interview with Traen and Mortier.

49 Randolph Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution, Vol. 1: Heterosexuality and the Third Gender in Enlightenment London* (Chicago, 1998), p. 136.

50 State Archives of Bruges [hereafter SAB], Tychten, 659, cahier 12, folio 13, 3 September 1790, Marie Bosan.

51 Mechant (ongoing doctoral research based on eighteenth-century court records); Mertens, “Prostitutie in Vlaanderen”, p. 64; Vande Voorde, “Prostitutie te Brugge tijdens de eerste en de tweede wereldoorlog”, pp. 87 and 90; 2011 Annual Report, Pasop.

relationship.⁵² Again, general developments were responsible for this, including the decreasing age of marriage and the shrinking number of spinsters prior to the second half of the twentieth century, and the increase in cohabitation afterwards.⁵³ Spikes during wartime in the number of married women engaging in the sex trade probably reflect temporary situations in which wives left on their own may have turned to prostitution in their struggle to survive, although this is hard to estimate. It is certainly possible that the historical sources available did not always note when an absent husband had been mobilized.⁵⁴ The number of prostitutes with children (see Table 3.4) was likewise subject to change. The contemporary sex worker population contains the greatest number of mothers—a rather notable finding given the widespread use of birth

TABLE 3.4 *Bruges' sex workers with one or more children, 1750–2011.*⁵⁵

	1750–1790	1872–1909	1910–1921	1940–1945	Pasop ^a
Number of women with children	41	68	14	58	48
Total number of women	284	172	69	270	74
Per cent of sex workers with children	14.4%	39.5%	20.3%	21.5%	64.9%

a Data pertaining to the entire provinces of East and West Flanders

52 No sets of data are currently available on the official marital status of contemporary Bruges sex workers, but 46.6 per cent of East and West Flemish sex workers are not in a relationship. van Nunen, *Effectonderzoek*, p. 134.

53 Between the end of the eighteenth century and the end of World War II, the age at first marriage for women decreased. In Flanders and Brabant, it was 27.3 in 1780–1789 and 26.2 in 1890–1899. In Belgium, it was 25.7 and 23.4 in 1947. Meanwhile, the proportion of spinsters decreased from 23.5 per cent in 1829 to 10.4 per cent in 1947. Isabelle Devos, “Marriage and Economic Conditions since 1700: the Belgian Case”, in Isabelle Devos and Liam Kennedy (eds), *Marriage and Rural Economy. Western Europe since 1400* (Turnhout, 1999), pp. 118, 124, 128.

54 Vande Voorde, “Prostitutie te Brugge tijdens de Eerste en de Tweede Wereldoorlog”, pp. 96–97.

55 Mechant (ongoing doctoral research based on eighteenth-century court records); Mertens, “Prostitutie in Vlaanderen”, p. 67; Vande Voorde, “Prostitutie te Brugge tijdens de eerste en de tweede wereldoorlog”, pp. 93–97; 2011 Annual Report, Pasop.

control. However, there are some reasonable explanations. Present-day prostitutes tend to be older when joining the profession, and having been fertile longer than women in the past they are thus more likely to have children in general. Furthermore, both having children out of wedlock and being a single mother are normal features of today's society. Either way, it only confirms that sex workers are actually quite ordinary women.

Certainly, they're just as varied as the general population, although some trends are present among their profiles. While they cannot all be stereotyped as poor young migrants, analyses do show that some groups are overrepresented. Women with minimal prospects, such as migrants or the poorly educated, do indeed become prostitutes more often than others; moreover, as Bruges has become more diverse, offering more possibilities to more people, prostitutes increasingly come from distinct social groups. However, this does not make them passive victims. This stereotype of prostitutes as being "vulnerable" is linked to the impression that they fall prey to unscrupulous exploiters, but what do we actually know about the circumstances of their employment?

Sex Workers and Their Employers

While it is the case that some sex workers, both official and illicit, work under the oversight or protection of a brothel owner, madam, procurer, or pimp, this is not true of all. Many prostitutes have operated independently throughout history. Even in the nineteenth century, when prostitutes were not legally allowed to work outside of Bruges' official brothels, a considerable number still walked the streets or received men in private.⁵⁶ Presumably profitability has always been the most important factor in determining working arrangements. When the sector is lucrative, it attracts more people seeking to arrange contact between prostitutes and their clients—intermediaries, in other words. Prostitution is not as profitable in Bruges now, and as a result there are many more independent sex workers in the city; nearly half operate in private settings, whereas this is only the case for one fourth of the prostitutes in East and West Flanders as a whole.⁵⁷ In the eighteenth century, about a third of the Bruges' prostitutes were streetwalkers or women who frequented dishonest inns, but it is not clear at all as to how many were actually working on their own. The court

56 Mertens, "Prostitutie in Vlaanderen", p. 162.

57 2011 Annual Report, Pasop.

records indicate that some were accompanied by an intermediary or were called to a house of ill repute whenever they had customers, while others had arrangements with the inns they frequented. However, few streetwalkers were entirely dependent on intermediaries and about one in ten of all prostitutes received customers in their own homes—an activity that they often combined with running their own brothels.

All the same, the level of organization involved in eighteenth-century prostitution is remarkable. At the time of their arrest, four out of ten prostitutes lived—or had lived—in a “closed brothel”, that is to say an establishment, usually an inn run by a keeper in which they both lived and worked. While individual circumstances varied, there is no doubt that this system generally curtailed prostitutes’ freedom; some women informed the authorities that they could leave the house at any moment and many clearly did, while others stated they were practically imprisoned. In Bruges, as in other early modern cities, debt bondage was the most common method employed for keeping prostitutes in such houses.⁵⁸ Debts could be accrued for boarding costs but also for clothing, drinks, travel costs, and the like, and the most remorseless brothel keepers charged so much for these services that prostitutes’ expenses exceeded their incomes. Marianne Stiers, for instance, declared that even though she earned a lot of money, she had to give it all to the bawdy woman to cover the debts she had run up because of the wine she drank, thus making it impossible to leave.⁵⁹ Marie De Faït similarly said, “She did not know how to pay off her debts when she was charged for everything she consumed.”⁶⁰

Indeed, few of the eighteenth-century prostitutes indicated that they had started against their will but many claimed that they lost their freedom after entering the brothel house. Marie Le Boeuf testified that she entered the brothel on her own initiative, but when she thought better of it, she could not leave because she was under surveillance, and she said that her only hope was that her father would come to fetch her.⁶¹ Unfortunately, there are no more recent sources that can tell us whether such practises continued, but it is likely that prostitutes’ circumstances remained just as diverse, with some working independently to varying degrees and others becoming trapped. Presumably, the latter situation became increasingly uncommon over time due to increased regulations, particularly in the last few decades. According to Ans Traen and

58 Van de Pol, *Het Amsterdams hoerdom*, p. 300; Benabou, *La prostitution et la police des mœurs*, p. 223.

59 SAB, Tychten, 658, cahier 6, folios 29–30, 6 October 1789, Marianne Stiers Marianne.

60 SAB, Tychten, 656, cahier 1, folios 19–20, 6 February 1787, Marie De Faït.

61 SAB, Tychten, 656, cahier 1, folios 9–10, 19 January 1787, Marie Le Boeuf.

An Mortier from the NGO Pasop, forced prostitution is much less widespread today than is often believed. They indicated that they do not know of a single sex worker in West Flanders who is constrained by an intermediary or for whom it is impossible to stop. And while they conceded that quitting the sector is difficult as a result of other circumstances such as the problems involved in explaining away such a gap in a résumé, this is a different issue.⁶²

However, while few eighteenth-century women declared that they were forced into prostitution, “choice” is a relative concept. Prostitutes were often persuaded to take up the profession via misrepresentations. For example, Jacoba Mesijs said that she started because her prospective madam claimed to know girls in Antwerp who had earned eighty-one guilders in sixteen days.⁶³ Jacoba entered prostitution to earn a lot of money, but the amount she was promised clearly was exaggerated. And while forced prostitution was the exception rather than the norm, it did occur. Anne Marie Cootens testified that while looking for work, she had moved in with Marie Callens, who, unbeknownst to her, ran a house of ill repute. When she had not found a job after a few days, Anne Marie had to sell some of her clothing. Callens “saw that she was in need” and gave her clothes but “forced her to go into a room with the clients of the inn.”⁶⁴ Anne Marie informed the aldermen and Callens was jailed, but other women were not so fortunate. Rather, they acquired more debt and were passed between brothels, thus becoming trapped in trafficking networks.

Indeed, trafficking—meaning here all assisted migration, both voluntary and involuntary—is not a modern phenomenon. Eighteenth-century brothel owners in Bruges corresponded with colleagues elsewhere to exchange girls and plan their travel. The only thing that changed over the course of time was the expanse of territories they operated across. While Bruges’ eighteenth-century networks did not reach further than Brussels, those of the nineteenth century crossed some national borders and the present ones cross even more.⁶⁵ A substantial number of immigrant prostitutes were trafficked, especially those from farther away. In fact, eighteenth-century sex workers who were not native to Bruges rarely began their careers there. Most were prostitutes on the move and the city was just one more stop on the road. Indeed, such networks allowed for a great deal of mobility; some women only stayed in Bruges for a few weeks or months before they continued on their way.

62 Interview with Traen and Mortier.

63 SAB, Informatieboeken, 642, folio 242, 30 December 1758, Jacoba Mesijs.

64 SAB, Registers instructies, 712, cahier 4, folios 35–37, 7 June 1777, Anne Marie Cootens.

65 Dupont, *Maagdenverleidsters, hoeren en speculanten*, p. 98.

The role played by trafficking networks is hard to pin down. Yet it is certain that they were not merely mechanisms of forced prostitution, although they did operate as such in some cases. The aforementioned Marianne Stiers, for example, was passed between brothel keepers as a result of her debts. Other women, however, willingly took part in trafficking. Clara Van den Brugge of Brussels told the Bruges aldermen that she voluntarily went to the city along with a friend in order to live in Jan De Met's house of ill repute.⁶⁶ For their part, Bruges' Macqué sisters accepted a brothel madam's offer for employment in her Ostend establishment because their reputation in Bruges was at stake as a result of the fact that they had been streetwalking.⁶⁷ In the nineteenth century, the police investigated accusations of trafficking levelled against Léon Désiré Thibault, a French brothel owner. He was not found guilty because the women involved were of age and were already working as prostitutes before travelling to Bruges, which—according to the police—meant that they had not been forced.⁶⁸ Although this may be disputable, it is clear that trafficked prostitutes rarely fit the standard image of innocent young girls. Prostitutes have always had many reasons for moving, including the avoidance of social stigma or simply looking out for greater profits. In addition, they were often forced to travel onwards in the eighteenth century because of court judgements banishing them. Willingly or not, trafficked women ended up working under highly diverse conditions, whether in brothels that varied in terms of their size, organisation, profitability, and amenities or in the precarious circumstances experienced elsewhere by the prostitute population at large.

Working Conditions

In the early modern period, the boundaries between different types of prostitution were less clear than they are today. Streetwalkers solicited for customers around military barracks and theatres and retired to soldiers' quarters, cemeteries, or the town ramparts for sexual intercourse.⁶⁹ Most prostitutes,

66 SAB, Tychten, 656, cahier 1, folios 17–18, 6 February 1787, Clara Van den Brugge.

67 SAB, Tychten, 655, cahier 8, folios 6–7, 11 July 1786, Rosa Macqué.

68 Mertens, "Prostitutie in Vlaanderen", pp. 79–80. The primary source material concerning this network consists of correspondences between the city governments of Bruges and Versailles.

69 Cemeteries are often mentioned in the court records, presumably because at night they offered the privacy requisite for sexual encounters.

however, combined indoor and outdoor transactions. They either looked for costumers at inns or brought in those that they had found elsewhere. On some days, they did not leave the bars they frequented, while on others they stayed outdoors completely. Prostitutes working in closed brothel houses usually plied their trade inside the building, but some did go out to look for clients when none appeared on the premises. Women working from home similarly found customers on the streets or called out to them from their windows. The rare upper-class prostitute was more discrete, however, and remained indoors like the mistresses who were installed in private houses or brothel rooms to provide services for one man. It is likely that similar practises were employed in the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth, although maintaining the same level of the flexibility between indoor and outdoor business must have been made complicated by the legal framework that only allowed prostitution inside registered brothels.

Today, visible forms of prostitution have entirely disappeared from Bruges. There are no sex workers soliciting in parks, nor are there window prostitutes; as mentioned above, this change is related to evolutions in both Bruges' economy and public image. The other side of the spectrum—the escorts—are not represented either, or at least they are not known. Rather, Bruges' sex workers operate out of bars (52 per cent), private settings (44 per cent), and saunas and massage parlours (4 per cent).⁷⁰ Although it is hard to generalize, the city's prostitutes today seem to work in relatively decent circumstances. They are sheltered from the dangerous and unpleasant situations related to working on the streets and they are not completely dependent on pimps or procurers. However, each type of prostitution and each individual situation have their own benefits and drawbacks, particularly when it comes to earning potential.

The price of sex depends on several interrelated factors. In addition to the setting, the service provided, and the class of the prostitute, the client also matters. What little data is available from the eighteenth-century records indicate that prices ranged from five pennies to one crown, which is between half and five times the daily wage of an unskilled labourer.⁷¹ In the nineteenth century, prices fluctuated between one and fifty francs.⁷² The first was the standard price for soldiers visiting brothels, while the latter was the amount paid

70 2011 Annual Report, Pasop.

71 MAB, 188, *Criminele informatiën*, 29 February 1768, Marianne Cortenbos; SAB, *Registers instructies*, 725, cahier 6, folios 1–7, 16 June 1789, Anna Van Vijve.

72 The nineteenth-century data are based on two main sets of sources: the correspondences between the police and the city council, and the testimonies given by informers, soldiers

by a Bruges baron to a Brussels prostitute who regularly travelled to Bruges at his request; a special room was readied for their use upon each occasion. Most revealingly, the woman slept with another client for just two francs.⁷³ Similar examples can be found in the eighteenth century, and they all make it clear that historical prices depended more on the class of the client than that of the sex worker. Contemporary data for Bruges could not be retrieved, but it seems modern prices are more consistent: window prostitutes in Ghent charge €50 for fifteen minutes, while a brothel visit of half an hour costs around €100.⁷⁴

Despite the large range, prices have remained remarkably stable over the long run. According to Chris Vandenbroeke, the mean price of a half hour in a brothel is invariably the equivalent of one male day's wage.⁷⁵ And the data discussed here more or less confirm this: the mean price in the eighteenth century was 113 per cent of one daily wage, 117 per cent in the nineteenth century, and the mean net daily wage of Belgians today amounts to around €100—just enough for thirty minutes in a brothel.⁷⁶ Still, these long-run comparisons obscure short-term fluctuations. Nineteenth-century data indicate that in the 1880s, a time of economic crisis in which there was an exceptionally high number of prostitutes, the mean price dropped to just 40 per cent of the daily wage.⁷⁷ The current economic crisis has also affected prostitutes. As Traen and Mortier put it, “The demand side decreases while the supply side increases.” The result is that prostitutes have more down time between customers, while the costs of certain types of accommodation, like windows in Ghent, have substantially increased. So even though the prices have not changed in twenty years, the net daily wage earned by sex workers has declined over the last decade.⁷⁸

While sex workers' wages—even at the low end of the sector—have always been high compared to those of other women, the sums paid by customers do

who consequently became ill, as well as others. As such, the prices only refer to clandestine prostitution. Mertens, “Prostitutie in Vlaanderen”, pp. 218–220. Mertens also found a few references to the price of 0 francs, but this might refer to a soldier who had an actual relationship with the prostitute.

73 Mertens, “Prostitutie in Vlaanderen”, pp. 183, 186, 386.

74 Interview with Traen and Mortier.

75 Chris Vandenbroeke, “De prijs van betaalde liefde”, *Spiegel historiael*, 2 (1983), pp. 90–94. The prices for the nineteenth century were drawn from the dissertation written by Mertens. According to Dupont, fifteenth and sixteenth century prices were lower: Dupont, *Maagdenverleidsters, hoeren en speculanten*, pp. 126–127.

76 See note 42.

77 Mertens, “Prostitutie in Vlaanderen”, pp. 230 and 267.

78 Interview with Traen and Mortier.

not tell us much with regard to their actual earnings. There are always costs involved. Prostitutes working with an intermediary have to hand over about half their pay—a proportion that has not changed over the centuries⁷⁹—and others have to pay rent for a window or a room, and all must compensate for the hours spent without clients. Sex workers' net wages are therefore extremely variable. Not only do they fluctuate daily, but a great deal depends on individual circumstances and the economic climate. So while it is true that sex workers can potentially make a good living, it all hinges on their operating expenses vs. turnover, as with any other small business.

Unfortunately, we have little information regarding prostitutes' average number of clients or the length of time between them. What we do know is that many prostitutes are not employed in the sector full-time; instead, they often combine sex work with another job, or only occasionally use prostitution to supplement wages earned elsewhere. Quantitative data is not available for historic or contemporary Bruges alone, but in a survey conducted in the present-day provinces of East and West Flanders as a whole, 13 per cent of sex workers indicated that prostitution is not their primary means of support and 29 per cent declared that prostitution is not their only source of income.⁸⁰ Presumably, these proportions were much higher in previous centuries, when combining several occupations was a more common survival strategy. Nearly all eighteenth-century prostitutes interrogated in Bruges stated that they had some other form of employment, and while such claims have to be interpreted within the judicial context, there is no reason to assume that the occupations they provided to the court were not practised at all, particularly among street-walkers. In all likelihood, full-time prostitution was most common among those working in brothel houses, but even under those circumstances there may not have been enough customers to support women without additional income. And indeed, there were brothel workers who had other employment; Anna Helders, who lived in *De Vlagge* (The Flag) brothel, for instance, informed the court that she worked part-time as both a *fille de joie* and domestic servant.⁸¹ In nineteenth-century Bruges, registered prostitutes were not permitted to have a second job, but that does not mean that those working illicitly did not combine

79 SAB, Tychten, 658, cahier 4, folios 19–21, 7 July 1789, Marie Roselie Duhamel; MAB, 188, Criminele informatiën, 4 March 1775, Angeline Meijers; Mertens, "Prostitutie in Vlaanderen", p. 219; Interview with Traen and Mortier.

80 van Nunen, *Effectonderzoek*, pp. 136–138.

81 SAB, Tychten, 659, cahier 1, folio 28, 10 February 1790, Anna Helders.

occupations or that those in official brothels did not do so as well. Certainly data from the eighteenth century and today make it clear that flexibility was and still is crucial in the prostitution sector.

Conclusion

We can draw two main conclusions from this brief history of prostitution in Bruges. First, the sector is characterized by a remarkable degree of long-term stability. Although at first sight there seem to have been many changes, most of the developments are in line with general societal evolutions or represent continuity in another guise. For example, legislation progressed from criminalization to regulation to abolition, but in the end all the changes were merely different approaches to controlling prostitution—a profession still considered a “problem”, one with which the authorities continue to struggle. The number of migrants working in the sector has increased substantially, but so has the number of migrants in the overall population. The territory of prostitution networks has grown, but overall mobility has increased quite extensively as well. Public solicitation has disappeared and the sector’s different branches have grown more distinct, but at the same time labour demarcations in general have become more pronounced. Even the prices for sexual services have remained remarkably constant when compared to daily wages, as have the sums that dependent prostitutes are expected to give to intermediaries. Individual revenues are not constant but there is no evidence to suggest that they ever have been, and meanwhile, the hourly wage earning potential remains considerably higher than that of other occupations. This overall continuity also suggests that prostitution in Bruges does not differ substantially from the sector elsewhere and that what changes it has undergone merely correspond to the city’s own evolution, most notably with regard to its size.

The second conclusion is that while the sector shows a high degree of continuity as a whole, individual circumstances have always been subject to a great deal of variability. Some women fall victim to exploiters, others make their own arrangements with intermediaries, and still others work entirely independently. So while forced prostitution and abuses do take place, this is not the general state of affairs. Trafficking networks are similarly diverse. Some women were brought to Bruges to work as prostitutes without their consent, but most already had experience in the sex trade before they took up such long journeys and either agreed with travel proposals when they were made or were seeking opportunities to move. Working situations and wages have remained

diverse as well. Lastly, the prostitution sector has internal divisions which mirror the existing hierarchies and classes in society, and prostitutes' profiles are also quite diverse as a result. Migrants and locals, rich and poor, young and old, single and attached: all work in the sex industry. Yet some groups, such as migrants, the young, and the poor have always been overrepresented among prostitute populations, which explains our current stereotypes regarding sex workers. However, it does not then follow that all prostitution is the result of force or the exploitation of the vulnerable. As this brief essay has shown, some women took their lives into their own hands, deciding to become prostitutes for their own reasons.

Sex for Sale in Florence

Michela Turno

Introduction

Despite the often heated debates at the national and local levels about prostitution that have been ongoing since the 1950s, commercial sex has only quite recently begun to receive more attention among Italian historians. This is apparent in the lack of studies covering the last four centuries of Florentine prostitution. While the most relevant publications devoted to this subject focus on the late mediaeval and Renaissance periods,¹ none fully addresses the seventeenth or the eighteenth century,² and only one study explores the sex trade from the Restoration to 1888.³ All this research is mainly based on documents preserved at the Archivio di Stato in Florence, from the Ufficiali dell'Onestà (Office of Decency 1403–1747) to the Buongoverno (1814–1848), and from the Prefettura del Compartimento Fiorentino (1848–1858 and 1859–1864) to the Prefettura (1865–1952) and Questura (1860–1888).

To date, no studies have investigated male prostitution which, according to Michael Rocke, was a well-known phenomenon in Florence starting in the

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- 1 See Richard Trexler, “La Prostitution florentine au xve siècle: Patronages et clientele”, *Annales*, 1 (1981), pp. 983–1015; Maria Serena Mazzi, “Il mondo della prostituzione nella Firenze tardo medievale”, *Ricerche Storiche*, 14 (1984), pp. 337–363; *Prostitute e lenoni nella Firenze del Quattrocento* (Milan, 1991).
- 2 On the institutions created with the aim of reforming former prostitutes and providing a refuge for married prostitutes, see Sherrill Cohen, *The Evolution of Women's Asylums since 1500: From Refuges for Ex-prostitutes to Shelters for Battered Women* (New York [etc.], 1992); John K. Brackett, “The Florentine Onestà and the Control of Prostitution, 1403–1680”, *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 2 (1993), pp. 273–300.
- 3 Michela Turno, “*Il malo esempio*”: *Donne scostumate e prostituzione nella Firenze dell'Ottocento* (Florence, 2003) and Michela Turno, “Postriboli in Firenze: Un'inchiesta del prefetto del 30 novembre 1849”, *Annali di Storia di Firenze*, 2 (2007), pp. 233–246. For the period from unification until 1914, see Mary Gibson, *Prostitution and the State in Italy, 1860–1915* (Columbus, 1999).

fourteenth century.⁴ Likewise, no studies concerning twentieth-century prostitution have been carried out so far.⁵ Twentieth-century archival documents, such as those preserved at the Archivio Centrale di Stato in Rome, do not seem to have information that could provide good insights into the last century. The relative paucity of sources is mainly the result of the partial reform of the regulation of prostitution dating back to 1860 and definite abrogation in 1958. Following the early feminists' battles against regulation, some measures were introduced in 1888 which limited the state to regulating places of prostitution but not the persons involved. However, it is possible that health and police statistics and, in particular, press reports might offer a very general picture of the trade in the early 1950s when the socialist senator Lina Merlin presented to parliament her draft bill on the abolition of regulation.

The details of prostitutes' working conditions, family situation, mediation, and profiles are largely unknown, but could perhaps to some extent be gathered from court records and newspaper articles. Florentine non-profit organizations, such as the C.A.T. social co-operative and Associazione Arcobaleno, provide additional sources of information, as they produced noteworthy documentation between the late 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century. These organizations offer medical and legal support to both those who want to leave the business of sold sex and those who decide to keep working as streetwalkers. Given the state of research and the nature and lack of available sources, providing a satisfying overview of prostitution in Florence from the seventeenth century to the present is not an easy task. However, this chapter will attempt to draw a reasonable, though necessarily incomplete, picture based primarily on what the law has said about prostitution, archival findings, and what is known about the social and economic structure of Florentine society.

The Seventeenth Century: Laws, Definitions, and Social Profiles

Until 1680, prostitution in Florence, which was then the capital of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, was under the administration and control of the Onestà

4 Michael Roche, *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence* (Oxford, 1996).

5 As far as I know, only two studies have focused on late-twentieth century Florentine prostitution: Laura Lucani, "Criminalità femminile: informazione e ricerca nell'area fiorentina degli anni '80" (Unpublished M.A., University of Florence, 1989) and Raffaele Palumbo, *La tua città sulla strada: Cronache di ordinarie prostituzioni* (San Domenico di Fiesole, 1997).

(hereafter Office of Decency). Created in 1403, this magistracy was to “establish brothels in the city, licence prostitutes and pimps to work in them, regulate their activities, and adjudicate criminal cases involving the women under [its] supervision.”⁶ At the same time, it was expected to generate revenue by granting licenses and permission to *meretrici* (prostitutes) on the basis of a fee and the imposition of pecuniary penalties.⁷ Over the course of three centuries, the magistracy imposed several restrictions on prostitutes’ freedom but also granted some concessions, such as protection from other magistracies, immunity from prosecution for debt, and the right to bring injustices before the Office. In fact, according to Cohen, “Prostitutes enjoyed more direct access to the courts than did their respectable female contemporaries, who had to rely on male representatives to bring their cause to court.”⁸ Moreover, the Office of Decency was not infrequently asked to establish whether “loose-living wives and spinsters” or “a woman with only one lover [...] were to be counted as public prostitutes.”⁹ The decisions of the court varied from one woman to another; while some were punished, others were exonerated.

By the end of sixteenth century, however, the Office of Decency had already tightened control over both the resources and the movement of prostitutes. Permission to traverse the city at night or change residences had to be purchased from the Office. Any violation was duly fined but “exemptions to most of these regulations were also sold to those able to pay, which was a quicker method to generate revenue than was the collection of fines.”¹⁰ Moreover, in line with this trend, registered prostitutes who were married and could generally have expected to escape prosecution for adultery saw a deterioration in their position. In 1635 the grand-ducal government allowed the criminal magistracy, the Otto di Guardia e Balìa, to charge registered women who were married with adultery if they did not withdraw from their “shameless life” and return to their husbands.¹¹ Adultery was certainly considered to be worse than prostitution as

6 Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*, p. 31. According to Cohen, “Early modern Tuscany recognized several variations on the general term *meretrice*. They spoke of streetwalkers (*cantoniere*), brothel prostitutes (*meretrici in postribulo*), parlour whores (*donne di partito*), and courtesans (*cortigiane*.” Cohen, *The Evolution of Women’s Asylums*, p. 46.

7 Brackett, “The Florentine Onestà”, pp. 273–300, 281–285.

8 Cohen, *The Evolution of Women’s Asylums*, p. 44.

9 *Ibid.*, pp. 47–48. Generally, an anonymous denunciation was enough to raise suspicions which would lead to an investigation. See Andrea Zorzi, “The Judicial System in Florence in The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries”, in Trevor Dean and K.J.P. Lowe (eds), *Crime, Society and the Law in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 41–58.

10 Brackett, “The Florentine Onestà”, pp. 273–300, 295–296.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 298; Cohen, *The Evolution of Women’s Asylums*, p. 49.

it undermined the institution of the family and challenged male prerogatives. Even so, this and other edicts making it possible for husbands and relatives to denounce married prostitutes had few consequences in practice. Cohen suggests that “prostitution might seem to be not a sin but a rational strategy, necessary along with marriage, for women to make economic ends meet.”¹²

Laws attempting to control married prostitutes were as ineffective as those decrees concerning unregistered prostitutes and suspect women. More numerous than any other, unregistered prostitutes were perceived to be an additional serious problem but, at the same time, an additional source of revenue. By buying their own immunity, they could avoid wearing the prostitute’s identifying sign (a piece of yellow ribbon) and they didn’t have to work in bordellos or reside on those streets designated for prostitution.¹³ They could enjoy a degree of freedom as long as they behaved with “apparent modesty and decency.”¹⁴ They could preserve their reputations and independence and move about freely, increasing their opportunities for better business. In fact, “only unregistered prostitutes had property” while “the registered prostitutes were ‘like a snail’ owning so little they could carry it on their backs.”¹⁵ Social background, independence, and the ability to make the most of their entrepreneurial activities could determine (or improve) the living conditions of a prostitute.

According to contemporary observers,¹⁶ the number of prostitutes in Florence seems to have increased in the seventeenth century. The great majority were single, but widowed and married women were not infrequently registered with the Office of Decency and they were also among those taken in as repentant prostitutes.¹⁷ Reversing the trend of the previous century which was characterized by a predominance of foreign and northern Italian women,¹⁸ prostitutes were now mostly of Florentine origin and from Tuscany. Among the 767 *meretrici* registered with the Office of Decency between 1606 and 1650,

12 Cohen, *The Evolution of Women’s Asylums*, p. 50.

13 “What was for Florence a new method of controlling prostitution was initiated in 1544 [...] with the first creation of official streets of residence for prostitutes”. However, the wealthiest prostitutes “could live where they pleased.” Brackett, “The Florentine Onestà”, pp. 273–300, 291–292.

14 Cohen, *The Evolution of Women’s Asylums*, p. 51.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 60; Brackett, “The Florentine Onestà”, pp. 273–300, 296; Giulia Calvi, *History of a Plague Year: The Social and the Imaginary in Baroque Florence* (Berkeley, 1989), p. 134.

17 Cohen also reports that “very few of these women left evidence of having had children.” Cohen, *The Evolution of Women’s Asylums*, p. 57.

18 Trexler, “La Prostitution”, pp. 983–1015, 985–988.

only twenty were not Italian.¹⁹ However, according to Brackett, the “1627–50 period saw a drop in all types of enrolments” as a result of the progressive restrictions imposed on *meretrici* and, above all, the criminalization of married prostitutes. He suggests that “what probably happened was that many prostitutes simply refused to register and went underground.”²⁰ Yet, according to the Census of 1631, 4 per cent of the women whose occupations are known were involved in prostitution.²¹

The development of textile manufacturing attracted many women from the countryside throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Brown and Goodman report that “surveys of both the silk and the wool industries completed in 1662–1663 show that female employment [constituted] about 38 per cent of wool workers and 84 per cent of workers in silk.”²² Nevertheless, the majority were employed in the lowest-paid jobs in this industry, thus inducing some of them to seek additional sources of income. Despite social disapproval, the violence to which they were subjected,²³ and the taxes and limitations on their freedom imposed by the Office of Decency, selling sex could be seen as a profitable option. Moreover, Calvi notes that “the crisis in manufacturing, in conjunction with the widespread poverty of the popular classes, forced many women, particularly in the textile industry, to become prostitutes.”²⁴

An important aspect of the system created by the Office of Decency was the relationship between the Monastero delle Convertite and the rescue homes such as the Casa delle Malmaritate and Santa Maria Maddalena. Paradoxically, the fines and taxes that prostitutes had to pay to the Office were used to finance the homes for those who gave up the trade.²⁵ Later on, cancellations

19 Brackett, “The Florentine Onestà”, pp. 273–300, 299. More precisely, there were 390 Florentine women, 258 Tuscan women (from Medici territories), 65 north Italians and 34 south Italians.

20 *Ibid.*, pp. 298–299.

21 “Over 80 per cent of women whose occupations are listed were employed in textiles while the remainder were scattered over a number of other occupations such as making clothing (5.9 per cent), prostitution (4 per cent), domestic work (3 per cent), and a variety of activities ranging from making gold thread to selling liquor.” Judith C. Brown and Jordan Goodman, “Women and Industry in Florence”, *The Journal of Economic History*, 40 (1980), pp. 73–80, 78.

22 *Ibid.*

23 Cohen, *The Evolution of Women's Asylums*, p. 55.

24 Calvi, *History of a Plague Year*, pp. 133–134. For the economic decline of the wool and silk industry, see the bibliographic reference in Richard A. Goldthwaite, *Economy of Renaissance Florence* (Baltimore, 2009), pp. 268, 282–283. See also Furio Diaz, *Il Granducato di Toscana* (Turin, 1976), in particular pp. 388–408.

25 Brackett, “The Florentine Onestà”, pp. 273–300, 296–298.

and immunities granted to unregistered prostitutes and women of bad reputation provided the additional income that the Monastero delle Convertite sorely needed. The widespread practice of granting concessions made it more difficult to identify prostitutes and keep control over them. Nevertheless, the grand-ducal government never ceased to exhort (even by threats) registered, unregistered, and suspect women to reform themselves.

The Eighteenth Century

The lack of available research makes it difficult to offer up a detailed account of prostitutes and prostitution in eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Florence. Nevertheless, some sources and legislation on this matter, as well as an initial superficial exploration of the available sources, allow us to outline some general considerations. The Office of Decency was absorbed by the city's chief criminal court in 1680 but, so far as is known, no substantial changes were made to the regulatory and fiscal system of prostitution until the late eighteenth century. There is no doubt, however, that Cosimo III de Medici's reign (1670–1723) was characterized by bigotry and corruption. His decisions influenced, to a greater or lesser degree, his subjects' lives, including the lives of prostitutes. In a burst of anti-Semitism, for instance, he enacted several laws against the Tuscan Jewish population. Among them, he banned all "sexual interactions between Jews and non-Jews (which targeted Jewish men who paid for Christian prostitutes)."²⁶

After the short reign of Gian Gastone, the last Medici grand duke, Tuscany came under the control of Pietro Leopoldo of Lorraine, whose policy on prostitution tended towards repression. Known for having abolished capital punishment and torture in 1786, Pietro Leopoldo's efforts were also directed to the improvement and protection of public morality. In January 1777 he abolished the tax imposed on *meretrici*, and in 1780 he banned prostitution from Tuscan territories with the exception of Livorno. A pragmatist, Pietro Leopoldo allowed the toleration of prostitution in this important harbour and centre of trade and business. Leopoldo's policy regarding prostitution seemed to be efficacious. By this time, Florence was already one of the main destinations of European travellers who made the Grand Tour. According to Rosemary Sweet, "references to prostitutes or 'public women' in Florence were extremely rare: they formed no part of the discourse around the city, unlike Naples, or Venice,

26 Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven, 2009), p. 89.

or even Rome.²⁷ Archival sources, however, seem to reveal that some form of control over prostitution remained at work in Florence despite the ban. It appears, in fact, that a compulsory monthly health check for all “parlour whores” (so-called *donne di partito*) was a practice that had been contemplated but not enacted.²⁸

Control over suspect women and indecent behaviour was the responsibility of the four *Commissari di quartiere*, the post of the community police offices created in Florence in 1777.²⁹ In February of 1780, for instance, they were asked to provide both a list of the “more libertine and scandalous, more loose-tongued, mordacious and chatterbox ecclesiastics and regulars” and a “note of the men and women who are the more libertine and scandalous.” The latter included a number of married women who, with the more or less explicit consent of their husbands, were having “friendships” with married men.³⁰ Procuring was forbidden and punished. In March of the same year, the *commissario* of San Giovanni produced a record of those women who acted as procurers (*ruffiane*). The list was actually very short as it indicated only two female pimps, both of whom were married. According to a police report, one of them was arrested for violating an injunction against admitting anyone into her house, and a parlour whore had been found in company with a married man at her place.³¹

This and other documents suggest that, in the economy of neighbourhood life, men were generally not involved in procuring and prostitution was often an all-female affair. Moreover, they reveal what was still an unbroken bond between women selling sex and their communities that dates back to the previous centuries. In fact, as already noted, “Despite the state’s attempt to stigmatize [...] prostitution from the sixteenth century on, leading citizens still saw

27 Rosemary Sweet, *Cities and the Grand Tour: The British in Italy, c. 1690–1820* (Cambridge, 2012), p. 72.

28 Archivio di Stato, Florence [hereafter, ASF], *Commissario di quartiere (1777–1808)*, Quartiere di S. Giovanni, 52, 1 August 1780.

29 On the Florentine police, see Carlo Mangio, *La polizia toscana: Organizzazione e criteri d'intervento (1765–1808)* (Milan, 1988); Alessandra Contini, “La città regolata: Polizia e amministrazione nella Firenze leopoldina (1777–1782)”, in *Istituzioni e società in Toscana nell'età moderna: Atti delle giornate di studio dedicate a Giuseppe Pansini*, 2 vols, (Rome, 1994), I, pp. 426–508.

30 ASF, *Commissario*, 29 February 1780. *Viene richiesta una nota degli ecclesiastici e regolari più libertini e scandalosi, più linguacciuti, mordaci e ciarloni. Nota degli uomini e donne che sono i più libertini e scandalosi.*

31 *Ibid.*, March 1780, *Nota di quelle donne che si danno per ruffiane*. The second woman kept and prostituted a girl in her house.

it as something that has to be tolerated ‘in order to avoid the worst.’”³² Thus, it is no wonder that not only ordinary citizens but also patrician men could be found among the clients of average prostitutes. Anna Tamburini, for instance, the mother of a 5 year-old boy and the wife of a debtor who had taken refuge in Naples, could count on the “friendship” of the noble Francesco Palli, the Count Niccolò Acciaiuoli, and the Marquis Giuseppe Riccardi.³³ Perhaps because of her involvement with nobility, Anna was not immediately sentenced to punishment. On being ordered to join her husband in Naples, she pleaded against the judgement and obtained probation by promising to keep good conduct, which she did.³⁴ But that was not her first time in court.

Anna’s story tells us about the importance of having good relationships, some form of silent support from both families and neighbours, and the ability of some women to slip through the spaces left between the law and its practice.³⁵ Her activities dated back to 1773 when she was 20 years old and her husband was still in Florence. In the following seven years, Anna had a child whom her mother cared for, she started practicing the art of *comica*, and she continued to maintain her various “friendships”. As far as the documents reveal, she received no sentences; rather, she asked for probation twice, which she judiciously used as a means of loosening the grip of the watchful police. Continuously scrutinized, suspect married women and married prostitutes tried to find or make room for themselves so they could negotiate their way out of police control.

The Nineteenth Century: Towards the End of an Epoch

The dissolution of the Grand Duchy and the creation of the Kingdom of Etruria in 1799 did not bring about a change in the policy on prostitution. However, the annexation of the Tuscan territory by Napoleon brought about a significant novelty, referred to by the *maire* of Florence in the following terms: “since the French government [took power] those women are quartered in twenty-seven different districts of the city.”³⁶ It is probable that the French rulers tried to introduce a new model already implemented in France that was based on the compulsory registration of prostitutes, medical examinations, and the police

32 Cohen, *The Evolution of Women’s Asylums*, p. 52.

33 ASF, *Commissario*, 6 September 1780.

34 ASF, *Commissario*, October 1780.

35 Cohen, *The Evolution of Women’s Asylums*, pp. 55–56.

36 Turno, “*Il malo esempio*”, p. 79 [my translation].

supervision of brothels.³⁷ What was left, however, was the perception of a generalized lack of control over prostitution: “Such a large and badly regulated license”, wrote the *maire* of Florence in the aftermath of the Restoration in 1814, “demands from the present wise government vigorous measures.”³⁸

Despite complaints made by the “most respectable individuals”, no specific decrees on prostitution were enacted, and no written regulation existed. After an initial outburst of activity, the interest of the restored Buongoverno appeared to decline.³⁹ In May of 1814 a circular was sent by the Buongoverno to the prefects of the main Tuscan cities ordering the closure of brothels located along the busiest streets and the expulsion of all foreign prostitutes. It was supposed to be a temporary solution until a definitive regulation was drafted. A few days later, the Buongoverno instructed police commissioners about how to distinguish between women assigned to a brothel and those engaged in “scandalous practices”, between the *meretrici* and libertines. Once identified, the latter were normally subjected to a number of precepts, such as *de non conversando* (injunction to stop talking to men) or *della sera* (requirement to stay indoors after dark), and they were only sent to prison as a last resort.

Throughout the forty years after the Restoration in 1814, no other measures on prostitution were introduced and, with some exceptions,⁴⁰ no particular anxiety was expressed on the subject of venereal diseases. In 1830 the pre-existing regulations on the medical examination of tolerated prostitutes were merely renewed and slightly modified. The number of inspections was increased to three per month, and infected prostitutes were sent to the hospital until the disease went into remission. If concerns were raised, they were of a moral nature, that is to say the protection of public mores and decency from this “necessary evil”.

Particular emphasis was placed on the protection and re-education of those girls and young women who did not adhere to gender roles or were exposed to “bad examples” but not all of them could be defined as libertines. In daily

37 Claude Quézel, *History of Syphilis* (Baltimore, 1990), pp. 211–215.

38 Turno, “*Il malo esempio*”, p. 79. Unless otherwise indicated, the following data and quotations are from this source.

39 The Presidenza del Buongoverno was created by Pietro Leopoldo in 1784. It controlled the police functions and, after the Restoration, its powers also included the direction of Tuscany prisons, press censorship, and control over foreigners.

40 This is the case of Portoferraio (Island of Elba), where a large garrison was kept. In 1820, the governor of the Island of Elba noted the spread of diseases among those soldiers who had commercial sex with clandestine prostitutes. His main concern, however, was the spread of sex among the men because of their compulsory celibacy and the lack of a proportionate number of *meretrici*.

practice, the law in fact distinguished between girls in moral danger (*pericolanti*), concubines, and women of ill repute (*scostumate*), applying to each distinctive and personalized measures and solutions. A paternal and flexible attitude seems to have characterized the relationship between the grand-ducal authorities and some of their weakest subjects. The network of institutions—used both as refuges and as places of internment—played an important role in this regard.⁴¹ Yet, thirty years later sources describe what was defined as “governmental leniency” precisely towards those women known for their “loose behaviour”, not to mention the issue of married prostitutes and libertines.⁴²

At the beginning of the Restoration, in 1814 Florence counted thirty-three official brothels that were generally small and only one or two women were working there. Two years later there were forty-six registered prostitutes but their number decreased throughout the following decades from twenty-two in 1822 to only five in 1846. Following the revolution of 1848, however, a reverse trend took place. The arrival of Austrian troops in May 1849 was a turning point. A convention signed between Austria and Grand Duke Leopold II stipulated that ten thousand soldiers were to be kept in Florence and in the Tuscan territories for an indefinite period.⁴³ The presence of a foreign army was certainly a source of unexpected revenue for many but it was also a great concern for the Austrian command. Less than a month later, the military authorities filed complaints to the prefect over the spread of venereal diseases among the troops.⁴⁴

In a few months the number of prostitutes leaped to twenty-one, and they were housed in six brothels. A later survey conducted at the request of the prefecture referred to a further, although not spectacular, increase to thirty-three women in eight brothels. Moreover, an unknown number of unregistered prostitutes or women who were suspected of libertinage should also be noted. Pressured by the Austrian command, the grand-ducal authority ordered that stricter watch be kept over suspect women and that medical examinations should be carried out according to the circumstances. At the same time,

41 On nineteenth-century Florentine institutions, see Turno, “*Il malo esempio*”, pp. 54–78. Also, Giovanni Gozzini, *Il segreto dell'elemosina: Poveri e carità legale a Firenze, 1800–1870* (Florence, 1993); David Scaffei, “La povertà a Firenze a metà dell'Ottocento. Lavoro, famiglia, sanità e beneficenza” (Unpublished M.A., University of Florence, 1987).

42 Turno, “*Il malo esempio*”, p. 85.

43 It was also agreed that while salary and clothing were to be supplied by the Austrian Emperor, the grand ducal treasury should provide accommodation and provisions for the army until 1855. See also Turno, “*Postriboli in Firenze*”, pp. 233–234, 245.

44 Turno, “*Il malo esempio*”, p. 88. Unless otherwise indicated, all data and quotations are from this source.

following the instructions of the Home Minister of August 1849, the Prefect of Florence began to work on a project for the regulation of prostitution that took six years to complete. It is notable that the regulation of prostitution was enacted just a few months before the end of the Austrian occupation. It seems that silent resistance against regulation may have involved anti-Austrian sentiment and the financial distress caused by the foreign occupiers.

On 17 March 1855, the Home Minister finally enacted "Instructions on the Toleration of Public Prostitutes", acknowledging and reflecting the influence of the "imported" French regulation system. Despite other more repressive suggestions, the new measure did not include the compulsory registration of clandestine prostitutes. Rather, being granted the formal status of prostitute was considered to be a concession given only to those women who made a request and on the basis of certain pre-requisites. They were to be at least 18 years old, not pregnant, free from contagious diseases, and have no criminal record. If they were from the grand duchy, they were to be single or a widow with no children, and their parents or relatives should not be opposed to their participation in prostitution. At the same time, it was permissible to renounce the licence and leave a brothel after giving notice to the police. Former prostitutes, however, were to be kept under control with the aim of preventing clandestine prostitution. Compulsory medical examinations and restrictions on these women's movements characterized the life of registered prostitutes who also had to pay doctor's fees and the costs of their own hospitalization. They could work (and live) on their own or with other prostitutes in a brothel overseen by a woman older than 40 years of age.

Sources indicate that the geographical origins of prostitutes tended to vary from decade to decade. Among the forty-six *meretrici* registered in 1816, only seven were "foreign" born (15 per cent), while Florentine and Tuscan women represented 45 and 36 per cent, respectively. Foreigners (*estere*) were considered to be women who came from outside the grand duchy. Most of them were from the Papal States and a few were from Venice and Padua, while none were from southern Italy. Three decades later, in 1846, none were described as being as Florentine and only three were from Siena. Following the Austrian occupation, however, almost 43 per cent of the prostitutes registered in November 1849 were from grand ducal cities and the countryside, 30 per cent were foreigners, and the remaining 19 per cent were from Florence. In 1851, there was a partial reversal in that trend. The number of foreign prostitutes dropped while women who were Florentine and Tuscan increased to 33 and 45 per cent, respectively (Table 4.1).

According to the 1849 Note and the 1851 survey, the average age of registered prostitutes was 23. The youngest, ranging between 17 and 20 years old,

TABLE 4.1 *Origins of Florence's sex workers, 1816–1851.*

	1816	1826	1836–1846	1849	1851
Florence	45%	-	-	19%	33%
Grand-Duchy	36%	69.2%	20%	42.8%	45%
Foreign	15%	30.8%	80%	30%	22%
N	46	13	5	21	33

diminished from 47 to 35 per cent in 1851 after the Restoration, while those in their early and late 20s increased from 47 to 61 per cent. Very few were over the age of 30. The great majority were single, as married women were generally not allowed to be registered. Very little is known about their former occupations, as the available sources provide information only for sixteen prostitutes. It appears, however, that most of them were farm labourers (*braccianti*), while five had worked as domestic servants. These and other figures would dramatically change after the unification of Italy in 1861.

1861: The Cavour Regulation

In fact, the grand ducal regulations lasted only five years and were swept away by the introduction of the new and more repressive Cavour Regulation. Enacted by an administrative decree in February 1860 and extended to Tuscany two months later, the regulation “adopted a three-pronged strategy of registration, examination, and treatment. A special *polizia dei costumi* (moral police) were put in charge of the surveillance over the prostitutes, while subordinate *uffici sanitari* (health offices) carried out vaginal examinations.”⁴⁵ Prostitutes could voluntarily request registration, but it could also be done without their consent. In other words, any woman who was known to be or was suspected of being a prostitute was sent for a medical examination and forcibly registered. According to Cavour, morality and public health were thus guaranteed. In reality, “the threat of registration constituted a powerful mechanism of harassment potentially applicable to every lower-class woman.”⁴⁶ Mistresses, courtesans, and other categories of “high-class” prostitutes were generally excluded from registration. However, abuse and intimidation by the police and

45 Gibson, *Prostitution and the State*, p. 28.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 148.

within the brothels became a daily occurrence for many prostitutes. While the grand-ducal authorities wanted to maintain a distinction between women of ill reputation and those involved in prostitution, the unified Italian state distinguished only between clandestine and public prostitutes. No negotiation was allowed.

The regulation soon turned into an extremely repressive and intrusive measure. Only a few months after its practical implementation, the number of registered prostitutes jumped from thirty to 300, subsequently decreasing in 1863. According to the prefecture, in fact, eighty-four were prostitutes already regularly registered by the office of health. In addition, 134 women were registered throughout the year, thirty-three by order of the moral police and the remainder presented themselves voluntarily for registration.⁴⁷ Unlike the previous regulation, Cavour's law allowed for the registration of girls aged 16. This might explain the slight decrease in the average age in comparison to the previous period, from 23 to 21. 58 per cent were under 21, 35 per cent between 21 and 25, and only 6.7 per cent between 26 and 30.⁴⁸ Moreover, 81 per cent of the 134 women registered in 1863 were single, 16 per cent married, and 22 per cent widowed. These percentages were not so different from the national data, but higher compared to Florentine women as a whole.⁴⁹

Like most Italian women, the majority of prostitutes were not educated although the level of illiteracy was generally higher among the latter, with significant local variations within the two groups.⁵⁰ Demographic growth and lack of land and work opportunities pushed many peasants, including women, to migrate to the main urban centres. As a consequence, the Florentine population increased by 63 per cent between unification (1861) and 1911.⁵¹ Unskilled, uneducated young women moved from the countryside to Florence where, however, the jobs available to them were not well paid. This might explain the change in the geographical origins of prostitutes after unification. According to the statistics on prostitution in 1863, 20 per cent were from Florence whereas 49 per cent were from Tuscany, and 22 per cent were from other provinces and 4.3 per cent were from foreign countries.

47 Turno, *Il malo esempio*, p. 126.

48 Sources refer to the clandestine phenomenon of minor prostitution. Annarita Buttafuoco, *Le Mariuccine. Storia di una istituzione laica: l'Asilo Mariuccia 1902-1932* (Milan, 1985); Turno, *Il malo esempio*, pp. 131-132.

49 Turno, *Il malo esempio*, p. 217.

50 Gibson, *Prostitution and the State*, p. 96.

51 *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

Moreover, as mentioned above, the data on prostitutes' former occupations began to indicate a slight change; according to the same statistics, 30.5 per cent declared that they had worked as domestic servants,⁵² 27.6 per cent had been farm workers, 24 per cent had been garment workers, 8.9 per cent had been milliners, and 3.7 per cent had been straw workers. The remaining 4.4 per cent had been unemployed. Domestic service, straw work, and farm work in particular were seasonal and poorly paid, which explains the tendency of women to combine part-time occupations, including prostitution.⁵³ Mobility characterized prostitutes' lives. On the one hand, this was a means of "refreshing" the women in the brothels. On the other hand, it was a way of evading police control and the compulsory bi-weekly medical examinations.⁵⁴ In other words, mobility can also be seen as a form of resistance: "the easiest way to remove oneself from police lists was secretly to leave one city and set up shop in another."⁵⁵

According to the regulation, prostitutes could live in groups in tolerated brothels or work alone (*meretrici isolate*). Florence had a high number of "special places" (*case particolari*) where lone prostitutes carried out their work. In 1860, the San Giovanni quarter had sixty-four such lodgings, whereas Santa Maria Novella, Santo Spirito, and Santa Croce had twenty, seventeen, and sixteen, respectively. Ten years later, 100 lone prostitutes legally worked in the San Giovanni quarter. Working alone as a prostitute was highly valued. By working in that way, prostitutes could avoid the intolerable work rhythm imposed in the brothels and, above all, they could enjoy the right to refuse clients. In other words, they could achieve a degree of autonomy that was unheard of in terms of freedom from pimps and, in particular, their clients. It made it possible for such women to have an appearance of normality, develop more complex relationships, and increase their chances of finding an "honest" job or someone who would agree to provide them with economic support. Under Article 33 of the regulation, registered prostitutes could move in with citizens who formally agreed to be responsible for their behaviour and were able to support them. Women could thus avoid the compulsory health checks while they were being supported.⁵⁶

52 On the feminization of domestic service in Florence and the connection with prostitution, see Maria Casalini, *Servitù, nobili e borghesi nella Firenze dell'Ottocento* (Florence, 1997).

53 Gibson, *Prostitution and the State*, p. 111.

54 *Ibid.*, pp. 100–101.

55 *Ibid.*, p. 100.

56 Turno, "Il malo esempio", pp. 119, 146–147.

As for the past two centuries, very little is known about prostitutes' clients in terms of their numbers, ages, civil status, and social standing. The sources available vaguely refer to plebeians and boors (*plebei* and *beceri*), distinguished gentlemen, Florentine and foreign aristocrats, and soldiers of all ranks. However, the requests made by aspiring guarantors of registered prostitutes between 1861 and 1888 help shed some light on their clients. They came from all classes and professions, and on average they were 35 years old; most of them were artisans, shopkeepers, domestic servants, and civil servants, and there were also, albeit fewer, wealthy land owners, bookkeepers, shop helpers (*garzoni*), innkeepers, and nobles. The majority were single but widows with children were common as well.⁵⁷

An abolitionist campaign against Cavour's regulation began soon after its implementation.⁵⁸ This campaign obtained partial success only in 1888 when Prime Minister Francesco Crispi introduced a new set of rules. The most important innovation was the closure of the health offices and the *sifilicomi* (special hospitals for the treatment of venereal diseases) and the abolition of the compulsory health check; as a result, "the police could no longer force women [to] undergo vaginal examinations." Moreover, "only places—[...] in which prostitution is exercised habitually—not persons, were suitable objects of police registration."⁵⁹ Treatment of venereal diseases was guaranteed and free for both sexes. Three years later, Home Minister Giovanni Nicotera enacted a third and more restrictive regulation, a compromise between the decrees of Cavour and Crispi. Under this regulation, the registration of prostitutes was still prohibited but madams had to provide the authorities with a list of the women working in their brothels. In this way, the police could keep brothels and lone prostitutes under surveillance and they had the authority to send prostitutes who refused to undergo medical examinations to the hospital. In 1905, some aspects of the Nicotera law were mitigated by a health regulation which stripped the police of the power to carry out sanitary interventions. That regulation remained in place until the Fascist era, when a different approach was adopted.

57 *Ibid.*, pp. 146–149.

58 Early feminists/emancipationists such as Anna Maria Mozzoni, Sara Nathan, and Jessie White Mario played an important role in promoting abolition, which was, and remained, a bourgeois movement. See Gibson, *Prostitution and the State*, pp. 37–76.

59 *Ibid.*, pp. 53–54.

The Twentieth Century

Between 1923 and 1940 a set of laws was passed under Mussolini's dictatorship with the aim of isolating prostitutes from the "healthy" segment of society, and this was a step backwards towards repressive regulation. As a whole, the new legislation not only re-asserted most of the pre-existing rules, but also introduced surveillance over those women who worked outside the authorized brothels.⁶⁰ All prostitutes, including lone practitioners, were "ordered to carry a special passport with records of their vaginal examinations for venereal diseases."⁶¹ Although prostitution was tolerated, the police could arrest a woman who was suspected of having a venereal disease, refused to undergo a medical examination, practised clandestine prostitution, or merely had an "attitude of soliciting".⁶² The transmission of venereal diseases "was transformed from a minor offence into a crime against the race."⁶³ Because they were institutionalised in brothels and trapped for life by criminal and sanitary records, women had few opportunities to stop engaging in prostitution. Victoria De Grazia suggests that, in so doing, the fascist regime intended to emphasise women's biological mission, their motherhood: "Only by segregating illicit sex from public view and by drawing a sharp line between bad women and good ones might the state preserve the site and purpose of legitimate sex, namely, in marriage, at the initiative of the man and for the purpose of procreation."⁶⁴

As mentioned in the introductory section of this chapter, the available archival sources do not allow us to provide, at this stage, much information about prostitutes for this time period. The sources reveal very little about these women's profiles and families; likewise, they do not indicate to what extent prostitution took place in brothels and was carried out alone, nor can we know how widespread clandestine prostitution was. In reply to questions posed by the abolitionist senator Lina Merlin in March of 1949, the Public Security Division of the Ministry of Interior Affairs revealed that, following the abolition of registration in 1888, no details whatsoever could be found. It was suggested that the High Commissioner for Public Health and Hygiene could provide some data, while answers to other queries would have to be obtained

60 Alessia Sorgato, *I reati in materia di prostituzione* (Padua, 2009), pp. 7–8.

61 Victoria De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922–1945* (Berkeley [etc.], 1992), p. 44.

62 Testo unico delle leggi di Pubblica Sicurezza, 18 June 1931, art. 213.

63 Ellen Victoria Nerenberg, *Prison Terms: Representing Confinement During and After Italian Fascism* (Toronto, 2001), p. 113.

64 De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*, p. 45.

by carrying out a survey with prostitutes.⁶⁵ Piecing together and analysing the scattered and fragmentary information available in ministerial archives, newspapers, trial records, parliamentary acts,⁶⁶ literary works,⁶⁷ and personal recollections⁶⁸ might help us reconstruct some of the many aspects of prostitution in this era that are still unknown.

Tragic events, however, can lead to the disclosure of personal details, life stories, and information about the business. For instance, this is the case for Valmiria P., a woman 25 years of age who was killed in one of the fourteen brothels of Florence in September of 1954, as newspapers and the Ministry of Interior Affairs reported on the event. Born in the province of Modena, Valmiria left behind a 7 year-old son and her family, who, for all appearances, had not been aware of her activities. According to the available sources, in the year before her death she started working with her cousin in Turin as a seamstress and then started working in a brothel where she stayed until July of 1954 when she headed to Florence together with two other women. After spending fifteen days with her son at a hotel in Rimini, where she had relations with two young men, she returned to Florence.⁶⁹ This account reveals some aspects of the trade, such as the turnover of women in brothels and hotels, as well as their movement between cities; it also tells us about the autonomous choices that women made, their independence, and their family relations.

In general, very little is known about the working conditions in Florentine brothels. However, *Lettere dalle case chiuse*, a collection of letters written by women employed in public houses that was sent to Lina Merlin, the socialist senator who fought for the abolition of regulationism, provides a glimpse of those places that we may assume was common to most of the *case* (brothels).⁷⁰

65 Archivio Centrale di Stato, Rome [hereafter ACS], Ministero dell'Interno, Direzione Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza, Divisione Polizia, b. 332, 13600, *Dati statistici sulla prostituzione*, 14 March 1949. According to a later note, 3,929 women held a "sanitary passport".

66 In his speech against the abolition of regulation, Florentine senator Gaetano Pieraccini provided some more or less reliable information on prostitution in Florence. See Senato della Repubblica, *Atti parlamentari*, I Legislatura, Discussioni, vol. IX, 16 November 1949, pp. 11,952–11,967.

67 See, for instance, *A Tale of Poor Lovers* by the Florentine writer Vasco Pratolini. In his novel, published in 1947 and set in Florence during the Fascist regime, the author describes police round-ups of prostitutes in the streets each night.

68 See Gian Carlo Fusco, *Quando l'Italia tollerava* (Rome, 1965); Indro Montanelli, *Addio, Wanda! Rapporto Kensey sulla situazione italiana* (Milan, 1956). See also *Le Case Chiuse*, available at: <http://www.memoro.org/it/video.php?ID=123>; last accessed 2 July 2017.

69 ACS, Ministero dell'Interno, Direzione Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza, b. 304, 13600.30/6.

70 *Cara Senatrice Merlin... Lettere dalle case chiuse* (Turin, 2008).

The letters disclose a world far from the glamorous images later depicted by some of the brothels' customers who nostalgically remembered them; that world was also a far cry from the atmosphere of lust and perversion that moralists and Catholics imagined. Rather, the eloquent and lively accounts of prostitutes paint a picture that reveals dimly lit interiors, repetitive daily routines, and tense relations with madams. Some of them provide harsh and embittered details about careless clients who "come to us routinely, as if they were barber's clients",⁷¹ and they indicate that the women had from thirty to thirty five men per day, or more.⁷² The enquiry carried out by Lina Merlin (cited in her speech to the Senate) estimated that prostitutes had an even higher average number of *colloqui* (sexual intercourse) per day, but that figure may have been exaggerated to serve her purposes. The price was 100 to 200 lire for each encounter and the madams kept half of that while prostitutes had to pay for admission, room and board, health checks, and medical treatment, as well as the perfume they used.⁷³

Archival documents shed some light on madams and their brothels and, occasionally, on clandestine prostitution for the time period leading up to 1958 when regulation was abolished. According to a report dated 2 November 1923, Florence had thirty-five tolerated brothels where around 150 women worked under the supervision of the so called *tenutarie* (madams). Most likely, the madams were former prostitutes and generally middle-aged and unmarried, and more than fifty madams were listed as having been managers of brothels between the 1920s and 1958. Over 70 per cent of them were from northern Italy, and some of them were from the same village and even from the same family, while 20 per cent were from Florence and the rest from Tuscany.⁷⁴ The figures might suggest that Florentines themselves were more inclined to run clandestine brothels in order to avoid public notoriety, police restrictions, and tax payments. These women frequently replaced each other as managers of the houses, sometimes in rapid succession. However, they appear regularly as brothel-keepers in the prefecture records, and some of them ran the same *casa* for over twenty years.⁷⁵

71 *Ibid.*, p. 94.

72 A letter-writer recalls a "special day" when she received 120 clients, in *Ibid.*, p. 117.

73 Senato della Repubblica, *Atti parlamentari*, I Legislatura, Discussioni, vol. IX, 12 October 1949, p. 10812.

74 These percentages varied from year to year. In 1923, 38 per cent were Florentine or Tuscan-born madams. In 1927 the number decreased to 33 per cent, falling to 14 per cent by 1957. See ACS, Ministero dell'Interno, Direzione Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza, b. 304, nn. 1–16.

75 ACS, Ministero dell'Interno, Direzione Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza, b. 304, nn. 1–16.

Madams, often referred to as *turpi megere* (filthy hags),⁷⁶ were subject to police control in the running of their houses. It was illegal to sell alcohol or drugs on the premises, and entrance was forbidden to minors. Above all, madams were expected to promote and ensure sanitary surveillance over the women working in the *case*. Their houses could be temporarily or permanently closed down if they didn't follow the regulations and they could also face trial and imprisonment. In February of 1941, for instance, the local *questura* (office of the questore) imposed three days of suspension for a house in via Burrella. It had been reported that poor-quality condoms had been distributed to clients in place of those recommended by the provincial surgeon in conformity with the law on prophylaxis against venereal diseases.⁷⁷ On the other hand, an anonymous tip reporting the presence of an underage youth led to the closure of a brothel in via dell'Amorino 4 for fifteen days.⁷⁸ Brothels could also be closed and reopened purely for economic reasons. A house of prostitution in via Borgognona 1 was closed down because its manager went bankrupt in March of 1935, and then it was reopened in January of 1936 in the "interests of the mass of creditors."⁷⁹

Following a national trend, the number of registered brothels in Florence decreased over time from thirty-five in 1923 to fourteen in the 1940s. They were mainly concentrated around the S. Croce area, between the central market and the train station, around S. Maria Novella Church and the cathedral, and not far from the Ponte Vecchio (Old Bridge). Only two brothels operated on the other side of the Arno River (Oltrarno). After having been closed down by the Allies just after the liberation of the city in August 1944, the surviving fourteen brothels were reopened three months later as a means of containing the proliferation of clandestine prostitution in hotels and private houses and stopping the spread of venereal diseases. According to a report issued by the prefecture of Florence on 18 November 1944, the *questura* together with the Allied Military Police arrested 569 prostitutes over a period of two weeks.⁸⁰ The number of tolerated brothels remained constant for another decade until their closure.

76 Senato della Repubblica, *Atti parlamentari*, I Legislatura, Discussioni, vol. IX, 12 October 1949, p. 10809 (Discorso al Senato).

77 ACS, Ministero dell'Interno, Direzione Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza, b. 304, 13600.30/7, *Locale di meretricio in via della Burrella 8. Profilassi delle malattie veneree*, 27 February 1941, XIX.

78 *Ibid.*, b. 304, 13600.30/3, 13 September 1939, *Locale di meretricio in via dell'Amorino 4*.

79 *Ibid.*, b. 304, 13600.30/6, *Locale di meretricio in via Borgognona 1*.

80 *Ibid.*, b. 338, n. 13631/A, *Firenze—Prostituzione clandestina—Misure di vigilanza e repressione—Relazione quindicinale*, Reale Prefettura di Firenze, 18 November 1944. On the

Regulation was repealed in 1958 when, after ten years of debates, Parliament approved the Merlin law. The new measure abolished the regulation of prostitution and forbade the running of brothels, whether state-run or private. It also obviated the requirement for the registration and recording of women working as prostitutes, and abolished compulsory medical examinations and treatment. It also prohibited trafficking and the exploitation of women as well as *all* forms of aiding and abetting. Under the law, street prostitution was legal and women could engage in prostitution at their own homes. The Merlin law was expected to be a milestone for civil rights, as female prostitutes could, under the terms of the law, enjoy freedoms never known before. Reality, however, fell far short of expectations. The law was a compromise between libertarian and repressive intentions, as some of its articles increased the discretionary powers of the authorities to excessive and dangerous levels.⁸¹ Although selling sex was not illegal, it was bounded by a network of prohibitions that heavily restricted prostitutes' rights to the point that, for all appearances, it was an illicit activity. The law is still in effect, although several attempts have been made over time to reform or abrogate it. Some media outlets periodically supported parliamentarians who launched campaigns against street prostitution, which was considered to be the most visible consequence and legacy of the closure of brothels.⁸²

Street prostitution, however, was not a novelty but it did become more conspicuous starting in the late 1950s. At the same time, brothels did not disappear; police investigations led (and still lead) from time to time to the discovery of clandestine houses.⁸³ What is new is the increasing visibility of potential clients and simple onlookers who have started cruising in their cars looking

question of prostitution in Italy in the aftermath of liberation, see Isobell Williams, *Allies and Italians under Occupation: Sicily and Southern Italy, 1943–1945* (New York, 2013).

- 81 In reality the law had lost track of its original aim. According to Lina Merlin's original view, for instance, both prostitutes and clients would be involved in the safeguarding of public hygiene without compromising personal freedom. See Tamar Pitch, *Limited Responsibilities: Social Movements and Criminal Justice* (London [etc.], 1995).
- 82 Given the invisible and relatively comfortable status accorded to clients by the law, not all proposals had a long life. The suggestion to fine both clients and prostitutes began to raise some interest, especially among the most conservative and populist politicians only in the late 1990s. See Daniela Danna, "Italy: The Never-ending Debate", in Joyce Outhshoorn (ed.), *The Politics of Prostitution: Women's Movements, Democratic States and the Globalization of Commercial Sex* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 165–184.
- 83 See, for instance, "Bella indossatrice processata per le 'case squillo' di Firenze", *La Stampa*, 24 March 1965, p. 15; "Direttore di periodico arrestato per lenocinio", *La Stampa*, 8 November 1973, p. 20.

for prostitutes, often impeding the flow of traffic.⁸⁴ Moreover, crucial transformations in the structure and location of the trade occurred in subsequent years, and perceptions have changes as well. The founding of the *Comitato per i diritti civili delle prostitute* (Committee for Prostitutes' Civil Rights, CDCP) in Pordenone in 1982, the emergence of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s, and the phenomenon of immigration marked a turning point. We can safely say that selling sex in Florence, as well as in the rest of Italy, profoundly changed in the last four decades of the twentieth century.

By the early 1970s, for instance, male and transvestite prostitutes had become increasingly common in public spaces as they joined their female counterparts in the Cascine, a park that runs along the northern edge of the Arno River.⁸⁵ A more conspicuous transformation took place between 1970 and the early 1980s when West African women and, later, South American transgender individuals began to populate certain areas of the city along with prostitutes who were drug addicts. In particular, transsexual prostitution would go on to dominate and symbolize the Florentine street sex market until the early 1990s (in Cascine Park, Lungarno Vespucci, and along Florence's inner ring-roads).⁸⁶ Its supremacy has been undermined by the arrival of young Albanian women who, it seems, have been brought into Italy by smuggling organizations.⁸⁷ As a consequence, most of the Italian Florentine female and transsexual prostitutes have abandoned the streets and now work mainly indoors, attracting clients with newspaper advertisements. The overall picture of the trade has been complicated by new waves of women from countries in eastern Europe such as

84 The "puttan tour" is a common term referring to cruising around looking for prostitutes without actually being interested in buying sex. See Carla Corso and Sandra Landi, *Quanto vuoi? Clienti e prostitute si raccontano* (Florence, 1998), pp. 107–108.

85 In his novel dating from 1963, *La costanza della ragione*, Florentine writer Vasco Pratolini refers to the Cascine Park as a zone where both male and female prostitutes and their clients could meet. Raffaele Palumbo claims that the Cascine is the place of the sex trade "par excellence" in Florence, where "voluntary, coerced, Italian, foreign, child, and drug-addict prostitution can be found all together" [my translation], in Palumbo, *La tua città sulla strada*, p. 19. Unless otherwise indicated, the following information come from this source.

86 See also Francesco Matteini, "Le Cascine monumento nazionale", *La Stampa*, 26 July 1986, p. 9; Piero Taddei, "Quando il parco diventa una bolgia d'inferno", *Cronaca Vera*, 3 August 1988, n. 830, pp. 36–37.

87 "It is common opinion among journalists, Italian prostitutes, the magistracy and police detectives that the organization of prostitution in Florence, as well as in other Italian cities, is run by Albanian groups not connected to each other" [my translation], in Palumbo, *La tua città sulla strada*, p. 20.

ex-Yugoslavian states, Romania, and Poland, thus multiplying both supply and demand. From the late 1980s onward, in fact, the Florentine market has been characterized by a high turnover of women, adaptability to contingencies, and a variety of services that are available twenty-four hours a day.⁸⁸

Various sources estimate that, between 1996 and 1998, about 700 prostitutes worked in Florence, 200 of whom were streetwalkers.⁸⁹ Albanian women were the most numerous, followed by eastern European and West African women. South American, Italian, and in particular transsexual prostitutes now represent a very small heterogeneous part of the total, along with prostitutes who are drug addicts. The prostitutes who work indoors are mainly Italian and they are the largest group. Palumbo has noted that the working conditions of foreign prostitutes have generally deteriorated in comparison with the two previous decades and with those enjoyed by their Italian colleagues.⁹⁰ He distinguishes between sex workers and “new prostitutes”. While the former are mainly Italian or are well-integrated into Italian society, free from the pressure of pimps and other exploiters, the latter are younger, generally foreign, often controlled by pimps/traffickers, exposed to higher degrees of violence and police harassment, and have less control over their clients, working conditions, and income.

More recent reports have identified further changes in terms of the numbers, gender, age, ethnic composition, geography, and structure of the trade. A press release issued by the Florence City Council in June of 2001, for instance, refers to a slight reduction in the daily presence of prostitutes on the streets (confirmed by later estimations), from 200 to 160 individuals. 32 per cent of the prostitutes were from Nigeria, 19 per cent were from Albania, 24 per cent were from ex-USSR states and 16 per cent were from other countries.⁹¹ An unknown number of children and young boys from Romania should be added to those figures, and they have tended to hang around in, or according to some

88 See also Ministero dell'Interno, 2010. *Osservatorio sulla prostituzione e sui fenomeni delittuosi ad essa connessi Relazione sulle attività svolte, 1° semestre 2007*, available at: http://www.osservatoriodofilia.gov.it/dpo/resources/cms/documents/141.Osservatorio_prostituzione.pdf; last accessed 2 July 2017.

89 Gruppo Abele, *Annuario sociale 2000: Cronache dei fatti, dati, ricerche, statistiche, leggi, nomi, cifre* (Milan, 2000), p. 575; Palumbo, *La tua città sulla strada*, pp. 59–60.

90 Palumbo, *La tua città sulla strada*, pp. 51–53.

91 Comune di Firenze, “Prostituzione: Assessore Lastri, non possiamo ridurlo ad un fenomeno di Ordine pubblico”, 26 June 2001, available at: http://press.comune.fi.it/hcm/hcm5353-7_7_24051-Prostituzione%3A+assessore+Lastri,+non+possiamo+ridurlo.html?cm_id_details=30305&id_padre=5080; last accessed 2 July 2017.

newspapers have “dominated”, Cascine Park since 2006.⁹² Moreover, activities related to prostitution have spread beyond the city centre and the Cascine towards other areas, in particular in the north close to the motorway and the airport, and in the southwest across the Arno River. In these neighbourhoods and nearby outskirts, the prostitutes who work on the streets are foreign, arrived illegally, and had their travel organized by smugglers or traffickers; some of them have been forced into prostitution, while others have been deceived about the nature of the work and yet others chose it but were not informed about the working conditions.⁹³ Although periodic police raids are carried out with the aim of cracking down on trafficking and exploitation, they often simply lead to the arrest and deportation of sex workers who are in the country illegally. In other words, police action represents an additional threat to the daily lives of streetwalkers.

The available sources do not disclose much information about the social profile of female streetwalkers in Florence. More attention seems to have been placed on the system of smuggling, its repression, and the impact of street prostitution in specific areas of the city. We know, however, that most of the Nigerian streetwalkers are between 17 and 27 years old, come from large poor families in the south of Nigeria, only have secondary school educations, and did not work as prostitutes in their home country.⁹⁴ They seem to have long-term migratory plans to break out of poverty which is the result of relative social deprivation, high rates of youth unemployment, and gender-based inequality.⁹⁵ Albanian streetwalkers enjoyed a brief period of autonomy in the early stages of Albanian emigration to Italy in 1990 and 1991. Subsequently, the trade in coerced (kidnapped or deceived) women and those who came to work as prostitutes of their own accord has been under the firm control of Albanian criminal organizations. Romanian women seem to migrate temporarily and

92 Franca Selvatici, “Ragazzini in vendita alle Cascine, indaga la questura”, *La Repubblica*, 28 September 2007, available at: <http://Firenze.repubblica.it/dettaglio/ragazzini-in-vendita-alle-cascine-la-procura-indaga/1372588>; last accessed 3 July 2017.

93 Cambini Tosi Sabrina (ed.), *Prostituzione e comunità locale: percezione del fenomeno, vivibilità urbana, mediazione di conflitti, sperimentazioni sul territorio: Rapporto* (Florence, 2006), available at: <http://www.coopcat.org/cultura/ricerche/>; last accessed 28 June 2017.

94 Valentina Cipriani and Elena Micheloni, “...non ti vedo”: *La città di Prato e la prostituzione sommersa* (Prato, 2010), available at: <http://www.provincia.prato.it/w2d3/internet/download/provprato/intranet/utenti/domini/risorse/documenti/store--20120613124101429/LE+TELE+PROSTITUZIONE+L.pdf>; last accessed 28 June 2017.

95 Ifeanyi O. Onyeonoru, “Pull Factors in the Political Economy of International Commercial Sex Work in Nigeria”, *African Sociological Review*, 8 (2004), pp. 115–135, 118.

generally take up consensual sex work after agreeing to pay half of their earnings to their recruiters.⁹⁶

Forms of indoor prostitution have also been observed with increasing frequency in the last fifteen years. This form of prostitution is carried out in rented apartments and hotels with the complicity of the landlords, hotel managers, and receptionists, and it is mainly advertised in print, via the internet, or by word of mouth.⁹⁷ Occasionally, anonymous tips or neighbours' protests against the unusual comings and goings of people lead to the discovery of illegal activities in apartments where one or more sex workers take their clients in succession during the day. The hidden character of indoor prostitution, however, makes it impossible for us to know more about these women's profiles and their relationships with the urban context. Non-profit organizations that deal with sex work find it difficult to create and maintain stable contacts because of the high turnover rate, which is even higher in indoor prostitution than in street prostitution.

In comparison to streetwalkers, indoor prostitutes appear to be more independent and less exploited, and they often have a residence permit and enjoy more control over their money and rhythms of work.⁹⁸ Most of them are South American transgender individuals, Italians, eastern Europeans, and, more recently, Chinese women, while high-class escorts seem to be mostly from eastern Europe. However, according to non-profit organizations working in Florence, the picture is often far from idyllic and is even more complex. Indoor Chinese prostitution, for instance, seems to range from sex work in old-fashioned clandestine brothels in the Chinese community to self-entrepreneurial work, and from servile subjection to economic exploitation at the hands of Chinese or Italian-Chinese organizations.⁹⁹

96 Cipriani and Micheloni, "*...non ti vedo*": *La città di Prato e la prostituzione sommersa*, p. 18.

97 In May 2013, police discovered that two Florentine luxury hotels were meeting places for high-class escorts (mainly from eastern Europe) and their clients. In this case, the encounters were organized through a specialised web page and a number of escort agencies. See (Anon.), "Firenze, festini a luci rosse in hotel: Clienti vip, quattordici indagati", *La Nazione*, 16 May 2013, available at: <http://www.lanazione.it/cronaca/2013/05/16/889426-festini-luci-rosse-hotel-clienti-vip.shtml>; last accessed 28 June 2017.

98 Cambini Tosi, *Prostituzione e comunità locale*, p. 16.

99 Andrea Cagioni (ed.), *Sintesi della ricerca sulla prostituzione indoor e sull'assoggettamento para-servile nel territorio della regione Toscana, settembre 2009–giugno 2010: La vulnerabilità invisibile* (Florence, 2010), available at: <http://www.coopcat.org/cultura/ricerche/>; last accessed 28 June 2017; see also Cipriani and Micheloni, "*...non ti vedo*", *La città di Prato e la prostituzione sommersa*, pp. 21–22.

Conclusion

This paper has illustrated some aspects of the sex trade in Florence and some of the changes that have taken place in the city during the period taken into consideration. The lack of information regarding prostitutes' clients is notable for these time periods, which is hardly surprising. Clients simply disappear from police records, media accounts, and sociological studies, as the stigma and criminalization has usually been heaped on prostitutes. By virtue of a tacit agreement, clients' presence has been merely taken for granted and rarely investigated. Only very recently have Italian researchers turned their attention to the buyers of sexual services, in particular as regards the demand for trafficked women.¹⁰⁰ At the same time, the legal framework has limited, or even blocked, an exhaustive exploration of questions related to the social profiles of female (and male) prostitutes and their families, the mediation of sex work, and the working conditions of prostitutes.

On the other hand, both the legislative approach and the demographics of prostitution have undergone several transformations, in particular since Italian unification in 1861. The introduction of the regulation of prostitution was a dramatic turning point for Italian women in the sex industry regardless of their standard of living. Its abrogation in 1958 was a milestone for women's rights. The closure of the brothels, however, brought about as a consequence a drastic increase in street prostitution, which is now a feature of the Florentine urban scene both day and night. Nonetheless, illegal indoor sex work is believed to be increasing, and it is carried out in hotels and rented apartments. Both indoor and outdoor prostitution have spread well beyond the city centre and the Cascine Park towards the periphery and other areas.

The geographical composition of Florentine prostitution and the gender of the individuals engaged in sex work have greatly changed in the last forty years. By the early 1970s, male and transvestite prostitutes had taken on an increasingly stable and visible presence in the city followed later on by West African women and South American transsexuals. After the fall of the communist regimes, women from eastern and central Europe started to work the streets,

100 See, for instance, Maria Serena Natale and Silvia Turin, "Prostituzione, sono tre milioni gli uomini che pagano", *Corriere della sera*, 4 March 2016, available at <http://www.corriere.it/cronache/sexo-e-amore/notizie/sexo-a-pagamento-inchiesta-27ma-956b45a6-e13b-11e5-86bb-b40835b4a5ca.shtml>; last accessed 28 June 2017; Di Nicola *et al.* (eds), *Prostitution and Human Trafficking: Focus on Clients* (New York, 2009). See also Corso and Landi, *Quanto vuoi?*, pp. 61–209; Luisa Leonini and Sonia Bella, *Sesso in acquisto: Una ricerca sui clienti della prostituzione* (Milano, 1999).

replacing transsexual and Italian sex workers who now work mainly indoors. Recent statistics show that Nigerian women, together with Romanians, are the most conspicuous, while Italian sex workers seem to represent a small minority among street walkers. Moreover, outdoor and in particular indoor prostitution carried out by Chinese women appears to be a phenomenon that has become well-established despite its newness.

It is commonly thought that the majority of the women involved in prostitution are victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation rather than autonomous migrants, thus emphasising the so-called “victimhood” narrative.¹⁰¹ However, as non-profit and sex work organizations have argued, it is also true that this phenomenon co-exists with other forms of “self-entrepreneurial” sex work. Despite their claims, the media, politicians, and institutional feminists have firmly repositioned (some) prostitutes as victims and clandestine migrants as criminals, together with or in a strategic shift away from a civil rights discourse. As a consequence, contradictory local policies regarding commercial sex may very likely contribute to a worsening of the living and working conditions of prostitutes, in particular for street-based sex workers. In Florence, for instance, mediation and harm-reduction projects led by non-profit local organizations and mainly financed by the regional government are constantly undermined by the so-called “incisive action of the police force.”¹⁰²

101 In 1998, the Italian parliament passed an article that makes it possible to grant a “protection permit” which allows people to stay in the country if they are determined to be victims of traffickers. See Danna, “Italy: The Never-ending Debate”, pp. 165–184, 168.

102 Ministero dell’Interno, *Osservatorio sulla prostituzione* (2010), p. 11 [my translation].

A Global History of Prostitution: London

Julia Laite

Introduction

London is deeply connected with prostitution in the popular historical imagination. A skim through a library catalogue, a history channel, or a bookstore reveals many accounts of “bawdy” London through the ages. Any given night in the East End, crowds pad around the old haunts of “Jack the Ripper”, hearing about the prostitute women whose lives have been revealed to us through their murders. The modern gates that enclose “Crossbones Graveyard” in Southwark are covered in ribbons and tokens, commemorating the Tudor prostitutes that some believe to be buried there. Tourists and punters alike flock to Soho, and peek down side roads where sex is for sale up bright staircases, its flavours advertised on a neon poster board. The city described in 1885 by William Stead as “the largest market in human flesh in the whole world” remains central to both historical and contemporary understandings of worldwide commercial sex.¹

Academic historians share in this fascination, and a number of important works have appeared in recent decades that consider the history of London prostitution in social, cultural, and economic terms. This research has revealed striking changes in metropolitan commercial sex over the early modern and modern periods, but also some fascinating continuities. The following account, a brief history of female prostitution in London since 1600, is organized thematically and draws attention to both change and continuity over time. It considers the geography of commercial sex in a changing urban landscape; it assesses the way that women’s labour choices and urban masculinities created supplies and demands for sex; and it looks at the backgrounds of the women who sold sex in London and the experiences they had. Through this discussion, I will also address conceptual issues and historiographical debates surrounding prostitute women’s agency and victimhood. Finally, this account will examine the complex ways that prostitution was controlled, regulated, and repressed in London over the past four hundred years, and how this has helped dramatically reshape commercial sex in the present-day metropolis.

1 William T. Stead, “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon”, Part IV, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 10 July 1885.

Space and Place

London saw immense changes in its physical and cultural geography in the 400-year period under examination. Much of its mediaeval core was destroyed by fire in 1666, and there was also a massive expansion of its suburbs over the next three centuries. It witnessed one of the most significant population growths in Europe, going from as little as 200,000 people at the start of the seventeenth century to over eight million regular residents (and many more daily commuters) in the present day. As London grew and shifted and changed, so too did the areas in which prostitution occurred. In the seventeenth century, most of the sex for sale in the metropolis could be found in Southwark around London Bridge, harking back to the Tudor and mediaeval periods which saw the official regulation of brothels there.² On the margins of the early modern city's commercial and political centre, these "suburbe stewes" were also known for their street and theatrical entertainments.³ Seventeenth-century prostitution in London could also be found around the busy docks just east of the City of London, which saw the arrival of people and merchandise from the Continent and, increasingly, the colonies.⁴ Prostitutes and their clients could also be found in well-known streets within the City itself, and Ian Archer's map of late sixteenth century bawdy houses shows them scattered around Cheapside, Whitefriars, Clerkenwell, Aldgate, Shoreditch, and Smithfield.⁵ Despite the changes wrought by the Great Fire, the City of London remained a popular area for commercial sex in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, particularly the areas of Outer Farringdon such as Turnbull Street.⁶

Tony Henderson has charted a distinct move of on- and off-street prostitution out of the City and, overwhelmingly, to the west by the 1750s, which mirrored the shift in population centres more generally, but likely at a greater pace.⁷ While it was already infamous by the late seventeenth century, by the late eighteenth century Covent Garden could claim to be the most popular

2 Ruth Mazo Karras, *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 37–41.

3 Paul Griffiths, *Lost Londons: Change, Crime, and Control in the Capital City, 1550–1660* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 78, 96–97.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 79.

5 Paul Griffiths, "The Structure of Prostitution in Elizabethan London", *Continuity and Change*, 8 (1993), pp. 39–63, 54; Ian Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 212.

6 Griffiths, *Lost Londons*, pp. 77–78, 85.

7 Tony Henderson, *Disorderly Women in Eighteenth Century London: Prostitution and Control in the Metropolis, 1730–1830* (London, 1999), p. 74.

home of the metropolitan sex industry.⁸ By the early nineteenth century, meanwhile, prostitution was even more widely distributed, with major centres throughout the West End, but also in the East End.⁹ All over London, prostitution was closely associated with music halls, pleasure gardens, and fairgrounds, as well as certain bars and restaurants.

By the later years of the nineteenth century, prostitution had become more concentrated in the West End, where women selling sex mingled with the evening crowds of Regent Street, the Haymarket, and Piccadilly and in places where apartments and furnished rooms nestled on top of or beside workshops, restaurants, and working-class housing. Yet despite this concentration, it is in fact difficult for the historian to pin-point any area that developed into a red-light “zone” to rival those in Continental and colonial cities. Prostitution in modern London remained geographically diverse and dispersed, and even areas where there were large concentrations had no clearly defined or permanent boundaries. This era also witnessed the expansion of rail travel, and women who sold sex tended to find good business around London’s major terminuses such as Paddington, Euston, King’s Cross, and Waterloo. Prostitution was also predictably clustered around other entertainment districts outside the West End (for instance, Commercial Road in Whitechapel, and Earl’s Court in the west), in parklands (especially Hyde Park), and near docklands and military bases.¹⁰

Throughout the early modern and modern periods and until the mid-twentieth century, prostitutes in London primarily solicited on the street, in entertainment establishments, and in parklands. Some would also perform sex acts outside, but many others would go to a “bawdy house” or “brothel” (usually a house that rented rooms by the hour or part-hour, or one that rented rooms on a longer term basis to individual women) in order to have sex. Because of the lack of formal regulation in both the early modern and modern periods, the relationship between indoor and outdoor commercial sex in London was a loose and fluid one.¹¹ In seventeenth century London, as Faramerz Dabhoiwala points out, “a bawdy house could be any number of things: a private home

8 For Covent Garden in the late seventeenth century, see for instance the ditty “HELLS Nightwalker: / OR, / The Devil in Petticoats. / Being a dismal Ditty concerning two Gentlemen, / who went to pick up a fine Lady, as they thought, walking in Covent-Garden”, c. 1690–1700, Facsimile on the English Broadside Ballad Archive, available at: <http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/ballad/32797/image>; last accessed 7 July 2017.

9 Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, pp. 52–75.

10 Julia Laite, *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens: Commercial sex in London, 1880–1960* (Basingstoke, 2011), pp. 78–83.

11 Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, pp. 23–27; Laite, *Common Prostitutes*, pp. 60–62.

or a tavern or a brothel, of greater or lesser sophistication and expense.”¹² Tony Henderson has found that in eighteenth century London, most women worked for themselves, using bawdy houses by the hour or for the evening. Other indoor public sites proved equally popular for solicitation and commercial sex, such as the bagnios or hot-houses which were a common feature of the eighteenth century cityscape. These gave way later in the century to cheap hotels, of which prostitutes made equal use, alongside the public and lodging houses of various stripes that could be found everywhere in the metropolis.¹³ In the nineteenth century, many prostitutes worked in cafés, coffeehouses, and restaurants, while others lived and took clients to their own rooms, flats, apartments, and lodging houses. In part instigated by the legal crackdown on brothels after 1885, women also began to work in massage parlours and other clandestine establishments that advertised modelling or health services in the late nineteenth century.¹⁴ Less common were enclosed brothels, where women lived and worked under a madam or brothel-keeper and where clients would come to find them, like in many *maisons* found in Paris. However, as with street prostitution, brothel prostitution in London was marked above all by diversity, and throughout the period, we catch glimpses of very exploitative brothels where women worked under the control of another woman or a man.¹⁵

These disperse geographic locations and diverse on- and off-street spaces persisted into the twentieth century. There were more dramatic changes in the spatial pattern of prostitution in London during World War I and World War II, as prostitutes flocked to areas where troops would be concentrated. But however dramatically the World Wars affected commercial sex, it was moral panic about the state of London’s postwar streets and legal developments in the so-called “permissive” era that were to have the most significant impact on the spaces and places of London prostitution. The Street Offences Act of 1959, put into place after the recommendations of the Wolfenden Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution, significantly increased police powers to clear the streets and imposed much tougher penalties for street solicitation.¹⁶

12 Faramerz Dabhoiwala, “The Pattern of Sexual Immorality in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century London”, *Londinopolis: Essays in the Cultural and Social History of Early Modern London* (Manchester, 2000), pp. 86–106, 93; Griffiths, “The Structure of Prostitution”, pp. 43–45.

13 Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, pp. 30–32.

14 Laite, *Common Prostitutes*, pp. 135–148.

15 Griffiths, “The Structure of Prostitution”, p. 45; Laite, *Common Prostitutes*, p. 61.

16 For an extensive account of the Wolfenden Committee and the formulation of the 1959 Street Offences Act, see Helen Self, *Prostitution, Women, and the Misuse of the Law: The Fallen Daughters of Eve* (London, 2001).

Almost overnight, London street prostitution had all but disappeared, replaced by off-street establishments, such as the walk-up flats in Soho that became so iconic of the sex trade in London in the second half of the twentieth century. Women also worked increasingly in massage parlours, as call girls, and in furnished rooms and their own homes. While some street prostitution remained, especially around rail stations and in more derelict areas, London went from being a primarily street-based prostitution scene to a primarily indoor scene in less than a decade.¹⁷ That being said, prostitution did not stay entirely indoors for long; not only did some areas, such as Stepney, see a rise in street solicitation and indecency in the 1960s, becoming a home for young and poor women who could not afford indoor accommodation, other areas such as King's Cross re-emerged in the 1980s as problem areas, in the context particularly of rising drug addiction problems in the population at large.

Changing technologies of communication and transport—especially the telephone and the motorcar—also had an immense impact on the geography and economy of commercial sex in London. Car-based solicitation of women, described by police and prostitutes alike as dangerous, became a chief form of street prostitution by the second half of the twentieth century.¹⁸ On the other hand, the telephone came to be of vital importance to women who wished to work indoors. By the early 1960s London telephone booths were already plastered with the calling cards for which they are so well known in the present day.¹⁹ In the twenty-first century, commercial sex in London is once again being dramatically reshaped, this time by online technology.²⁰

There are some enduring themes we can see when examining the spaces and places of London prostitution over a four hundred year period. The first is the importance of micro-geographies of prostitution. No defined and delineated red-light zone developed in London, although certain spaces were concentrated sites of commercial sex.²¹ Spaces of prostitution could be very small and bleed into one another, and they existed all over the metropolis.

17 See for instance, Phil Hubbard, "Cleansing the Metropolis: Sex Work and the Politics of Zero Tolerance", *Urban Studies*, 41 (2004), pp. 1687–1702.

18 Cecil Hewitt Rolphe (ed.) (Rosalind Wilkinson unattributed author), *Women of the Streets: A Sociological Study of the Common Prostitute* (London, 1955), p. 9.

19 A prostitute calling card ephemera collection going back to the 1960s is archived at the Wellcome Library. See also, Caroline Archer, *Tart Cards: London's Illicit Advertising Art* (West New York, 2003).

20 There is very little work focusing on the impact of the internet on the sex industry in Britain and London. For general research with an American focus, see Scott Cunningham, and Todd Kendall, "Prostitution 2.0: The Changing Face of Sex Work", *Journal of Urban Economics*, 69 (2011), pp. 273–287.

21 Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, p. 70; Laite, *Common Prostitutes*, p. 80.

Another enduring feature of London prostitution through the ages was the “mixed economy” of commercial sex, where street prostitution and off-street prostitution were interrelated, and where women solicited on the street but also kept flats for clients. Thirdly, prostitution was always spatially linked to areas of entertainment, transportation terminuses, eating and drinking, military encampments, and areas of shipping and receiving. From the seventeenth to the twenty-first century, prostitution was woven into the fabric of London’s economy: leisure, transport, commerce, and trade.

There are also some striking spatial and geographic changes that are worth noting. Since around 1600, there has been a move of prostitution outside of the City and mostly into the west. The greatest change of all occurred after the 1950s, when a perfect storm of criminalization and technological change meant that women moved off the street and worked in walk-up flats, as call girls, in massage establishments and saunas, or on the internet. And yet, the occasional street prostitute who works around King’s Cross in 2013 still shares some fundamental experiences with her seventeenth century counterpart, both of whom were and are caught up within the geographic complexity of the ever-changing metropolis.²²

Supply, Demand, and “Causes” of Prostitution

While there is much historical distance between the women who sold sex in the sixteenth century and those who sell sex in the twenty-first century, historical and sociological studies of the reasons why women became involved in prostitution in London point to some very important continuities. Chief among these is the relationship between female prostitution and other forms of women’s unpaid, underpaid, interrupted, exploited, and menial labour. In the early modern period, prostitution in the metropolis appears to have been deeply connected to—and often done at the same time as—other forms of female employment. Women used the sale of sex acts as a way to supplement meagre, scant, or unpredictable earnings elsewhere, often just for a short period of their lives or in any given year. Many left prostitution for a time or altogether if,

22 King’s Cross remains one of the few areas of London that has a comparatively prominent street sex scene. See for instance Erin Sanders and Lucy Neville, “Women’s Open Space Project Evaluation: Final Report”, New Horizon Youth Centre and Middlesex University, 2012, available at: <http://www.nhyouthcentre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/WOS-Final-Report-12-Sept.pdf>; last accessed 18 November 2013.

in the words of Paul Griffiths, “a better job or husband came along.”²³ Frequent unemployment, particularly in the domestic service sector, was a very significant factor determining the patterns of casual prostitution in the 1600s and little had changed by the eighteenth century, where “economies of makeshift”, as Tony Henderson deploys the term, saw women selling sex casually at times when they were unemployed or denied poor relief. Meanwhile, other women made a regular, or “professional”, living from prostitution.²⁴

G.P. Merrick, a prison chaplain at Millbank and other women’s prisons in the second half of the 1800s, provides a striking snapshot of women who used the sale of sex as a response to a market that exploited their labour.²⁵ 20 per cent claimed that unemployment and severe poverty had led them to prostitution, while a full 40 per cent had been domestic servants who had left or lost their positions, some surely because of pregnancy.²⁶ As in the eighteenth century, it seems that many women who sold sex in London in the nineteenth century did so casually or temporarily.²⁷ While historians of prostitution in Britain emphasize the enormous variety of experiences that compelled, coerced, or outright forced women into prostitution, they also note that very often prostitution was part of a chosen economic and social strategy for disadvantaged women.²⁸ There is not a great deal of evidence about women exiting prostitution in any period, but it does seem that many women eventually stopped selling sex altogether, perhaps before or after marriage or when they had saved enough money to invest in a licit business.²⁹

In addition to economic need, abject poverty, and constrained labour choices, a woman’s move into prostitution could include factors such as loneliness,

23 Dabhoiwala, “The Pattern of Sexual Immorality”, p. 94; Eleanor Hubbard, *City Women: Money, Sex and the Social Order in Early Modern London* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 107–110; Griffiths, *Lost Londons*, pp. 149–150.

24 Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, pp. 14–16; Henderson is following Olwen Hufton’s concept of “economy of makeshifts” developed in her work on the poor in eighteenth century France. Olwen Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth Century France, 1750–1789* (Oxford, 1974), p. 16.

25 Merrick, *Work among the Fallen as Seen from a Prison Cell* (London, [circa 1891]), p. 46.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

27 Mary Higgs, *Glimpses into the Abyss* (London, 1906), pp. 208–209.

28 Daboiwala, “The Pattern of Sexual Immorality”, p. 98; Paula Bartley, *Prostitution: Prevention and Reform in England, 1860–1914* (London, 2000), pp. 6–12; Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State* (Cambridge, 1980), p. 219.

29 Griffiths, *Lost Londons*, p. 5; Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, p. 109; William Acton, *Prostitution: Considered in its Moral, Social, and Sanitary Aspect* (London, 1858), pp. 57–58; Wilkinson, *Women of the Streets*, p. 99.

a lack of a support network, violence and abuse, and isolation in the city.³⁰ Merrick found that many women had begun to sell sex after having been turned out by their parents because of “bad habits”; again we must suspect that pregnancy must have been one of the factors here.³¹ Yet it is very difficult for the historian, given the sources available and the extreme under-reporting of domestic and sexual violence in any era, to determine whether prostitutes experienced neglect, abuse, and violence *more* frequently than other girls and women, and it seems evident that we must consider the abuse and dislocation experienced by women who entered prostitution as part of a more general and upsetting pattern of violence and abuse against all women.³²

These sorts of motivations for choosing prostitution—money, labour, lack of social support, and experiences of abandonment and abuse—persisted into the twentieth century. Despite the fact that there was a growing sense amongst pundits and politicians that no woman needed to sell sex because of economic necessity any longer, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that financial struggles remained the primary reason why women got involved in prostitution after 1900.³³ Nonetheless, especially by the interwar years, more and more people began to claim that psychological and sexual pathology, not poverty, was the strongest “push” factor for prostitution. As one member of parliament crudely put it, “There is none of the romance of ‘Fanny by Gaslight’ in this modern tart [...]. She is a hard girl who knows exactly what her value is.”³⁴ From the perspective of history in the *longue durée*, this seems a striking return to the mediaeval and early modern concepts of prostitution as wantonness, a significant reversal of the idea, popular from the seventeenth century, that prostitutes were victims of men’s lust and systemic social and economic inequality.

By the second half of the twentieth century, more sources became available that can tell contemporary historians and sociologists about why women sold and sell sex, but these sources also serve to corroborate the diversity of reasons and motivations that historians have uncovered in earlier periods. Some women appear to have chosen prostitution as a kind of labour that pays well,

30 Griffiths, *Lost Londons*, pp. 49–50; Merrick, *Work among the Fallen*, p. 46.

31 *Ibid.*

32 Hubbard, *City Women*, pp. 100–101; Garthine Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 56–58.

33 *The Report of the Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution* (London, 1957), p. 79.

34 Mr. Reese-Davis, MP, House of Commons Debate, 29 January 1959, Hansards vol. 598 cc 1, pp. 267–386, 1267.

others did it to pay off student loans, while others sold sex as a way to fund drug addictions, particularly after drugs like heroin and crack cocaine became readily available on London's streets.³⁵ Still other women were and are forced into selling sex by family members and boyfriends, or because of illegal immigration statuses that render them susceptible to trafficking and human smuggling.³⁶ In any case, the growing number of first-hand sources has complicated rather than clarified the reasons why women get involved in prostitution in twenty-first century London.

The question of prostitute's agency remains a contentious one, and one that lies at the heart of the divisions within present-day feminism over the issue of prostitution. For those feminists who see prostitution as inherently exploitative and violent, prostitutes cannot *choose* to sell sex: they are *prostituted* women. Other feminists, while recognizing the large amount of abuse and exploitation within the sex industry, acknowledge that prostitutes tend to frame their move into prostitution as a choice, albeit a difficult choice amongst worse ones. Historians of London and British prostitution have uncovered evidence that in the main supports the latter view, and argue that the decision to become involved in prostitution must be considered alongside women's other—often poor—economic choices. Prostitution routinely challenges any tidy historical conceptualization of agency and victimhood, which appear as false dichotomies in the face of individual women's complex and contradictory experiences.

Another line of historical and sociological enquiry has also complicated our understanding of commercial sex by pointing out that while women make up by far the largest proportion of prostitutes, there was nonetheless—and especially in London—a very significant market for males who sell sex.³⁷ The motivations and experiences of these men could differ dramatically from those of female prostitutes, but could also, and perhaps more strikingly, have much in common with them. This calls into question any simple gendered

35 Sophie Day, *On the Game: Women and Sex Work* (London, 2007) *passim*; Teela Sanders, Maggie O'Neill and Jane Pitcher, *Prostitution: Sex Work, Policy and Politics* (London, 2009), pp. 39–40.

36 For prostitution, trafficking, and immigration law in the wider European context, see Rutvica Andrijasevic, *Migration, Agency, and Citizenship in Sex Trafficking* (Basingstoke, 2010).

37 For early modern male prostitution see Rictor Norton, *Mother Clap's Molly House: The Gay Subculture in England 1700–1830* (Stroud, 2006). For modern male prostitution, see for instance Katie Hindmarch-Watson, "Male Prostitution and the London GPO: Telegraph Boys' 'Immorality' from Nationalization to the Cleveland Street Scandal", *Journal of British Studies*, 51 (2012), pp. 594–617.

understandings of prostitution in the past and present. While male prostitution is not considered in this chapter, it is important to note its prevalence in London and its important spatial and experiential parallels with female prostitution.

Largely due to the fact that laws against street solicitation were directed at prostitutes, they are rendered historically visible in a way that male clients were not. We know more, in other words, about the supply side of prostitution than the demand. In a sample compiled from court records and literature, Paul Griffiths has suggested that the largest group (40 per cent) of prostitutes' clients in seventeenth century London were apprentices and servants, 12 per cent were craftsmen and tradesmen, while just over 10 per cent were "gentlemen". He also argues that "the bawdy house [was] an expression of the sexual vitality and camaraderie's of males", especially young urban ones.³⁸ This observation mirrors other findings from different periods and different cities, suggesting that prostitution has long been an important part of the masculine urban environment and not easily relegated to the disconnected "underworld". In the late 1700s, meanwhile, Patrick Colquhoun described the clients of prostitutes as "the multitudes of young men yearly arriving at the age of puberty—the strangers who resort to the metropolis—the seamen and nautical labourers employed in the trade of the River Thames, who amount at least to 40,000."³⁹ By the late nineteenth century the middle class "gentleman" had become the stereotypical buyer of sex, but there is convincing evidence that the purchase of sex occurred at all levels of the social spectrum. As one Police Commissioner complained at the turn of the century, "The apparent admirers of these women belong to all classes from the peer to the shop-boy."⁴⁰ While these comments demonstrate the ubiquity of sex-buying they also suggest that it was considered a natural, inevitable, and normal thing that all groups of men would do. The historical record in this case is likely sharply skewed, seeing as we have compelling evidence that higher-class brothels—the sort to which the richest and most powerful men would resort—were ignored and at times outright protected by the authorities. The most striking case is that of the unsuccessful prosecution of Mary Jeffries' Chelsea brothels in the late nineteenth century; not only did it take a great deal of pressure to compel the vestry to prosecute in the first place, when the prosecution was underway the lawyers and judges

38 Griffiths, *Lost Londons*, p. 55.

39 Patrick Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis* (London, 1806), p. 340.

40 Edward Bradford to Home Office, 27 November 1901, London, National Archives, HO 45/10123/B13517.

insisted on total anonymity for all the male clients who were involved. That was a courtesy they did not extend to the women.

Despite these often deliberate obscurities, there does nonetheless seem to have been a greater concentration of clients of prostitutes in certain occupations. Soldiers and sailors were disproportionately represented amongst the buyers of sex throughout the entire period, and it was certainly these categories of men—and their attendant sexual health—that most concerned the state. For the four hundred years in question, London was a hub for both these groups: along the docklands mercantile sailors came and went in droves, and several barracks in and around the city were home to thousands of soldiers. During the Napoleonic Wars and the two World Wars, these numbers were far higher, and evidence suggests that at these times the commercial sex market was booming. Meanwhile, another study of London sex-buying in the mid-twentieth century found that men from “mobile occupations”, commercial travellers, and lorry drivers, for instance, were far more likely to buy sex. In a rare instance where male sex buying was denaturalized and even pathologized, the researcher concluded that the psychological factors that had driven these men toward such occupations also drove them toward buying sex; this pathologization of sex buying would gain ground in the later twentieth century.⁴¹ Despite the fact that some historians have argued that the popularity of sex buying declined in the twentieth century as more non-mercenary sex became available, by the early twenty-first century surveys in Britain continued to suggest that anywhere from one in ten to one in twenty men buy sex in the U.K.⁴² It is therefore surprising that there continues to be a real dearth of research into male sex-buying in London even in the twenty-first century, while the writing on prostitutes could fill a library.

Demography, Labour, and Lifestyle

One of the key questions about prostitution in any city is how much of it there was at any given time. I remain circumspect overall about any historian's ability

41 Trevor Gibbens and Martin Silberman, “The Clients of Prostitutes”, *British Journal of Venereal Disease*, 36 (1960), pp. 113–117.

42 This most recent study also found that men who bought sex were more likely to be between the ages of 25 and 34, never married, and living in London. They also had a higher rate of STIs. Helen Ward *et al.*, “Who Pays for Sex? An Analysis of the Increasing Prevalence of Female Commercial Sex Contacts among Men in Britain”, *Sexually Transmitted Infection*, 81 (2005), pp. 467–471.

to come up with a firm answer. Even in regulated systems, a lot of prostitution went unmonitored, and in unregulated systems, the dark figure is simply enormous. Trying to work backwards from information like arrest statistics and the highly flawed reports of social investigators and moral reformers can give us only the vaguest idea of numbers. London furnishes a very good example of these uncertainties.

Part of the problem lies in the imprecision and blurriness of historical labels and identities. When a historical source makes claims about “whores”, “harlots”, and “prostitutes”, about whom are they speaking? At the start of the early modern period, while the concept of prostitution as a mercenary activity certainly existed, the courts and wider culture made very little distinction between prostitution and other forms of fornication or adultery. Not only was the term “whore” used synonymously and more commonly than “prostitute”, both these terms could mean any “unchaste” or unruly woman.⁴³ From a social standpoint, Dabhoiwala has found that “women who engaged in prostitution were not, as a group, socially or economically distinct from respectable society. They were part of wider metropolitan communities.”⁴⁴ Little had changed in the eighteenth century; there were only vague distinctions between “prostitutes” and “mistresses”, and “whore” remained a very loose term. Henderson, like Dabhoiwala, has argued that a distinct “class” of prostitutes in eighteenth century London is impossible to find.⁴⁵

In keeping with more general attitudes to social categories and crime, it is in the nineteenth century that we start to see more attempts to classify, define, and count prostitutes in London. In this statistics-loving era, several commentators and authorities attempted to enumerate prostitutes, although most relied on each other’s estimates, and most included all unmarried mothers and other “unchaste” women in their figures which could reach as high as 80,000.⁴⁶ The mid-nineteenth century Metropolitan Police estimates ranged from 8,000 to 12,000 women, although they were criticized for not accounting for the vast swathes of casual prostitution. In any case, all attempts to enumerate prostitutes in the nineteenth century were inseparable from the biases of moralizers or the politics of crime control.

Are we able to get a better sense of numbers by the twentieth century? Certainly there are more and better standardized sources, particularly within the criminal justice system. In addition, by the mid-century there appeared to be

43 Dabhoiwala, “The Pattern of Sexual Immorality”, p. 88.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 101.

45 Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, pp. 43–47.

46 See for instance Acton, *Prostitution*, p. 15.

more carefully delineated sociological research that examined prostitution and offered estimates. Looking at arrest and recidivism statistics, it seems that by the twentieth century the levels of casual prostitution were falling, meaning fewer and fewer women sold sex but those who did so did it more frequently than ever before. It is, however, difficult to be sure, because just as the police, the courts, and social sciences were getting better at statistics, prostitution in London was effectively pushed out of public view. Another attempt to enumerate the vast world of off-street commercial sex in London in 2008 by the Poppy Project estimated that there was an “absolute minimum” of two thousand women working in the off-street industry.⁴⁷ However, this report was criticized by social scientists as deeply methodologically flawed.⁴⁸ It seems that only a little more certainty about numbers can be found in the present age of information than could be found in Elizabethan London.

Historians have been able to collate other kinds of quantitative data—found for instance in court records, police files, rescue home reports, social investigations, and lock hospital records—to build a picture of women who sold sex in different time periods. From the seventeenth to the twentieth century, there seem to be some broad demographic trends. Various investigators (both historical and contemporary) have found that around 40 per cent of prostitutes in London were born there, a lower proportion, generally, than the female population of London at large. Around 10 to 15 per cent each came from Ireland, the Home Counties, and the Southwest, with other areas of Britain and “everywhere else” making up between 2 and 5 per cent.⁴⁹ By the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, there was an important demographic change, when significant numbers of London prostitutes began to come from the Continent, especially France and Germany.⁵⁰ By the late twentieth century, meanwhile, new European and global migration trends had reshaped the ethnic profile of London prostitutes; while white British women still engaged in prostitution in high numbers, women of Afro-Caribbean descent, Southeast Asian women, and most markedly women from eastern and southern Europe (especially

47 Julie Bindel and Helen Atkin, “Big Brothel: A Survey of the Off-Street Sex Industry in London”, Poppy Project/Eaves (London, 2008), p. 5.

48 United Kingdom Network of Sex Work Projects (UKNSWP), “Academic Response to ‘Big Brothel’”, available at: <http://www.uknswp.org/wp-content/uploads/AcademicResponse-BigBrothelFinSept2008.pdf>; last accessed 7 July 2017.

49 Paul Griffiths, “Meanings of Nightwalking in Early Modern England”, *The Seventeenth Century*, 13 (1998), pp. 212–238, 228; Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, p. 19; Merrick, *Work Among the Fallen*, p. 27.

50 Laite, *Common Prostitutes*, pp. 106–107.

non-EU countries) are disproportionately represented in the London prostitution market.⁵¹

We also have some information about the families of prostitute women. Many women who sold sex—likely across the periods—were married or had long-term romantic partners, although many experienced estrangement and abandonment as well.⁵² A high proportion of them were orphans, or had lost one parent, but this is a family experience that women who sold sex largely shared with other groups, such as domestic servants and female migrants.⁵³ Prostitutes were also often parents themselves, though we have strong reasons to believe that rudimentary condoms and other forms of birth control and abortifacients were often used by prostitutes, even in the seventeenth century, to limit fertility. The effects of undiagnosed and untreatable venereal diseases, especially syphilis and gonorrhoea, may have meant that many prostitutes were infertile. Throughout the period, while many prostitute women—like single or widowed mothers more generally—gave their children up, many others kept them, sharing their care with other members of their community, or paying for their care and board elsewhere with the proceeds of their prostitution. By the late nineteenth century, legal measures that enabled the British state to take children found in the company of prostitutes from their homes meant that there was increased incentive for prostitutes to conceal their motherhood; many preferred to send their children away to school or out to board.⁵⁴ And so again, historians are faced with increased clandestinity just as statistics were becoming more available.

Similar guessing games must be engaged in when trying to determine prostitutes' health experiences, particularly their experiences with venereal diseases. Before the Wasserman test in the early twentieth century, syphilis and gonorrhoea were both difficult to diagnose, and rates of the disease (as well as other venereal diseases) are extremely difficult to determine. We do know that from the very early seventeenth century, syphilis was common amongst the sexually promiscuous in London, and there were certainly many cases of "the pox" in London's Bridewell and workhouses.⁵⁵ By the late eighteenth century, the London Lock Hospital, specializing in the treatment of venereal diseases, had opened its doors and was admitting, often via the courtroom or

51 Bindel and Atkin, "Big Brothel", pp. 17–19.

52 Merrick, *Work Among the Fallen*, p. 46.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

54 1880 Industrial Schools Amendment Act (43 & 44 Vic, ch. 15), 1908 Children Act (8 Edw 7, Ch. 67).

55 Griffiths, *Lost Londons*, pp. 266–267.

rescue home, high numbers of women who sold sex.⁵⁶ Prostitutes who were suspected of carrying a disease were frequently coerced into being examined and treated in lieu of (or during their) imprisonment, a practise that continued, it seems, well into the twentieth century. During the two World Wars, London prostitutes were made *de facto* targets for exceptional wartime legislation that attempted to curb the spread of venereal diseases.⁵⁷ In the present day, HIV/AIDS is the most significant venereal disease within the commercial sex industry, though the evidence for the rate amongst prostitutes who do not use intravenous drugs has been called into serious question. Similarly, prostitutes in the present day are also frequently associated with drug addiction, though researchers Helen Ward and Sophie Day, reporting on a longitudinal study of sex workers in London, stress that the correlation between mental health, venereal infections, drug addiction, and prostitution is “complex”.⁵⁸ It therefore remains difficult to separate the actual health experiences of prostitutes from their pathologization within the British criminal justice and social work systems.

For other women, avoiding penile-vaginal intercourse was their chief strategy to avoid pregnancy as well as infection. This points to a much wider and often overlooked question; namely, which sex acts were performed by women who sold sex. There is an assumption that most prostitutes sold vaginal intercourse; however, a great deal of evidence from London challenges this. Many women traded only in masturbation, while others allowed men to ejaculate between their thighs, breasts, or in their mouth.⁵⁹ Henderson has uncovered convincing evidence that masturbation was a very common form of prostitution in eighteenth century London; and in the nineteenth century it is likely that the “knee tremblers” of Victorian lore were offering similar acts.⁶⁰ Even in the twentieth century, manual and oral sex remained more common than

56 Linda E. Merians, “The London Lock Hospital and the Lock Asylum for Women”, in Linda E. Merians (ed.), *The Secret Malady: Venereal Disease in Eighteenth-century Britain and France*, (Lexington, 1996), pp. 128–148.

57 Pamela Cox, “Compulsion, Voluntarism, and Venereal Disease: Governing Sexual Health in England after the Contagious Diseases Acts”, *Journal of British Studies*, 46 (2007), pp. 91–115.

58 Helen Ward and Sophie Day, “What Happens to Women who Sell Sex? Report of a Unique Occupational Cohort”, *Sexually Transmitted Infection*, 82 (2006), pp. 413–417.

59 Dabhoiwala, “The Pattern of Sexual Immorality”, p. 89.

60 Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, p. 38. For the immense variety of sex acts for sale in nineteenth century London, see “Walter” (Anonymous), *My Secret Life*, 11 vols (London, 1995 [1888]).

penetrative sex, and was preferred by many women as a much less unsavoury (if also less lucrative) way to sell sex.⁶¹

As might be imagined, prostitutes' earnings varied widely and were determined in no small part by the sex acts they were willing to perform. In his study of Bridewell records, Griffiths has found evidence of very high earnings (ten pounds, in one instance) by London prostitutes in the seventeenth century and he posits a very tentative 4 shilling 3 pence average charge in this period, which was striking considering the average male day labourer earned only around twelve pence a day in this same period.⁶² There is also evidence that women would frequently supplement their earnings with petty theft from clients, especially inebriated ones, and also often trade for forms of payment other than cash (drink, food, and clothes, for instance). When more figures do start to become available for the nineteenth century, their range is striking. Some women would charge as little as 3 pence, almost certainly for masturbation; while others could earn incredible annual sums (as much as a male professional salary) working in higher-class (though still street-based) prostitution. A similar range can be found in the twentieth century. Although there is some evidence to suggest that the average prices of sex acts like oral and penetrative sex were falling by the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, there were (and are) also women who charge thousands of pounds as escorts to London's super-rich.⁶³ Despite some changes, the continuity here is just as significant: women still charge a huge diversity of prices, many still engage in barter (for drugs, for instance) instead of cash payment, and most could earn more through prostitution than through any other form of labour that was open to unskilled women in any given time period. However, particularly after third-party control began to rise, we must also consider what percentage of her earnings a prostitute—working under the control of a pimp or owing rent to exploitative landlords—was able to keep for herself.

The experience of selling sex varied so dramatically from woman to woman it belies a totalizing term like "prostitution". Women who sold sex belonged to different "classes" both within society at large and within the world of commercial sex. Some women worked in isolation, or under third-party control, while others worked in highly sociable environments with other prostitutes. Still others worked as part of wider communities and families, sometimes in licit and sometimes illicit labour. Some women earned very little, some earned

61 Wilkinson, *Women of the Streets*, pp. 59–60; Laite, *Common Prostitutes*, p. 37.

62 Griffiths, *Lost Londons*, pp. 48–49; Jeremy Boulton "Wage Labour in Seventeenth Century London", *Economic History Review*, 49 (1996), pp. 268–290, 278.

63 Sanders et al., *Prostitution*, pp. 36–37.

staggering sums. Some only masturbated their clients while others offered “fetish”, anal, and other “perverse” activities. This highly diverse and dynamic character of commercial sex is one of its most enduring historical realities.

There are, however, some ways that experiences, at the macro-level, have changed. A greater and greater percentage of prostitutes in London now hail from eastern Europe and Southeast Asia, and often encounter language barriers as well as the vulnerabilities that come with having the status of being an illegal migrant. This must dramatically reshape some of the fundamental experiences of selling sex. But by far the most significant macro-level change that affected women’s experiences of prostitution was their increasingly common encounters with the criminal justice system and the rescue and reform industry, which sought to more carefully define their activities as a legal category, more thoroughly monitor and record them, more effectively police and prosecute them, and more consistently punish and reform them according to new moral, social, and medical understandings of prostitution.

Official Attitudes, Control, and Punishment

This account begins just a few decades after Henry VIII outlawed the licensed “stewes” of London’s then disreputable South Bank in 1546, effectively ending the city’s use of regulationism as a way to control prostitution. The period from 1600 to the present in London has been marked by many different attempts to control and repress prostitution and punish prostitutes, but none have taken the form of official regulation. London had a very brief, early, and ultimately abandoned experiment with official regulation, setting it apart from many other world and European cities (including many within the British Empire).⁶⁴

The laws and regulations that were used to govern prostitution in London were and remain a patchwork, developed in the absence of a criminal code and combining specific clauses against prostitution in statutes with more general national and municipal regulations that came to be directed against prostitution. Within London, the licensing and legal powers of individual local authorities (parishes and vestries, and later Borough Councils, the London County Council, and the Greater London Authority) were immensely important in the control of commercial sex in the metropolis. As with most precedent-based legal systems, legislation surrounding prostitution in London is historical in

64 Karras, *Common Women*, pp. 34–35. On regulation in the colonies, see Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (London, 2001).

its very nature; the law which operates to outlaw street solicitation today can be very clearly traced back to the nineteenth century, while these Victorian laws were also based upon much older jurisprudence from the early modern period. This makes it very hard for the historian to tell a simple story of prostitution control in London, dealing as they are with a system that was dynamic, complex, administered by multiple and changing officials, and subject to immense amounts of discretion on the part of different local authorities, police officers, magistrates, and social workers. Drives against prostitution also came in waves, ebbing and flowing according to public pressure and the politics of crime control.

Nonetheless, one pattern does emerge: between the seventeenth and the twenty-first century, prostitution in London came to be increasingly—though not straightforwardly—criminalized. While the actual buying and selling of sex was not (and, as of the time of writing, is still not) illegal in Britain, over the four hundred year period in question prostitution was separated from other forms of moral offence and public disorder, authorities found ways to more effectively identify women as prostitutes, and there was a marked increase in statutory laws, regulations, and licensing restrictions designed to suppress commercial sex.

At the close of the sixteenth century, prostitution was conceptualized, on the one hand, as part of a spectrum of sexual behaviours—like fornication and adultery—that were considered felonious and punishable under church court jurisdiction and, on the other hand, as entangled with wider laws against vagrancy. This rendered prostitutes, according to Melissa Mowry, “indistinguishable from their underclass brethren and thus legally invisible.”⁶⁵ As the seventeenth century progressed, however, in the words of Faramerz Dabhiwala, “sexual discipline in the capital was changed out of all recognition”; adultery and fornication were no longer prosecuted, and churches began to pass responsibility for the control of sexuality over to increasingly professionalized police and municipal authorities.⁶⁶ Prostitution—referenced in terms like “nightwalking” and “wicked and lewd practises”—was one of several problems of public and moral order (such as vagrancy and begging) that came under

65 Melissa Mowry, “London’s Bridewell: Violence, Prostitution, and Questions of Evidence”, in Joseph P. Ward (ed.), *Violence, Politics, and Gender in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke, 2008), pp. 207–222, 211.

66 Faramerz Dabhiwala, “Sex, Social Relations and the Law in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-century London”, in Michael J. Braddick and John Walter (eds), *Negotiating Power in Early Modern Society: Order, Hierarchy and Subordination in Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 85–101, 86–87.

increasing attack in London in the seventeenth century under the reinstated Poor and Vagrancy Laws.⁶⁷ There was a growing understanding that there were important differences between private and public immorality; in other words, in this period we see *sex* crimes going down and *street* crimes going up.⁶⁸

At the same time, the concept of “nightwalking”, used in regulations since the fourteenth century, became increasingly “feminized” and associated with female sexual misbehaviour in London.⁶⁹ London’s Bridewell prison and hospital, established in the mid-sixteenth century as a kind of summary court and site of incarceration for London’s “idle and disorderly persons”, became a common destination for women who came under the notice of the night watchmen and the parish beadle for vagrancy and nightwalking. While it is extremely difficult to determine which of these women were selling sex, it is safe to say that Bridewell saw many prostitutes come through its gates and, given that its records show a sharp rise in female recidivism, it seems many passed through several times.⁷⁰

Despite these new measures and definitions, open and visible prostitution remained a common feature of London street life, which inspired a late seventeenth-century explosion of moral reform and anti-vice associations (the influential London Society for the Reformation of Manners was founded in 1691, for instance).⁷¹ They had few legal powers but, together with Justices of the Peace, they found informal methods of dealing with prostitutes in public, including binding them over to keep the peace, and committing them for other offences to the Bridewell, whose incarceration numbers peaked during this time.⁷² These informal, de facto, and backdoor tactics of arrest and imprisonment would become one of the defining features of the control of prostitution in London, stretching into the nineteenth century and the present day.

In the first few decades of the eighteenth century, “a narrower, sharper definition of public prostitution and its legal culpability [...] slowly emerged.”⁷³ While there was still no law that referred to prostitutes by name, general laws preventing vagabondage, begging, thieving, and disorderly behaviour were increasingly aimed at them. Still, as Henderson has described, “flexibility,

67 Mowry, “London’s Bridewell”, pp. 211–212.

68 Griffiths, *Lost Londons*, p. 203; Dabhoiwala, “Sex, Social Relations and the Law”, pp. 86–87.

69 Griffiths, “Meanings of Nightwalking”, pp. 216, 221, 223.

70 Griffiths, *Lost Londons*, pp. 205–206.

71 For a full account of late seventeenth and early eighteenth century anti-vice movements in London, see Alan Hunt, *Governing Morals: A Social History of Moral Regulation* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 28–54.

72 Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, pp. 86–89.

73 Dabhoiwala, “Sex, Social Relations and the Law”, p. 93.

compromise, and absence of system were almost defining characteristics of the policing of street prostitution in this period.⁷⁴ Anti-vice campaigners were more successful, to a certain extent at least, in bringing brothels under the law. The Disorderly Houses Act of 1752 gave local authorities more power to monitor and deny licenses to establishments, and a later Act allowed them to prosecute disorderly houses through their own time and cost.⁷⁵ Although this system was very prone to corruption and the costs were a disincentive to potential prosecutors, it is a model of local authority control over “brothels” that persists into the present day.

The nineteenth century brought some very important legal changes, which came along with wider changes in policing and criminal justice. A clause in the Vagrancy Act of 1824 stipulated that any “common prostitute found wandering and behaving in a riotous or indecent manner” could be liable to arrest, and a fine or incarceration; this was the first time that the term “common prostitute” was used in a statute.⁷⁶ The most significant law for the policing of London prostitution was the 1839 Metropolitan Police Act. Clause 54 of the Act stated that “any common prostitute loitering or soliciting for the purposes of prostitution to the annoyance of inhabitants or passengers” would be liable to arrest.⁷⁷ This law only allowed for the magistrate to sentence with a fine, though prostitutes were frequently subsequently given prison time in default of fine payment. Together, these two laws formed the backbone of prostitution control in the metropolis in the nineteenth century; it is very important to note that the Contagious Diseases Acts, though very famous in the historiography of British prostitution, were never put into effect in London.

Nineteenth-century prostitution control, like its antecedents, was sporadic and poorly monitored. Statistics are very unreliable before the 1890s, and many arrested prostitutes have been hidden from history forever by the use of a different clause in the Vagrancy Act directed against “drunk and disorderly persons” and another in the Metropolitan Police Act against those likely to “cause a breach of the peace”. Until the very end of the century, many arrests in London were recorded as “drunk and disorderly prostitute”, even though no such charge actually existed in the statute books. This example illustrates nicely the idiosyncratic nature of prostitution control in the capital in the modern period: despite firmer laws and better policing techniques, the policing of commercial sex remained disorganized, informal, localized, and very often corrupt.

74 Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, p. 140.

75 1751 Disorderly Houses Act (25 Geo. II, c. 36) s. 5 and 25.

76 1824 Vagrancy Act (5. Geo. IV, c. 83) s. 3, 4, and 5.

77 1839 Metropolitan Police (2 & 3 Vict., c. 47) s. 54.

By the late nineteenth century, a series of scandals that highlighted the extent of corruption within the police and exploitation within the commercial sex industry forced new changes in the law. In 1885, journalist William Stead painted London as a “modern Babylon”—where poor children were bought and sold for sex under the averted eyes of the Metropolitan Police—and helped to push the Criminal Law Amendment Bill into law. The new Act, by making it cheaper and easier for local authorities to prosecute brothels in their areas, witnessed a very large increase in prosecutions, going from seventy per annum before the Act to almost 900 by the early years of the twentieth century.⁷⁸

Yet again, however, prostitution control in London was anything but straightforward. The Criminal Law Amendment Act failed to define a “brothel”, and up to the present day police and borough councils struggle to address the legal loopholes that saw women operating out of individually rented flats. Meanwhile, simultaneous attempts to crack down on street solicitation met with still greater and more scandalous challenges: a series of cases of mistaken identity, and police brutality and corruption, culminated in several government committees, inquiries, and commissions that looked at the policing of prostitution in the first half of the twentieth century.

Despite this, the early twentieth century saw some increasing power and efficiency in the control of prostitution. Arrest rates, and more importantly rates of conviction, began to rise and (apart from during World War 1) remained largely steady. Police began fingerprinting prostitutes in 1917, and this system began to improve the criminal justice system’s ability to identify, arrest, and punish prostitutes. By 1950, 99.97 per cent of prostitute’s arrests ended in their conviction, a truly stunning figure in relation to almost all other offences.⁷⁹

Despite these moves towards criminalization, informal regulation was still alive and well. There were countless reports from prostitutes that police operated a “rota” system of arrests, for example, using the fines imposed as a kind of licensing fee; local efforts to repress prostitution in one area merely displaced it to others, and many brothels continued to be tolerated so long as they conducted their business quietly. As one sociologist argued in the 1950s, the relationship between the police and prostitutes was a “working, though pointless, compromise.”⁸⁰ Unlike in the seventeenth century, criminalization and organized repression had become the official stance toward prostitution. Much like

78 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act (48 & 49 Vict., c. 69); *The Judicial Statistics of England and Wales*.

79 *Judicial Statistics of England and Wales*; Laite, *Common Prostitutes*, p. 225.

80 Wilkinson, *Women of the Streets*, p. 18.

in the seventeenth century, however, the situation on the ground was complex, regulatory, and frequently ineffective.

But while systems of prostitution control may have been ineffective in dealing with the overall problem of prostitution in London, this does not mean that these attempts to repress or regulate prostitution did not seriously affect the lives of women who sold sex, as they were subjected to a number of different official and unofficial controls and abuses. While statistics from the eighteenth century suggest that the majority of London prostitutes were simply discharged after being arrested, for example, this benign calculation surely hides a great deal of potential emotional duress, harassment, and sexual and physical violence that many accused prostitutes must have experienced between their arrests and their release the next morning. For those who were not discharged, they could be sent to a higher court, committed to a hospital, or sent to a prison.⁸¹ And while most women who were incarcerated in the eighteenth century (and, for that matter, in the nineteenth century) saw sentences of only seven to fourteen days, we must not be quick to assume that this was an easy experience for these women.

The institutional alternative to prison, for much of the period in question, was a reform or rescue home; these various private philanthropic initiatives also formed part of the informal system of control and punishment. Historians have charted a “radical cultural shift” in attitudes toward prostitution in the eighteenth century, when more and more people began to consider the prostitute not as a licentious villain, but an exploited victim.⁸² It was in this climate that reform homes were established as places to rehabilitate recalcitrant prostitutes; the London Magdalene Hospital for Penitent Prostitutes opened its doors in 1758, and it and similar institutions grew into very popular charities.⁸³ Yet, within the walls of these reform homes the “the janus-like nature of the sentimental discourse” surrounding prostitution in the eighteenth century was revealed, and “reform” looked a great deal like punishment.⁸⁴ These complicated and contradictory attitudes and practises persisted within the prostitute reform charities into the nineteenth century, and many prostitutes, given the choice between a long stay in a reform home (with its strict schedules, spartan meals, and domestic service training) and a short stay in prison

81 Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, p. 134.

82 Mary Peace, “Figuring the London Magdalen House: Mercantalist Hospital, Sentimental Asylum or Proto-Evangelical Penitentiary?”, in Ann Lewis and Markman Ellis (eds), *Prostitution and Eighteenth-Century Culture*, (London, 2012), pp. 141–156, 141.

83 Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, pp. 186–187.

84 Peace, “London Magdalen House”, p. 155.

chose the latter.⁸⁵ This helps to explain why reform homes were frequently under-utilized and tended to cater to young women who were pregnant out of wedlock, sexually promiscuous, or sexually abused, rather than to women who regularly earned their living selling sex.⁸⁶ By the turn of the twentieth century, many of these organizations had begun to act in concert with the state, especially through their monitoring of immigrant prostitutes.⁸⁷

The second half of the twentieth century witnessed a rising panic about prostitution on London's streets which were, some felt, "without parallel in the capital cities of other civilised countries."⁸⁸ The 1959 Street Offences Act was the product of a significant rethinking of London prostitution policy in the 1950s, and its simple legal adjustment belied a major change in approach. The Act largely kept the working of the 1839 Metropolitan Police Act, but removed the need to prove that the "common prostitute" in question was doing anything to the annoyance of other people. While this clause had often been overlooked by police and magistrates in the past, its sanctioned removal, alongside a steeply increased fine and the distinct possibility of imprisonment, allowed the Metropolitan Police to effectively clear prostitution from London's streets. Virtually overnight, London went from being a city with one of the most significant street prostitution scenes in the western world to one in which prostitution occurred almost exclusively behind closed doors.

Even this was not without its subtleties, however, and a resurgence of street prostitution in the 1980s saw the passing of the very first prostitution law in the history of Britain to be directed against the male customers of prostitutes, addressing habitual solicitation of prostitutes by men in cars, known as "kerb crawling": the measure enjoyed some limited success in reducing traffic in problem areas, however, the need to prove "habitual" male solicitation made the measure difficult to enforce overall and ineffective for foot traffic or solicitation by telephone.⁸⁹ By the 1990s, "Anti-Social Behaviour Orders" also began to be used against women who sold sex in public, and served as a way to reintroduce prison sentences.⁹⁰ More "backdoor" attempts to criminalize

85 *Third Annual Report of the National Vigilance Association*, 1888, London, London Metropolitan Archive, LMA A/FWA/C/D150/1.

86 Bartley, *Prostitution*, pp. 94–115.

87 See "Expulsion of Foreign Prostitutes: Co-operation of the National Vigilance Association, 1913–1933", London, N.A., HO 45/15041.

88 *Report of the Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution*, p. 81.

89 Teela Sanders, "Kerbcrawler Rehabilitation Programmes: Curing the 'Deviant' Male and Reinforcing the 'Respectable' Moral Order", *Critical Social Policy*, 29 (2009), pp. 77–99.

90 Catherine Jane Benson and Roger Matthews, *The National Vice Squad Survey* (Middlesex, 1995).

prostitutes were included in the new immigration acts of the early 2000s, which played upon fears of trafficking to strengthen older laws against the immigration of “undesirable” people into Britain.⁹¹ The early twentieth first century has witnessed several more significant attempts to “rethink” prostitution policy in Britain, including using “tolerance zones” as well as legalized brothels; however these regulatory measures have largely been discarded and at the time of writing, the U.K. has been embroiled in serious debates about dealing with prostitution through what is known as the “Nordic model”, which criminalizes the *purchase of sex*.⁹²

While the criminalization of prostitution in the metropolis has never been able to totally repress it, it has had a major role to play in shaping the geographies, structures, and experiences of people within the commercial sex industry. There is very clear evidence that as legal sanctions against prostitution increased, so too did third party involvement, as women sought the assistance and protection of pimps, touts, landlords, and human smugglers to secure their workspaces, their bodies, and their mobility in a socio-political landscape that was increasingly intolerant of prostitution. Third parties had of course always had an interest in prostitution, and seventeenth- and eighteenth-century sources provide us with glimpses of the bawds, pimps, and advertisers who helped prostitutes secure custom and often exploited them within the “black economies” of early modern London.⁹³ But by the late nineteenth century, even the police themselves were frequently noting the ways in which legal restrictions encouraged pimping, and the first laws were passed directly addressing crimes such as procurement for the purposes of prostitution and living on the earnings of prostitution, whose application was (for the former) extremely rare and (for the latter) extremely patchy.⁹⁴ In the twenty-first century, prostitutes’ exploitation and abuse by third parties is tied most significantly to the politics and economics of undocumented migration.⁹⁵

91 Home Office (2007) The Criminal Justice and Immigration Bill, available at: <http://www.parliament.uk/commons/lib/research/rp2007/rp07-065.pdf>; last accessed 20 November 2013.

92 Marianne Hester and Nicole Westmarland, *Tackling Street Prostitution: Towards a Holistic Approach* (London, 2004); “Paying the Price: A Consultation Paper on Prostitution” (London, 2006).

93 Griffiths, “The Structure of Prostitution”, pp. 45–46; Griffiths, *Lost Londons*, pp. 148–149.

94 Laite, *Common Prostitutes*, pp. 87–99.

95 Andrew Boff, “Silence on Violence: Improving the Safety of Women. The policing of off-street sex work and sex trafficking in London” (London, 2012), available at: <http://www.uknswp.org/wp-content/uploads/SILENCEONVIOLENCElondonmajorofficereport19th-march2012.pdf>; last accessed 7 July 2017.

The legacy of the 1959 Street Offences Act also set firmer borders between indoor and outdoor sex in London, and created a hierarchy of commercial sex in which street sex workers became the poorest, most vulnerable, and most marginalized.⁹⁶ The late twentieth century has also witnessed new crusades against brothels and lap-dancing clubs, made possible not only through the Sexual Offences Act of 1956 (which reiterated the terms of the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act) but also through a patchwork of licensing regulations and local bylaws.⁹⁷ Meanwhile, sporadic raids on brothels and walk-ups in areas like Soho and the East End have become a regular feature of twenty-first century prostitution control in the metropolis. These are joined by crusades against calling cards, lap-dancing clubs, escort services, and internet sites, and spurred on by specific moments of heightened panic. During the recent London Olympics, for instance, there was heightened concern over the threat of migrant and trafficked prostitutes flooding London, echoing earlier panics surrounding such events as the Franco-British Exhibition and the Olympics in 1908, the Festival of Britain in 1951, and the Coronation in 1953. As was the case in the centuries before, today local community organizations, private and quasi-governmental charities, local authorities, and local health care and social work initiatives join special police squads and general beat officers in the effort to control and suppress commercial sex. London prostitution, always important in a global context, has also become, increasingly, a global affair, and the control of commercial sex has expanded significantly into the control of migration and international organized crime. The sex industry in the metropolis today is marked by postcolonial and new European immigration, as well as by human trafficking, as the legacies of historical, imperial, and present-day global inequalities and migration patterns play out in London's streets, saunas, telephone booths, and walk-up flats. Meanwhile, despite the discussions surrounding the criminalization of clients, male buyers of sex remain almost as culturally and legally invisible as they did in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries.⁹⁸

96 Rosie Campbell and Lynn Hancock "Sex Work in the Climate of Zero Tolerance: Hearing Loud Voices and the Silence of Dissent", paper presented at the Sex Work Reassessed conference, University of East London, 2008; Phil Hubbard, "Morality, Sexuality and the City: The Marginalisation of Street Prostitutes", *Gender, Place and Culture*, 5 (2008), pp. 55–72; Sanders and O'Neill, *Prostitution*, p. 35.

97 Phil Hubbard, "Cleansing the Metropolis: Sex Work and the Politics of Zero Tolerance", *Urban Studies*, 41 (2004), pp. 1687–1702; Phil Hubbard, "Legal Geographies: Controlling Sexually Oriented Businesses: Law, Licensing, and the Geographies of a Controversial Land Use", *Urban Geography*, 30 (2009), pp. 185–205.

98 Susan Collinson, Reg Straub, Georgina Perry, "The Invisible Men: Finding and Engaging with the Male Partners of Street Sex Workers", *Journal of Men's Health*, 8 (2011), pp. 202–207.

Conclusion

It is possible to trace important continuities as well as significant changes in the control of prostitution in London over the past four hundred years. Throughout both the early modern and the modern period, we can see the importance of de facto regulation and tolerance, accommodation, and compromise. Even as prostitution in London fell increasingly under the jurisdiction of the modern and centralized criminal justice system, local authorities and charities have remained central to prostitution control right into the present day. However, we can also see important changes. There was an enormous increase in the power and technology of the state to control and identify prostitutes, reflected in the dramatic rise in the conviction rate and the introduction of near countless direct and indirect laws and regulations to the arsenal of prostitution control. This gave rise to a growth in the off-street and clandestine commercial sex industry and contributed to a significant increase in third-party involvement in prostitution in London. In other words, the increasing legal prohibition of activities associated with prostitution helped to shape prostitute women's experiences of selling sex. Prostitution became more professionalized, as women were less able to move in and out of the trade without legal stigma and third-party pressure, and as firmer lines between prostitution and other kinds of semi-commercial promiscuity were drawn by society and by the law. As the inequalities within British society were mirrored on a much larger scale with the rise of globalization, more and more women of colour and immigrants could be found within London's sex industry. Women worked increasingly indoors, and street solicitation—at one point the norm for most women who sold sex, including very high-class prostitutes—came to be seen as the resort of the poorest and most marginalized women, even as indoor prostitution also rendered many women isolated and vulnerable.

One of the most significant narratives of prostitution control in London over the course of 400 years is the increasingly careful and in some ways successful attempts to separate prostitution from other kinds of moral and public order offences and to separate prostitutes from other kinds of potentially transgressive women and women in public. That being said, the actual definition of prostitution, and the line between who is and who is not a prostitute, continues to defy tidy categorizations every bit as much as it did in the seventeenth century. Nowhere do the lines between "prostitutes" and "other women" appear blurrier than within the glimpses we get of the lives, experiences, and opinions of women who sell sex. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, such sources are rare indeed, and while "whore biographies" (of mostly high class prostitutes) were a popular genre, they tell us much more about the social

and political context of these highly stylized accounts than about most women who sold sex in this period.⁹⁹ In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, London prostitutes appear within the police files and reform home records that were steadily growing and yet their experiences remain fragmented within these sources, and are heavily mediated by the authorities that produced them. Most of all, these women only appear to us in times of duress: after an arrest, within a prison, as a victim of an attack. For historians of the future, the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century will mark an immense change in this regard. This era has seen the proliferation of stories from women who sell sex, sometimes through the work of sociologists, but also through the narration of their own lives. Unlike in past sources, where they are caricatured, ventriloquized, or marginalized, we are now getting a real sense of the experiences and opinions of many different women who sell sex in their own words.¹⁰⁰

99 For a critical edited collection of these biographies, see Julie Peakman (ed.), *Whore Biographies: 1700–1825*, Parts I and II (London, 2006 & 2007).

100 More pamphlets and accounts began to be published from the late 1970s with the rise of the organized prostitutes' rights movement, some of which can be found in the English Collective of Prostitutes' files at the Women's Library, London (see for instance 3AMS/B/16/05). However, the internet has been the most significant medium facilitating an even wider range of prostitutes' voices. See for instance the "Sex Workers" subreddit on Reddit, a popular community-focused and community-moderated web content aggregator, available at: <http://www.reddit.com/r/sexworkers>; last accessed 7 July 2017.

Prostitution in Moscow and St. Petersburg, Russia

Philippa Hetherington

Introduction

In the years immediately following the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, migrant prostitution from the former Soviet areas became one of the most visible manifestations of the political and economic uncertainty pervading the region. In contemporary Turkey, sex workers from the former Soviet Union are considered so ubiquitous that the nickname “Natasha” is often used to refer to prostitutes in general.¹ The association of prostitution from and in Russia with recent geopolitical shifts has, however, served to occlude wider discussions of sex work as a historical phenomenon in the region. Furthermore, the fact that prostitution was considered a politically unacceptable topic of discussion in the postwar Soviet Union meant that no historical work on commercial sex was produced in Russia itself before the late twentieth century. In the last twenty years scholars writing in English and Russian have made up for lost time, publishing innovative studies of prostitution regulation in nineteenth-century Russia, philanthropic and scientific activism surrounding commercial sex before and after the revolution, and social historical analyses of women who sold sex in the early Soviet period.²

This chapter examines the history of prostitution in Moscow and St. Petersburg from 1600 to the present. It is based on both primary and secondary sources, although it is important to note that historiography on

1 Leyla Gulcur and Pinar Ilkkaracan, “The ‘Natasha’ Experience: Migrant Sex Workers from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in Turkey”, *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 25 (2002), pp. 411–421.

2 See for example Laurie Bernstein, *Sonia’s Daughters: Prostitutes and their Regulation in Imperial Russia* (Berkeley, 1995); Laura Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siecle Russia* (Ithaca, 1994), pp. 128–164; Richard Stites, “Prostitute and Society in Pre-Revolutionary Russia”, *Jahrbuch für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 31 (1983), pp. 348–364; Aleksandr Antonovich Iliukhov, *Prostitutsiia v Rossii s XVII veka do 1917 goda* (Moscow, 2008); Natalia B. Lebina and Mikhail V. Shkarovskii, *Prostitutsiia v Peterburge (40-e gg XIX v–40-e gg. XXv)* (Moscow, 1994); Frances Bernstein, *The Dictatorship of Sex: Lifestyle Advice for the Soviet Masses* (De Kalb, 2007).

Russian prostitution is sparse except for the period between 1843 and the mid-1920s. As a result, my coverage of earlier periods, and the mid-Soviet period (in which prostitution was supposedly non-existent) is correspondingly much less dense.

The study also draws on the considerable statistical material available on prostitution from the mid-to-late nineteenth century, when the imperial Russian police regulated prostitution. Even mildly reliable statistics for the social backgrounds and experiences of prostitutes are not available for Moscow or St. Petersburg until the birth of the regulation of prostitution in 1843, when the state's own interest in the surveillance of prostitutes necessitated the collection of information about them. Even then, the high point of statistical research into prostitution came between 1885 and 1917, and in the Soviet period the ideological necessity of claiming that prostitution was a problem that was disappearing under socialism (and by 1945, was deemed to have been eradicated) militated against the systematic collection of information about it. As a result, by far the richest data comes from the 1885–1917 period. Government-collected data on legally registered prostitutes, mediated as it was through a series of legal and social constructs denoting what sex work or prostitution was at that particular time, can only give us a small snapshot of prostitution as a legal identity, social category, and daily practice in Moscow and St. Petersburg in this period. Nonetheless it does give us a sense of how certain important social phenomena (such as urbanization, industrialization, war, revolution, and mass migration) may have impacted commercial sex as a practice as it was understood by the late imperial state.

Finally, a minor point on chronology: while Moscow existed in the seventeenth century, St. Petersburg was not founded until 1703, at which point Peter the Great made it the new imperial capital. Thus, all reference to information about the pre-1703 period pertains to Moscow only, and after 1703 the text will note which city is being referred to at any given time.

Definitions

The legal, cultural, social, and philosophical definitions of prostitution in Russia, and therefore in its two capitals, St. Petersburg and Moscow, have changed greatly since 1600. To give a very rough outline of the contours of the many and overlapping definitions of prostitution (explained in more detail below), it is worth noting that in the early seventeenth century, the state did not consider prostitution to be a crime separate from that of adultery, as “ecclesiastical literature did not distinguish between a prostitute and a woman who slept with

a man other than her husband voluntarily, without financial gain.”³ The Old Church Slavonic word for both was *bludnitsa*, and whether money changed hands was irrelevant to the ecclesiastical authorities’ harsh judgement of extramarital sex.⁴ It was not until the landmark Law Code of 1649 that secular law took a stance on offences relating to prostitution, in this case outlawing the procurement of women for fornication and assigning the death penalty for women who live by “fornication and vileness” and destroy any resultant offspring.⁵

On his ascension to power, Peter the Great, ever careful about the health and strength of his military, proved much more ready to legislate against prostitution as a crime against the secular order, as opposed to a moral crime to be treated by the Church. In 1716, his “Military Statutes” ordered that “no whores [*bludnitsy*] will be permitted near the regiments.”⁶ His successors Empress Anna Ioannovna (1730–1740) and Catherine the Great (1762–1796) placed further restrictions on the movement and activities of women “of debauched behaviour”, underlining the crime of commercial sex as a threat to public order.⁷ It was in the nineteenth century that the exigencies of public health became the overwhelming justification for restrictions on the activities of prostitutes, and rather than prohibit commercial sex altogether state authorities sought to legalize it in restricted circumstances and thus control the activities of “public women”.⁸ Just as in France, the Russian state enacted regulations in 1843 that allowed for tolerated prostitution in cities as long as prostitutes were registered with the police and submitted to weekly medical examinations.⁹

This position, and the accompanying legal entity of the “public woman”, remained until 1917, when the Provisional government overthrew the system of regulated prostitution. This paved the way for the Bolsheviks after the October Revolution, who perceived prostitution as a prime example of the structural inequality of men and women, and its eradication as an important step on

3 Eve Levin, *Sex and Society in the World of the Orthodox Slavs* (Ithaca, 1995), pp. 190–191.

4 *Ibid.*

5 See the English translation of the *Sobornoe Ulozhenie* of 1649 at <http://pages.uoregon.edu/kimball/1649-Ulj.htm#ch22>, which is based on the translation by Richard Hellie of The Muscovite Law Code (*Ulozhenie*) of 1649.

6 Cited in Bernstein, *Sonia's Daughters*, p. 13.

7 *Ibid.*, pp. 13–15.

8 Laurie Bernstein, “Yellow Tickets and State-Licensed Brothels: The Tsarist Government and the Regulation of Urban Prostitution”, in Susan Soloman and John Hutchinson (eds), *Health and Society in Revolutionary Russia* (Bloomington, 1990), pp. 233–252.

9 Bernstein, *Sonia's Daughters*, pp. 17–20.

the path to gender equality. Thus, rather than reintroduce criminal measures against commercial sex or the medical supervision of women engaged in it, Bolshevik officials developed a system whereby they sought to rehabilitate and educate former prostitutes so they no longer needed to sell sex. However, the system of labour colonies they enacted for these purposes proved useful vehicles for a punitive shift against women who sold sex in the Stalin period, during which time such women came to be deemed “social parasites” and “socially harmful elements”.¹⁰ Many were shot during the terror of the late 1930s.¹¹ In a discursive development that highlights the deep ambiguity of Soviet approaches to sex work, the language of prostitutes as “social parasites” in police reports and even some official proclamations of the Soviet government appeared alongside the continued existence of the idea that the “ideal prostitute” was an economic victim. By the late 1920s and early ‘30s, however, the state’s declaration that socialism had been achieved “in one country” and that there was accordingly full employment for all women meant that such an ideal type (the woman driven to commercial sex because of unemployment and destitution) was supposed to have disappeared.¹² Indeed, her very presence could serve to undermine the notion that socialism had been achieved at all. Accordingly, police and policy makers spoke more frequently of “professional prostitutes” who supposedly chose prostitution because of their criminal deviance, rather than because of economic need.¹³ The entrenchment of the category of

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- 10 For a succinct discussion of the category of socially harmful elements (*sotsial'nye vrednye elementy* or *sotsvredement*), which frequently included women selling sex, see Paul Hagenloh, “Socially Harmful Elements and the Great Terror”, in Sheila Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Stalinism: New Directions* (London: 2000), pp. 286–308. See also David Shearer, “Social Disorder, Mass Repression, and the NKVD during the 1930s”, *Cahiers du Monde Russe*, 42 (2001), pp. 505–534.
- 11 On the persecution of “socially harmful elements” in the “Terror” see Hagenloh, “Socially Harmful Elements and the Great Terror”, pp. 286–308. On the further disenfranchisement of prostitutes, see Golfo Alexopoulos, *Stalin's Outcasts: Aliens, Citizens, and the Soviet State, 1926–1936* (Ithaca, 2003), pp. 62–63.
- 12 On the discourse of full employment see David L. Hoffmann, *Cultivating the Masses: Modern State Practices and Soviet Socialism, 1914–1939* (Ithaca, 2011), pp. 56–57.
- 13 For police accusations that “professional prostitutes” had emerged as women who sold sex out of deviance not poverty, see State Archive of the Russian Federation [hereafter GARF], Fond A390, Opis' 21, Dela 1, “Narkomtrud. Komissiia po izucheniiu i ulucheniiu zhenskogo truda: Materialy o bor'be s prostitutsiei”, 1923–1928, L54; GARF, Fond 393, Opis' 43, Dela 12, 1922, “Proekty postanovleniia Sovnarkoma RSFSR i proekt polozheniia administrativnogo vozdeistviia po bor'be s prostitutsiei, protokoly zasedanii mezhdudomstvennoi komissii ot 27 fevralia 1922, i perezpiska s Glavnym upravleniem militsii

professional prostitute enabled the Soviet authorities to demonize women who sold sex as social parasites while continuing to insist that the primary cause of prostitution was economic want. Police repression of prostitution continued from the late 1920s throughout the Soviet period. Despite this, selling sex was not actually prohibited again until 1987, when it became an administrative offence during the moral regeneration campaigns that accompanied *glasnost*.¹⁴ In contemporary Russia, prostitution is an administrative but not a criminal offence, and thus operates in a liminal space between censure and sanction.¹⁵ Throughout the 1990s in particular it came to be seen as an especially visible sign of the sexual anarchy and social breakdown that accompanied the transition to capitalism.¹⁶

From this sketch, we can see that the legal and social definitions of prostitution shifted over time from those constructing it as a moral crime or crime against God (pre-1649 Muscovy), to that of a crime of against secular public and military order (under Peter the Great in particular), and to that of a threat to public health (under the system of regulation, 1843–1917). In the Soviet period it became a vestige of the inequality of the past and a sign of “social parasitism”, and finally a somewhat tolerated “perversion” that symbolized the confusion of the post-Soviet period. These categorizations were not, of course, clear-cut, particularly in the overlapping of moral and religious disapproval and the need for public order. The vestiges of pre-1649 ecclesiastical censure can be seen, for example, in the 1736 declaration against secret brothels by the governing senate, which stated that “many debauched women and girls can be

NKVD RSFSR”, l. 46; GARF, Fond r-393, Opis’ 43, Delo 14, 1923–1924, “Postanovleniia VTsIK s Sovnarkoma RSFSR, instruksii i perezpiska s VTsIK i VSNKk ob okhrane morskikh predosteregatel’nykh znakov, merakh bor’by s prostitutsiei i po drugim voprosam”, ll.48–48(ob).

- 14 Elizabeth Waters, “Restructuring the Woman Question: Prostitution and Perestroika”, *Feminist Review*, 33 (1989), pp. 3–19, 12.
- 15 Engaging in prostitution is administratively prohibited under article 6.11 of the Administrative Offences Code of the Russian Federation (*Kodeks Rossiiskoi Federatsii ob administrativnykh pravonarusheniakh*) and punishable by a small fine. “Federalnyi Zakon ot 22 iyunia 2007 g. N. 116-FZ,” *Sobranie zakonodatel’stva Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, No. 26, 2007, p. 3089. Enticing another person into prostitution, or organising the prostitution of others, is a criminal offence punishable by a jail term, as per articles 240 and 241 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (*Ugolovnyi Kodeks Rossiiskoi Federatsii*). “Federalnyi zakon Rossiiskoi Federatsii ot 8 dek. 2003 N.162-FZ,” *Sobranie Zakonodatel’stva Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, No. 50, 2003, p. 4848.
- 16 For a detailed discussion of the images of prostitution in Russia in the 1990s, see Eliot Borenstein, *Overkill: Sex and Violence in Contemporary Russian Popular Culture* (Ithaca, 2008), especially the chapter “Pimping the Motherland”, pp. 77–97.

found in charitable homes, which is indeed against pious Christian law.¹⁷ Furthermore, the legal definition of a “prostitute” was often unclear, with vague references to fornication (1649 Law Code), whoring (1716 Military Statutes), public women (nineteenth century regulations) and social parasites (Soviet declarations). Throughout all of this, however, context demonstrates that there were some features that these categories had in common. With the exception of the pre-1649 ecclesiastical laws, all legal and administrative mention of prostitution made reference to commercial sex or the exchange of money, and the law recognized such actions as a separate crime from adultery more broadly (albeit many social commentators did not differentiate so starkly between women who sold sex and any women who had sex outside marriage). The nineteenth-century statute defined prostitutes through the language of “trade”, referring to them as “women who traded in vice” and who “made debauchery into a trade.”¹⁸ Prostitutes could be women of any age, but under the nineteenth-century regulations, one could only be a “public woman” registered with the police if above the age of 16 (18 after 1903).¹⁹

The Great Soviet Encyclopaedia (GSE) provides a good source for thinking about shifts in the semi-official definition of prostitution in the twentieth century. The first entry on prostitution, from 1940, declares that prostitution constituted “the offering of one’s body in exchange for money, in order to satisfy sexual desires.”²⁰ The longest entry on prostitution of any edition of the GSE, the 1940 text unsurprisingly links prostitution to poverty (referencing Engels’ *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*) as well as vagrancy, before stating that neither of these exists in the Soviet Union. The 1955 edition of the GSE ties the definition of prostitution even more tightly to conditions of material need, defining it as “the sale of one’s body, usually by a woman, in order to make a living.”²¹ It is interesting to note the inclusion of the qualifier

17 Cited in entry “Prostitutsiia”, in *Entsiklopedicheskii Slovar’ Brokgauz i Efron* (St. Petersburg, 1899), available at: <http://www.vehi.net/brokgauz/index.html>; last accessed 10 July 2017.

18 Barbara Alpern Engel, “St. Petersburg Prostitutes in the Late Nineteenth Century: A Personal and Social Profile”, *Russian Review*, 48 (1989), pp. 21–44, 23.

19 “Polozhenie ob organizatsii gorodskoi prostitutsii v Imperii” (Tsirkuliar Ministerstva Vnutrennikh Del po Departamentu Meditsiny, 8-go Oktiabr 1903) published in *Alfavitnyi Sbornik raspriazhenii po S-Peterburgskomu gradonacha’stvu i politsii, izvlechennykh iz prikazov za vremia s 1902 g. po 10 Iiulia 1904* (St. Petersburg, 1904), pp. 291–301.

20 *Bolshaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia* (pod redaktsii N.I. Bukharina i Glavnyi Redaktor O.Iu. Schmidt), 65 vols (Moscow, 1926–1947), XLVII, p. 330.

21 *Bolshaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, 51 vols (1949–1958), XXXV, p. 100.

“usually by a woman”, one of the very few acknowledgments in imperial or Soviet discourse that men could theoretically also be prostitutes. This post-World War II entry also claimed that by eliminating the social conditions that led to prostitution, the Soviet Union and all “socialist democracies” had liquidated prostitution. Finally, the 1975 edition of the GSE provided the shortest and most perfunctory definition of prostitution of all, describing it as “a type of socially-deviant behaviour.”²² The entry repeated the assertion that prostitution did not exist in the Soviet Union, despite considerable evidence to the contrary (discussed below).

The Labour Market for Prostitution

The first reliable data we have on the labour market for prostitution comes from the mid-nineteenth century, when both the increasing reliance of professionals on statistical measures and the interest of the state in controlling prostitution in part through knowledge of it sparked a number of investigations of the brothel system in both St. Petersburg and Moscow. Under the nineteenth-century regulation of prostitution, brothels were legal if registered, although only women could run them (thus technically excluding men from the possibility of making money from the sexual labour of women). Other than brothel prostitution, women who wished to sell sex could also be registered as “street” prostitutes, which meant that they lived individually and solicited for clients in public rather than through a brothel.

According to an extensive 1889 census of registered prostitution across the empire, the division of labour between brothel prostitutes and “street” prostitutes was strikingly different between St. Petersburg and Moscow. In the former city, of 2,232 registered prostitutes, 584 (26 per cent) were brothel prostitutes, while 1,649 (74 per cent) were street prostitutes.²³ In Moscow, conversely, of 1,068 registered prostitutes in 1889 (less than half the number in St. Petersburg), 924 (86.5 per cent) were brothel prostitutes and only 144 (13.5 per cent) were street prostitutes.²⁴ This suggests that, at least in the waning decades of the nineteenth century, the brothel system was considerably more developed

22 *Bolshaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia* (glav. redaktor A.M. Prohkorov), 31 vols (Moscow, 1970–1981), XXI, p. 114.

23 A. Dubrovskii (ed.), *Statistika Rossiiskoi Imperii, Tom XIII: Prostitutsiia* (St. Petersburg, 1889), pp. 16–17.

24 *Ibid.*, pp. 10–11.

in Moscow than in St. Petersburg, whereas the geography of legal commercial sex in the latter unfolded far more publicly (in the streets, taverns, and courtyards frequented by street prostitutes) than in the former. Furthermore, the registered prostitute population of Moscow was less than 50 per cent of that in St. Petersburg. While St. Petersburg was indeed a larger city than Moscow in this period, the difference was not immense; in 1897 the capital had a population of 1,132,677 while Moscow had a population of 988,614.²⁵

These figures are open, of course, to various interpretations. One is that the market for commercial sex was greater in the imperial capital, potentially because of a higher number of single men moving to the centre of power for employment. However, when we look at the gender breakdown of the cities, we find that in fact it was Moscow that had the higher ratio of male to female population (56.7 per cent male compared to 46.3 per cent female) in this period, as opposed St. Petersburg (which was 54.5 per cent male to 45.5 per cent female).²⁶ Perhaps a more plausible explanation comes from the structure of regulation in St. Petersburg. The urban regulation of prostitution in the Russian empire was mandated by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, but the structure of regulation itself was left up to local authorities to determine. In some cases, regulation was managed by a particular Medical-Police Committee, which was a combined force of police and civilian medical practitioners (this was the case in St. Petersburg). In others, it was managed under the aegis of the local Sanitary Commission or similar organization charged with the general upkeep of hygiene and sanitation methods in the city, which acted independently of the police.²⁷ In still other cities, regulation was subsumed under the general work of the police in carrying out surveillance of the population.²⁸ As this typology shows, the goals and means of the various bodies managing prostitution in urban centres across the Empire could vary greatly. This in turn could influence the availability for brothel work in particular cities, for example in St. Petersburg where we see it was rare for a registered prostitute to work at a brothel.

At the brothels in both Moscow and St. Petersburg there was considerable stratification, which influenced the availability and types of sexual labour performed by women. For Moscow, Dubrovskii's 1889 census reports that the cost

25 Tsentral'nyi Statisticheskii Komitet MVD, *Pervaia Vseobshchaia Perepis' Naselenii Rossiiskoi Imperii 1897*, Tom 2 (St. Petersburg, 1897), pp. 13, 18.

26 *Ibid.*

27 Iliukhov, *Prostitutsiia v Rossii s XVIII veka do 1917 goda*, p. 45.

28 For a thorough description of the various legal forms regulation could take in Russian cities, see *Vrachebno-Politseiskii Nadzor za Gorodskoi Prostitutsiei* (St. Petersburg, 1910).

for a visit at the highest category of brothels (which employed 110 prostitutes in all) was 5 rubles, while a whole night was 10. In the middle tier of brothels, which employed 304 prostitutes, he recorded a price of 1–2 rubles per visit and 2–6 rubles for a night, while in the lowest tier, employing 537 prostitutes, a visit was 20–50 kopecks (a ruble was 100 kopecks) and a night was 50 kopecks to 2 rubles.²⁹ Thus we can see that by far the majority of women worked in the “lowest” type of brothel, suggesting that the majority of clients had little money to spend and probably came from the working class of the city. In St. Petersburg, which, as I have noted above, had a far smaller proportion of brothel prostitutes than Moscow, the highest tier of houses charged 3–5 rubles a visit and 5–15 rubles a night, employing eighty-two women. The medium tier charged 1–2 rubles a visit and 2–5 rubles a night, with 262 prostitutes, and the lowest tier charged 30–50 kopecks a visit and 1–2 rubles a night, with 435 prostitutes.³⁰ Once again, we can see that the lowest tier of houses held the largest number of registered prostitutes. We also see that the percentage of brothel prostitutes in the “lowest” houses is fairly constant between Moscow and St. Petersburg; in both cities it is between 55.8 and 56.5 per cent of all registered brothel prostitutes.

In analysing the above data, it is worth repeating the caveat that, even by imperial statisticians’ own admission, only a small number of women selling sex registered with the police as legal prostitutes (*prostitutki*). Furthermore, the statistics are open to the critiques of underreporting and inaccuracies that plague all attempts to collect data, particularly in the context of quasi-legality

29 Dubrovskii, *Statistika*, pp. 4–5. It is important to note that the historic value of the ruble is notoriously difficult to pin down, particularly as there were three rubles in circulation in the nineteenth century: the gold ruble, the silver ruble, and the *assignat* (credit ruble). Dubrovskii’s statistics do not identify to which ruble he refers; however, by the last half of the nineteenth century the credit ruble was in the ascendant, and the most reasonable assumption would be that this was the relevant currency. See Thomas Owen, “A Standard Ruble of Account for Russian Business History, 1769–1914: A Note”, *Journal of Economic History*, 49 (1989), pp. 699–706. See also the discussion on the problem of the ruble’s value in Tracy Dennison, *The Institutional Framework of Russian Serfdom* (Cambridge, U.K., 2014), pp. xv–xvi. Although such flaws in the data make it difficult to delineate the purchasing power of the ruble in this period, we can compare these prices to, for example, the average wages for a female factory worker. In the 1890s, this rose to between twelve and thirteen rubles per month, considerably higher than it had been in the previous decade. See Barbara Alpern Engel, *Between the Fields and the City: Women, Work and Family, 1861–1914* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 108.

30 Dubrovskii, *Statistika*, pp. 4–5.

and clandestinity that pervaded sex work in the imperial period. Nonetheless, they are able to hint at least to the state's perception of the labour market for prostitution at this time; furthermore, the fact that they were collected at all highlights the increasing scrutiny with which social scientists and bureaucrats viewed prostitution in this era.

Prostitutes' Social Profiles

Once again, there is very little information on prostitutes' social profiles in Moscow and St. Petersburg before the late nineteenth century. The information for that period, however, is quite extensive (this is particularly true for St. Petersburg). The imperial Russian state generally categorized its subjects by "estate" (*soslovie*) and confession. In 1888, Aleksandr Fedorov, a doctor and member of the Medical-Police Committee, surveyed 2,915 registered prostitutes in St. Petersburg. Of these, 49 per cent belonged to the peasant estate, 35 per cent were born townspeople (*meshchanki*), and 12 per cent were soldier's wives, or *soldatki*.³¹ Although the smallest number by proportion, *soldatki* were perceived as particularly susceptible to prostitution, representing as they did the wives of absent conscripts. As Beatrice Farnsworth has noted, the *soldatka* was "stereotyped as abused, neglected, and without resources, [and] seen as a loose woman who drank and the bearer of illegitimate children."³² As such, she represented the paradigmatic prostitute for many contemporary observers, despite being outnumbered by her peasant and urban dwelling sisters. This reputation was apparent even before the advent of nineteenth-century attempts to quantify it; Barbara Alpern Engel states that in the eighteenth century, "enough women turned to prostitution as a temporary or a permanent expedient that soldier's wives obtained an unsavoury reputation."³³

The state regulation of prostitution facilitated information collection on prostitutes' social profiles; once it was deregulated in 1917 and declared "liquidated" in the early 1930s, there was once again very little information collected on the backgrounds of people who sold sex. Historians who have considered Soviet prostitution have suggested that, in the early years of the new regime, urban women and many "former" elite women (that is, women from

31 Bernstein, *Sonia's Daughters*, p. 95.

32 Beatrice Farnsworth, "The Soldatka: Folklore and Court Record", *Slavic Review*, 49 (1990), pp. 58–73.

33 Barbara Alpern Engel, *Women in Russia: 1700–2000* (Cambridge, MA, 2004) p. 62.

the former aristocratic and middle classes now deprived of most rights and privileges) turned to casual prostitution in Moscow and St. Petersburg in the 1920s.³⁴ High unemployment in the period also fed into a perceived growth in urban prostitution.³⁵ From the mid-1930s, prostitution was officially declared eradicated in the Soviet Union, and historians have not yet thoroughly investigated the newly-available archival records of the police units and administrative courts to potentially correct this view. Prostitutes do occasionally appear in the historical record in the period between the 1930s and the opening up of the Soviet Union under perestroika. One example is in memoirs of the Gulags, where women sometimes turned to prostitution in an attempt to leverage better conditions or food. Further, as prostitution had itself become a forbidden activity (through claims of its impossibility), some women were purportedly sent to camps as punishment for commercial sex, a practice many continued in the Gulag.³⁶

In the late 1980s, in the resurgence of interest in prostitution that came with perestroika, newspapers in Moscow began printing descriptions of the social makeup of “women of loose morals” who had been identified by the police. Although these were by no means scientific statistical studies, they do provide a picture of the evolving ways in which Russians were reconsidering the possibility of commercial sex in their midst. The women purportedly fell into two distinct groups: those with existing connections to the criminal underworld whose activities were part of a general conglomeration of “anti-Soviet” activities, and homeless women or *bomzhi*, many of whom lived in railway stations and sold sex in return for food or clothing.³⁷ This picture contrasted with that which developed around prostitution in the port cities, especially St. Petersburg. There, prostitution was very much associated with women who went to bars and restaurants known to be frequented by foreigners, and who very explicitly sold sex for hard international currency.³⁸ The press described

34 Dan Healy, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia: The Regulation of Sexual and Gender Dissent* (Chicago, 2001), p. 54.

35 Leбина and Shkarovskii, *Prostitutsiia v Peterburge (40gg XIX v–40gg XXv)* (Moscow, 1994).

36 Prostitution is mentioned briefly, for example, in volume two of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*, where he recalls prostitutes who were sent to Solovki for three years continuing to sell sex in return for small amounts of money or gifts from Red Army guards. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago: Volume 2* (New York, 2007), pp. 66–67. See also the brief mention in Wilson Bell, “Sex, Pregnancy and Power in the Late Stalinist Gulag”, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 24 (2015), pp. 198–224, 215.

37 Waters, “Prostitution and Perestroika”, p. 6.

38 *Ibid.*, pp. 3–19.

the world of foreign-currency prostitutes in terms of glamour, high fashion, and the promise of international travel, a theme that was the subject of one of the most successful (and controversial) Soviet films of the 1980s, *Interdevochka* (Inter-Girl). *Interdevochka* tells the story of Tatiana, a beautiful, kind and plucky nurse who by night sells sex to foreign men in fancy hotels. At the beginning of the film, Tatiana is planning to leave St. Petersburg (then Leningrad) with a client-turned-lover, to marry him in Sweden. However, before she is able to leave, friends and family find out about her work, and after she goes to Sweden her mother commits suicide out of shame. *Interdevochka* highlights the paradox of the perestroika approach to sex work. On the one hand, in an era in which foreign currency was everything, it could be a woman's path out of a crumbling state; on the other, its fundamental moral ambivalence ensured that no good could come of it, even for the most well-meaning such as Tatiana.

Researchers examining prostitution in contemporary Moscow have found that the social stratification that seemed to emerge among prostitutes in the 1980s has largely carried over into the post-Soviet period. The most prestigious sex work is still done in hotels, serving a largely foreign (or very wealthy Russian) clientele. A study in 2003 found that hotel prostitutes were charging between US\$50 and US\$200 per client in the city.³⁹ Falling just under this were brothel, massage parlour, and sauna sex workers (US\$26–US\$150 per client), then street sex workers (\$50–\$100 per client), and truck stop sex workers (US\$4–US\$6 per client). As in the late Soviet period, the “lowest” rung on the sex worker hierarchy was that of the *bomzhi*, or the railway station sex workers, who charged anything from a crust of bread to US\$6 per client.⁴⁰ It is clear that there is a precipitous drop between even street sex workers, many of whom solicit by the highways in the city and on the way out to the airport, and the sex workers who operate at the train stations and roadside houses of the region.

Religious, Racial and Ethnic Backgrounds

The religious, racial and ethnic backgrounds of Russian prostitutes differed significantly between St. Petersburg, located on the far-western edge of the empire, and Moscow, considered to be in the Russian heartland. Regarding the pre-nineteenth century situation, historian Alexander Kamenskii states that

39 Segvi Aral *et al.*, “The Social Organization of Commercial Sex Work in Moscow, Russia”, *Sexually Transmitted Diseases*, 30 (2003), pp. 39–45, 40.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 40.

foreigners (*inostrantsy*) made up the majority of prostitutes in St. Petersburg in the eighteenth century, although he does not provide an archival source to back this up.⁴¹ Whether or not this was the case, by the mid- and late-nineteenth century the picture was very different. Fedorov's 1888 study of registered prostitutes in St. Petersburg found that of the 2,915 women studied, 87 per cent were of Russian ethnicity, 9 per cent were Russian subjects but of a different nationality or ethnicity (such as Poles, Finns, Latvians and Jews), and 4 per cent were foreign subjects.⁴² It is important to note that the fact that these statistics only pertained to *registered* prostitutes is particularly pertinent in the case of ethnicity, as foreigners and even Russian subjects without permission to live in the city may have been particularly likely to avoid the police scrutiny that came with registering with the police and worked instead as clandestine prostitutes.

Dubrovskii's 1889 census of prostitutes in the Russian empire gave figures for the ethnic and religious background of prostitutes surveyed, but it did this by province (*guberniia*) rather than city. However, in both Moscow province and St. Petersburg province, the titular cities had by far the largest number of registered prostitutes in the region, which means we can draw some conclusions, albeit imperfect ones, from the data. In Moscow province, 97 per cent of brothel prostitutes resided in the city of Moscow. 87 per cent (1,009) of these women were classified as being of Russian "ethnicity" by the imperial state, while 6 per cent (71) were German, 5.5 per cent (65) were Polish, 0.5 per cent (5) were Jewish, and 0.4 per cent (4) were Latvian. Also there was one Swede, one Estonian, and one black woman (*negritianka*) registered as prostitutes.⁴³ In St. Petersburg province, a slightly lower proportion of registered prostitutes in the region resided in the city itself; most of the remainder resided in Kronstadt, a small town just nineteen miles west of St. Petersburg that was historically the home of the Russian admiralty and the base of the Baltic Fleet. In St. Petersburg province, the prostitute population was slightly more ethnically diverse, with 84 per cent (2,186) of surveyed prostitutes categorized as ethnically Russian, 4.6 per cent (121) German, 3.4 per cent (89) Finnish, 2.5 per cent (66) Estonian, 2 per cent (56) Polish, 0.6 per cent (17) Jewish, 0.5 per cent (13) Swedish, and small numbers of women of Hungarian (3), Greek (5), Romanian (1), Czech (3) French (6) and Lithuanian (1) nationality.⁴⁴ In both cities, women

41 Alexander Kamenskii, "Mikroistoriia: Deviantnoe Povedenie v Russkom Gorode xviii v", in *Odissei: Chelovek v Istorii* (Moscow, 2005), p. 377.

42 Bernstein, *Sonia's Daughters*, p. 97.

43 Dubrovskii, *Statistika*, pp. 24, 28.

44 *Ibid.*, pp. 25, 29.

who were neither Russian nor one of the main minorities (Polish or German) were considerably more likely to be “street” prostitutes working on their own, rather than brothel prostitutes.⁴⁵

In terms of religion, the vast majority of registered prostitutes in both St. Petersburg and Moscow in the nineteenth century were Russian Orthodox, with Protestant and Roman Catholic distantly behind in terms of numbers. According to Dubrovskii, of the total number of brothel prostitutes in Moscow province, 87 per cent were Russian Orthodox, 9 per cent were Roman Catholic, 3.5 per cent were Protestant, and just one was Jewish.⁴⁶ Of the total number of street prostitutes in Moscow province, 87 per cent were Russian Orthodox, 3 per cent were Roman Catholic, 9 per cent were Protestant, one was Jewish, one was Muslim and one was an Old Believer (a member of a schismatic branch of Orthodoxy that adhered to pre-1666 liturgical practices).⁴⁷

Of the brothel prostitutes in the St. Petersburg province, 83.5 per cent were Russian Orthodox, 13 per cent were Protestant, and 3.5 per cent were Roman Catholic.⁴⁸ As for street prostitutes, 86 per cent were Russian Orthodox, 10 per cent were Protestant, 3 per cent were Roman Catholic, 0.5 per cent were Jewish, and one was an Old Believer.⁴⁹ Thus, comparing the two regions, the primary substantive difference was the higher number of Protestant prostitutes in St. Petersburg, unsurprising given the proximity of the region to the predominantly Lutheran Baltic provinces and Finland. The proportion of Russian Orthodox prostitutes stayed relatively constant across the two regions (around 83–87 per cent). St. Petersburg had the highest proportion of Jewish prostitutes, but at 0.5 per cent this was still an infinitesimal number compared to other confessions (it is important to remember that in this period most Jewish subjects of the Tsar were confined to residence in the Pale of Settlement, the region covering roughly what is today Belarus, Eastern Poland and Central Ukraine).

Once again, for the Soviet period, the dearth of statistical information makes it difficult to draw conclusions about the ethnic and religious makeup of prostitutes. One important thing to note is that if, as stated above, we take the conclusion that in the 1920s many urban and “former” (disenfranchised) women turned to prostitution, this would suggest that the percentage of prostitutes

45 *Ibid.*, pp. 24–25, 28–29.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

in the two cities of Russian ethnicity would have increased if it changed at all. The Soviet state, officially a (militantly) atheist one, no longer collected information on the religious backgrounds of its citizens, which were supposedly non-existent.

In contemporary Moscow, the ethnic stratification of prostitution appears to map closely onto the hierarchy within sex work itself. According to ethnographic research from the 1990s and early 2000s, the highest-class (hotel) prostitutes tend to be ethnically Russian (the most privileged ethnic group generally) while the lowest rung, the *bomzhi* in the rail stations and truck stops, are usually non-Muscovites and often non-Russian migrants from former Soviet states.⁵⁰

Employment Prior or Parallel to Prostitution

The most common path to prostitution in the nineteenth century was by way of domestic service. According to Dubrovskii's 1889 census of prostitutes, 46 per cent of women surveyed stated that they were in domestic service prior to prostitution.⁵¹ Citing the domestic servant's lack of protection in late imperial society, the historian David Ransel has said that "the female domestic often lived in a kind of personal bondage" in the period, and "frequently her position was far from secure and subject to great abuse."⁵² The precariousness and often misery of a domestic servant's employment conditions would thus help to explain the frequency with which women often left domestic service and entered prostitution. Writing in 1927, the doctor V.M. Bronner and jurist A.I. Elistratov claimed on the basis of the 1897 All-Russian census that, in that year, 6 per cent of domestic servants became prostitutes (compared with 4.6 per cent of needle workers and 1 per cent of factory workers).⁵³

The second most common employment background for women working as prostitutes was the needle trades, which despite requiring considerable skill and years of experience, paid barely subsistence wages (women made 64 per cent of what men did in these trades).⁵⁴ Further undermining women's ability to make a living in this line of work was its seasonal nature; usually, it involved

50 Aral, "The Social Organization", p. 40.

51 Dubrovskii, *Statistika*, pp. 74–75.

52 David Ransel, "Problems in Measuring Illegitimacy in Pre-revolutionary Russia", *Journal of Social History*, 16 (1982), pp. 111–123, 123.

53 Iliukhov, *Prostitutsiia*, p. 400.

54 Engel, "St. Petersburg Prostitutes", p. 30.

four to five months of work a year, and was not able to support women who had moved permanently from their village to the city.⁵⁵ Finally, the third largest group of prostitutes were former factory workers, comprising 6.4 per cent of prostitutes according to Dubrovskii. As Barbara Alpern Engel has noted, this group was the only one in which their proportion among prostitutes was smaller than their proportion in the female workforce as a whole (around 20 per cent in 1890).⁵⁶ Arguably, this suggests that even as factory work involved long hours and often poor pay (particularly when compared to men) the work was stable enough to keep most female employees out of sex work. However, there was always a large oversupply of female migrants to the city looking for factory employment relative to the number of jobs available. The ranks of St. Petersburg and Moscow prostitutes likely contained a large number of women who were aspiring, but had never been actual, factory workers.

Family Situation

Nineteenth-century studies suggested that many registered prostitutes were full or half orphans; according to Dubrovskii's 1889 study, fewer than 4 per cent of prostitutes reported that both their parents were still living.⁵⁷ Historian Laurie Bernstein reports that disrupted family backgrounds were the most distinguishing characteristic of prostitutes in nineteenth-century Russia, with many telling social workers and journalists about parents who beat them or relatives who drove them out of the home.⁵⁸ This model of family crisis as a driver of prostitution was also reflected in the rise of concerns about child prostitution, particularly after 1905. Concern about sex work among vagrant and homeless juveniles contributed to the notion that many who ended up prostitutes came from broken homes and financially unstable backgrounds.⁵⁹

Dubrovskii also gives us figures on the percentage of prostitutes who were married, widowed or divorced at the time of the 1889 survey. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the vast majority of prostitutes were unmarried. In Moscow province, 91 per cent of brothel prostitutes were unmarried, 7 per cent were married,

55 *Ibid.*

56 *Ibid.*

57 Dubrovskii, *Statistika*.

58 Bernstein, *Sonia's Daughters*, p. 101.

59 See for example M.K. Mukalov, *Deti Ulitsy: Maloletnie Prostitutki* (St Petersburg, 1906), as well as discussions in Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness*, pp. 291–298, and Bernstein, *Sonia's Daughters*, pp. 42–46.

2 per cent were widowed and 0.3 per cent were divorced.⁶⁰ In terms of street prostitutes in Moscow, 77 per cent were unmarried, 13 per cent were married, 7 per cent were widowed and 3 per cent were divorced.⁶¹ In St. Petersburg province, 95 per cent of brothel prostitutes were unmarried, 3 per cent were married, 1.5 per cent were widowed and 0.4 per cent were divorced.⁶² Among street prostitutes, 90 per cent were unmarried, 6 per cent were married, 3.4 per cent were widows, and 0.7 per cent were divorced (see Table 6.1).⁶³

A preoccupation with the spectre of child prostitution continued into the early Soviet period, when official discussions of the problem of prostitution was frequently yoked together with discussion of child homelessness (*bezprizornost'*) and poverty (*nishchenstvo*). In the chaotic years of the revolution and civil war, and the ensuing famine of the early 1920s, observers claimed that homeless orphans were flooding the streets of the capital (then Moscow) in particular. Commentators claimed that the number of child prostitutes had increased twenty-fold.⁶⁴ In 1920, a survey of 5,300 street girls indicated that 88 per cent of them had engaged in prostitution, supporting the fears of those who saw in the increased child homelessness of the period a direct increase in child prostitution.⁶⁵

TABLE 6.1 *Marital status of prostitutes in St. Petersburg and Moscow, 1889.*⁶⁶

Brothel	Married	Un-Married	Widow	Divorced
Moscow	66 (6.9%)	871 (91.2%)	15 (1.6%)	3 (0.3%)
St. Petersburg	20 (2.7%)	695 (95.3%)	11 (1.5%)	3 (0.4%)
Street	Married	Un-Married	Widow	Divorced
Moscow	25 (13.4%)	143 (76.9%)	13 (7.0%)	5 (2.7%)
St. Petersburg	110 (5.9%)	1670 (89.9%)	64 (3.4%)	13 (0.7%)

"Street" denotes *odinochki* or women registered individually.

60 Dubrovskii, *Statistika*, pp. 40–41.

61 *Ibid.*, pp. 44–45.

62 *Ibid.*, pp. 40–41.

63 *Ibid.*, pp. 44–45.

64 Alan Ball, *And Now My Soul is Hardened: Abandoned Children in Soviet Russia, 1918–1930* (Berkeley, 1994), p. 57.

65 *Ibid.*

66 *Ibid.*, pp. 40–41, 44–45.

Age Structure

Although we lack any quantitative data on the ages of prostitutes in Moscow and St. Petersburg in the eighteenth century, we do know that the image of a very young woman with an older man was a popular trope signalling prostitution in the woodcut prints (*lubki*) of the period.⁶⁷

Dubrovskii's 1889 survey suggests that, despite the above-mentioned fears of the prevalence of child prostitution, in the late nineteenth century the median age of (registered) prostitutes was well into adulthood. In Moscow, the median age of brothel prostitutes was 23, while that of street prostitutes was slightly lower at 22.⁶⁸ In St. Petersburg, the median age of registered prostitutes was noticeably higher, at 25 for brothel prostitutes and 24 for street prostitutes.⁶⁹ Both of these figures suggest that, contrary to popular opinion, the majority of registered prostitutes at the time were not under the age of sexual consent (between 18 and 21 in nineteenth-century Russia). Nonetheless, it is important to note that this excludes all clandestine prostitutes; furthermore, women and girls may well have been over-reporting their age in order to be able to legally sell sex. In 1903 the Ministry of Internal Affairs published a circular forbidding any Medical-Police Committees from registering a woman under the age of 18, which does suggest that prior to that moment this had been an acceptable practice.⁷⁰

An important factor in the length of time that registered women spent in prostitution was the fact of registration itself, as it was difficult to be taken off the list of prostitutes which the police kept ostensibly to protect public health. Formally, women had to die, enter a philanthropic shelter for reformed prostitutes, or marry to be taken off the list, a factor that could both inflate the numbers of women police believed to be in prostitution, and act as a disincentive for women to change professions in the first place. As Laurie Bernstein has pointed out, however, police records show that many women simply disappeared from registered prostitution, somehow evading inspection by starting new families or bribing officials for new documents, untainted by the shame of the yellow ticket. Despite police attempts to keep track of all those they had registered, in reality women frequently slipped through the cracks, highlighting

67 Dianne Eckland Farrell, "Popular Prints in the Cultural History of Eighteenth Century Russia" (Unpublished Ph.D., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1980), pp. 163–164.

68 Dubrovskii, *Statistika*, Part II, pp. 10–11.

69 *Ibid.*, pp. 16–17.

70 See "Polozhenie ob organizatsii gorodskoi prostitutsii v Imperii", Tsirkuliar Ministerstva Vnutrennikh Del po Departamenty Meditsiny, 8-go Oktiabr 1903, no. 1611, published in *Alfavitnyi Sbornik rasporiazhenii po S-Peterburgskomu gradonachal'stvu I politsii, izvlechennykh iz prikazov za vremia s. 1902 g. po 10 Iulia 1904* (St. Petersburg, 1904), pp. 291–301.

the “permeability of the trade of prostitution”, which was for many a temporary retreat from economic uncertainty or even starvation.⁷¹

Prostitutes’ Physical Health

Syphilis had been considered a major scourge since at least the eighteenth century, when Catherine the Great declared in her famous “Great Instruction” in 1767 that syphilis “spreads wide its mournful and destructive Effects in many of our Provinces. The utmost Care ought to be taken for the Health of the Citizens. It would be highly prudent, therefore, to stop the Progress of this Disease by the Laws.”⁷² It was also in her reign that the first hospital for the treatment of syphilis and other venereal diseases was founded exclusively for women on the Vyborg side of St. Petersburg, and the financial means for the hospital’s running came from the Empresses own finances.⁷³ The police in Moscow and St. Petersburg sponsored “private” homes for the treatment of syphilis starting in 1765, although these were primarily aimed at treating military personnel rather than prostitutes. Historian John T. Alexander has stated that the significance of syphilis for the development of public health policies in the eighteenth century was high, as Catherine’s concern about it encouraged the development of interventionist “medical police” methods for curing it.⁷⁴ This in turn can be seen as a precursor to the regulation of prostitution, ostensibly also designed to stop the spread of venereal diseases in the nineteenth century.

As noted above, a perceived prevalence of venereal diseases among prostitutes was the major motivating factor behind introducing regulation. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, prostitutes were consistently associated with disease and physical danger. Statistical studies of registered prostitutes in the late nineteenth century suggest the number of prostitutes with venereal diseases was reasonably high. According to Dubrovskii, in 1889, of 924 brothel prostitutes in Moscow city, 632 (68 per cent) currently had or had previously contracted syphilis and other venereal diseases, while 91 (63 per cent) of street prostitutes were in the same position.⁷⁵ In St. Petersburg, 497 (85 per cent) of brothel prostitutes had or had previously contracted venereal

71 Bernstein, *Sonia’s Daughters*, pp. 79–82.

72 Cited in John T. Alexander, “Catherine the Great and Public Health”, *Journal of the History of Medicine*, 36 (1981), pp. 185–204, 199.

73 A.A. Khitrovo, *Istoricheskii Ocherk i Meditsinskii Otchet’ Kliniki Kozhnykh i Venericheskikh Boleznei Imperatorskago Kazanskago Universiteta za 1899–1898 gody* (Kazan, 1902), p. 1.

74 Alexander, “Catherine the Great and Public Health”, pp. 185–204, 199.

75 Dubrovskii, *Statistika*, Part II, pp. 10–11.

diseases, while 1044 (63 per cent) of street prostitutes had.⁷⁶ The most at-risk group for the contraction of such diseases thus appears to have been brothel prostitutes in St. Petersburg, something that went counter to the claims of pro-regulationists such as Aleksandr Federov who saw street prostitutes as most likely to spread disease amongst the population.

In the early Soviet period, and despite the supposed reformulation of prostitutes as economic victims, sex workers continued to be seen as “the most valent visual image of the source of venereal disease” in public health propaganda.⁷⁷ Even up to the late 1920s, when prostitution was increasingly becoming a discouraged topic of discussion even among doctors, the primary journal for the study of venereal diseases, *Venerologiia i Dermatologiia*, was publishing articles about the high rates of venereal diseases among prostitutes.⁷⁸ From the 1930s onwards, however, the issue of venereal diseases among prostitutes disappeared from scientific study, as the official line of the Soviet government was that prostitution had been eradicated in Russia with the transition to communism.

In contemporary Russia, the prevalence of venereal diseases among prostitutes, particularly HIV and AIDS, has once again become a frequent topic of discussion among public health experts. A 2003 study found that venereal diseases, in particular syphilis, were especially common amongst the lowest strata of prostitutes in Moscow, the *bomzhi* who work in the railway stations and truck stops (a local clinic reported that 54 per cent of the sex workers they saw were infected with venereal diseases).⁷⁹ The authors of the study emphasized that the high rate of such diseases among *bomzhi* was due both to the higher number of sexual encounters they typically had and to a generally lower level of condom use, as well as the fact that they rarely used health services. This situation was compounded by the socially marginal position of many of these women, as they did not have legal residence permits for Moscow.⁸⁰

Push and Pull Factors

Urbanization and Industrialization

The growth of Russian cities occurred later than the traditional chronology of urbanization in Western Europe, although by the end of the nineteenth

76 *Ibid.*, pp. 16–17.

77 Frances Bernstein, “Envisioning Health in Revolutionary Russia: The Politics of Gender in Sexual-Enlightenment Posters of the 1920s”, *Russian Review*, 57 (1998), pp. 191–217, 202.

78 See for example O.N. Ostrovskii, “K voprosu o metodakh raboty v oblasti bor’by s prostitutsiei”, *Venerologiia i Dermatologiia*, 3 March 1927, pp. 265–269.

79 Aral, “The Social Organization”, p. 40.

80 *Ibid.*

century, migration from the fields to the city was in full swing. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Russian cities were primarily defined juridically according to their military, political, and cultural functions.⁸¹ Serfdom kept the vast majority of Russian peasants tied to the land, and hampered (although it did not completely prevent) outmigration to the cities. Indeed, prominent Russian social historian Boris Mironov has argued that the second half of the eighteenth century saw a considerable decline in urban populations, as many members of the urban estates (re)migrated to the countryside to work in agriculture.⁸² Moscow and St. Petersburg themselves constituted partial exceptions to this rule; movement to the two capitals for trade, business, or government service was facilitated by special rules which provided for temporary residence in the cities for people taking up employment.⁸³ However, the legal infrastructure of serfdom, according to which the majority of peasants could not change residence without their overlord's permission, largely made even travel to the capitals impossible for most subjects of the tsar.

The emancipation of the serfs in 1861 raised the hope that restrictions on peasant movements to the cities would be lifted, although this was not a promise on which the reform followed through quickly. Initially, the freed serfs were still tied to their land by crippling redemption payments and collective responsibility to the *mir* or village commune. However, the increased pull of job opportunities in rapidly industrializing Russian cities, not least of which were Moscow and St. Petersburg, encouraged an upsurge in temporary labour migration to the cities in the 1880s and '90s. In the mid-1890s, a series of reforms changed passport laws, easing travel restrictions and allowing individuals to move within the county (*uezd*) in which they lived without special permission for up to six months.⁸⁴ Finally, in 1906, the land reforms of Stolypin gave rural dwellers the right to change their places of residence.⁸⁵ By 1915, Moscow and St. Petersburg provinces were the two most urbanized in the country, with 75 per cent of St. Petersburg province's population living in cities, and 53 per cent of Moscow province's population being city-dwellers.⁸⁶

81 Boris Nikolaevich Mironov, *Russkii gorod v 1790–1860 gody: Demograficheskoe, sotsial'noe i ekonomicheskoe razvitiie* (Leningrad, 1990), pp. 16–17.

82 Mironov, *Russkii Gorod*.

83 Mervyn Matthews, *The Passport Society: Controlling Movement in Russia and the USSR* (Boulder, 1993), p. 6.

84 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

85 On the Stolypin reforms, see Abraham Ascher, *P.A. Stolypin: The Search for Stability in Late Imperial Russia* (Stanford, 2001).

86 Diane Koenker, "Urbanization and De-urbanization in the Russian Revolution and Civil War", *The Journal of Modern History*, 57 (1985), pp. 424–450, 429.

The high point of Russian urbanization and industrialization would come, however, in the Soviet period, particularly during the great transformation of Stalinism. Soviet authorities, like their imperial predecessors, were very concerned with preventing unauthorized movement to the cities. However, particularly after the collectivization of agriculture and the disenfranchisement of hundreds of thousands of peasant landowners (known as kulaks) in the late 1920s and early '30s, there seemed little that Soviet authorities could do to stem the movement of millions of Soviet citizens to urban areas in search of work.

Unsurprisingly, these social phenomena played an enormous role in structuring the growth, geography, and practices of prostitution in Moscow and St. Petersburg. As Barbara Alpern Engel has argued, the years between serf emancipation and the Russian revolution saw an unprecedented number of unattached women travel from the village to the city. Despite rapidly growing industry, the demand for jobs far outstripped the supply, and in need of cash many women turned to casual or even registered prostitution, or a more temporary exchange of sexual services for small amounts of money, food, or warm clothing.⁸⁷

Carried out in 1889, at the crest of a wave of migration to the cities that would continue almost unabated for the next five decades, Dubrovskii's census of Russia's prostitutes provides invaluable information about the effects of industrialization and urbanization on sex work in Moscow and St. Petersburg. His information shows that, for example, of 1,068 prostitutes registered in Moscow in 1889, only 293 were born in Moscow *guberniia*, and 730 were from other *guberniia* within Russia, while 45 were not Russian subjects.⁸⁸ In St. Petersburg, the difference was less striking if nonetheless significant; of 2,231 registered prostitutes in the city, 939 came from St. Petersburg province, 1,220 came from other provinces, and seventy-two were from outside the empire.⁸⁹ As we can see from this information, peasant women were moving to the major cities and working as prostitutes not only from the rural areas surrounding Moscow and St. Petersburg, but also from much farther afield. This was an important development particularly when we bear in mind the great distances that had to be travelled between provinces in the vast Russian Empire.

Proletarianization and Pauperization

As noted above, poverty brought on by unemployment and a sundering of ties to traditional networks of support led many women to prostitution in the late

87 Barbara Alpern Engel, *Between the Fields and the City: Women, Work and Family, 1861–1914* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 166.

88 Dubrovskii, *Statistika*, pp. 10–11.

89 *Ibid.*, pp. 16–17.

imperial period. A number of early twentieth-century commentators attributed the apparent surge in prostitution to the comparatively impoverished position of female workers. The secretary of a Moscow printer's union, Pavel Pavlov, told the First All-Russian Congress for the Struggle against the Trade in Women that women in the printing industry earned 40 per cent of the salaries of their male counterparts, a figure that was not unusual in other industries such as the important garment industry in the Moscow region.⁹⁰

Arguably, the influence of pauperization and proletarianization on the sexual economy was even greater in the early Soviet period, when the enormous upheavals of revolution, civil war, collectivization, and rapid industrialization produced an underclass of disenfranchised women who sold sex in order to survive. At first, during and immediately after the Civil War, many women (and men) left the cities, often starving for want of supplies cut off by war, and returned to the land where they could eke out a living. Thus for example, the population of St. Petersburg fell from 2.5 million in 1917 to only 700,000 in 1920.⁹¹ However, particularly with the beginning of collectivization and the first Five Year Plan in 1928, this situation was entirely reversed. The twin processes of collectivization of agriculture and "de-kulakization" (the confiscation of the land of "kulaks") left millions of people without the ability to sustain themselves on the land, and they flooded the cities. This in turn led to a major housing crisis, as the housing in both Moscow and St. Petersburg was nowhere near sufficient for the number of people trying to live in the cities.⁹² Although we do not have statistics on the residences or social profiles of prostitutes working in Moscow and St. Petersburg in the 1930s until the '80s, we can extrapolate from the historical evidence of the extreme social dislocation, unemployment, and homelessness of the Stalin years that the need to sell sex for money may have increased in this period. Further, some historians have suggested that the social changes of the Stalin period changed the urban geography of prostitution in the cities, as "the housing shortage and the decline in private control over sheltered urban spaces appeared to drive illicit heterosexual sex into the streets, railway stations and carriages, restaurants, bathhouses and taxicabs."⁹³

In the post-Soviet period, high rates of unemployment for women is a frequently cited factor for a perceived growth in sex work in both Moscow and

90 Bernstein, *Sonia's Daughters*, p. 113.

91 Koenker, "Urbanization and Deurbanization", p. 424. Moscow's population also fell, although not as dramatically, from 1,533,000 in 1910 to 1,028,000 in 1920.

92 Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times* (New York, 1999), pp. 46–53.

93 Healey, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia*, p. 54.

St. Petersburg. As in the imperial and Soviet periods, unemployment and female poverty in the cities are strongly linked to migration, both from less economically developed areas in Russia and from former Soviet countries. A 2005 study of prostitution in Moscow found that almost all sex workers in the city were not legal residents and therefore had very few opportunities to find other employment or gain access to government services, a fact that heavily influenced their likelihood to go into sex work.⁹⁴

War

In Russia, as in many other European states, the primary motivation for the regulation of prostitution between 1843 and 1917, and for much consternation and marginalization of it in other periods, was fear that diseased prostitutes would negatively impact the prowess of the state's military. It is no surprise that some of the first secular laws criminalizing prostitution in Russia were Peter the Great's "Military Articles", which directly linked their proscriptions on "whoring" to protection of Peter's beloved army. In the nineteenth century, many commentators worried that regulation of prostitution in urban centres, begun in 1843, was failing to properly protect itinerant soldiers, and ad hoc regulation was common in barrack towns and camps. According to local lore, the famous General Skobelev who led the Russians in the conquest of Turkestan created the first regimental brothels in Russia in the mid-nineteenth century, and the well-respected venerologist Veniamin Tarnovskii recommended this as an approach for all military units in the 1880s.⁹⁵ While mobile military brothels were never instituted as official policy, barrack towns usually regulated prostitution with a combination of civilian medical police committees (authorized by the Ministry of Internal Affairs) and military medics. Reflecting on the evolution of regulation in the Empire, an early twentieth-century observer credited the high concentration of local Medical-Police Committees on the western border to the similarly high concentration of military barracks on this heavily guarded frontier with the rest of Europe.⁹⁶

A key example of the desire to regulate prostitution more heavily around military barracks, as well as the role of the military in encouraging sexual

94 Julie A. Stachowiak *et al.*, "Health Risks and Power among Female Sex Workers in Moscow", *SIECUS Report*, 33 (2005), pp. 18–29, 23.

95 Iliukhov, *Prostitutsiia*, p. 310.

96 M.M. Borovitinov, speaking at the First All-Russian Congress on the Struggle Against the Trade in Women; see *Trudy pervogo vsrossiiskogo s'ezda po bor'be s torgom zhenshchinami i ego prichinami, proiskhodivshego v S-Peterburge s 21 po 25 apreliia 1910 goda* (St. Petersburg, 1912), p. 343.

commerce in its environs, is the case of Kronstadt. Founded in 1703, the same year as Petersburg itself, Kronstadt was entirely devoted to the maintenance of the navy. According to Dubrovskii's 1889 census, there were 219 registered prostitutes in Kronstadt, of whom 103 worked in brothels and 116 were street prostitutes.⁹⁷ This was in a period in which the overall population of Kronstadt was around 59,000, 70 per cent of which was male and only 30 per cent female.⁹⁸ Registered prostitutes made up 0.4 per cent of the city's population, and 1.19 per cent of its overall female population. This can be compared with Moscow, which had a population of around 980,000 in this period, and where the 1,068 registered prostitutes in 1889 thus made up 0.1 per cent of the overall urban population, and just 0.2 per cent of the overall female population.⁹⁹

Despite the heavy emphasis on registration around military barracks (and especially in times of war), nineteenth-century commentators noted the continued high rates of venereal diseases in the armed forces, a factor driving calls for even greater surveillance of women in military areas. In 1872, syphilis was the second most common illness in the army, with around 5 per cent of soldiers suffering from it, constituting 26.7 per cent of all cases of disease in the forces.¹⁰⁰ The effect of army service on the rates of syphilis could also be seen in the fact that the rates of venereal diseases among recruits on first joining the army were comparatively low; in 1879 just 0.63 per cent of recruits had any form of sexually transmitted disease (including syphilis, gonorrhoea, and cancrroids).¹⁰¹

In the Soviet period, protection of the army from venereal diseases continued to be a major concern. In the early years of the Russian Civil War, from 1919–1920, venereal diseases were a major cause of casualties, ranking alongside typhus and smallpox as the most deadly diseases on the front.¹⁰² It was in part for this reason that Soviet bureaucrats in the Commissariat of Health decided to set up prophylactoria for the treatment of venereal diseases in the 1920s, a system that then continued throughout the twentieth century, including during World War II. The motivations behind the prophylactoria were twofold: on the one hand, to protect civilians and military officers from

97 Dubrovskii, *Statistika*, Part II, pp. 16–17.

98 This information is based on the slightly later All-Russian Census of 1897. *Pervaia vseobshchaia perepis' naseleniia Rossiiskoi Imperii 1897* (St. Petersburg, 1897), p. 16.

99 Dubrovskii, *Statistika*, Part II, pp. 10–11.

100 Iliukhov, *Prostitutsiia*, p. 306.

101 *Ibid.*, p. 307.

102 Roger R. Reese, *The Soviet Military Experience: A History of the Soviet Army, 1917–1991* (London, 2002), p. 14.

contagion by informing them about appropriate ways to guard against venereal diseases, and on the other to treat and “re-educate” prostitutes as a measure to further insulate the population and especially the army against disease.¹⁰³ The fundamental importance of a strong and healthy army in the U.S.S.R., particularly during the Cold War, meant that the prophylactoria continued to play an important role well into the postwar era.

Prostitute/Employer/Client Relationships

Much of the historical data we have on prostitution in Moscow and St. Petersburg suggests that pimps and madams were a common and central part of the organization of sex work. Under regulation, brothels were legal if registered, and it was also legal to be a “madam” or *soderzhatel'nitsa*, whose job it was to manage the brothel and ensure proper adherence with the public health policies governing regulated prostitution. Madams had to be women (thus supposedly protecting prostitutes from exploitation by men) and different regulations across the nineteenth century stipulated minimum ages for madams, which were generally above 35.¹⁰⁴ Pimping, however, was never legal. Nonetheless, anecdotal evidence suggests it was common. Nineteenth-century descriptions of the Khitrov Market in Moscow, a notorious slum area and centre of the city's criminal underworld, abound with descriptions of the pimps (known as “cats” or “*koty*”) who supposedly ran the local sex trade, filling the taverns and doorways of the least salubrious corners of town.¹⁰⁵

In the Soviet period, both pimping and brothel-keeping were crimes. The 1922 Criminal Code listed pimping (or “bringing people together for prostitution”) a crime under Article 171, and brothel-keeping a crime under Article 172. Both crimes carried sentences of up to three years' imprisonment.¹⁰⁶ The prosecution of pimping and brothel-keeping was meant to ensure the eradication of prostitution without the persecution of prostitutes themselves, who were

103 On the Soviet *prophylactoria*, as both labour colony (for former prostitutes) and venereal dispensary, see Frances Bernstein, “Prostitutes and Proletarians: The Soviet Labor Colony as Revolutionary Laboratory”, in William Husband (ed.), *The Human Tradition in Modern Russia* (Lanham, 2000), pp. 113–128.

104 Joseph Bradley, *Muzhik and Muscovite: Urbanization in Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley, 1985), pp. 279–281.

105 *Ibid.*

106 Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, *The Criminal Code of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic* (London, 1922), p. 41.

assumed to have been economically coerced into their positions. However, the notion, common from the mid-1930s, that any sign of prostitution was a hold-over from supposedly liquidated capitalism, made prostitutes victims of administrative sanctions or criminal sanctions on vagrancy or begging (as per, for example, the 1970 Criminal Code which outlawed “Malicious Refusal to Carry Out a Decision to Take a Job”).¹⁰⁷

Studies suggest that a large number of contemporary prostitutes in Moscow and St. Petersburg work under pimps. Engaging in prostitution is not prohibited by the Russian Criminal Code, but it continues to be closely linked to other criminal activities (including drug trafficking). Estimates suggest that up to 80 per cent of Moscow’s prostitutes, for example, are street prostitutes, and many have close links to pimps who provide some measure of protection but also garnish a large amount of the women’s earnings.¹⁰⁸

Traces of Defiance

There is not a strong tradition of sex work collectives or unionization in either Moscow or St. Petersburg. In the late imperial period, there were few instances in the official record in which prostitutes, so long an object of analysis for bureaucrats, police, philanthropists, and social commentators, spoke back. One that stands out, however, occurred in 1910 when a group of sixty-three prostitutes signed a petition that they then sent to the First All-Russian Congress on the Struggle against the Trade in Women in St. Petersburg. The Russian Society for the Defense of Women had organized the Congress and, although it had invited a broad range of social activists involved in questions about prostitution (medical society representatives, government bureaucrats, university professors, feminists, temperance organizations, and delegates from district and municipal councils), it had not invited any actual sex workers.¹⁰⁹ In response, the group of sixty-three prostitutes wrote a petition, asking that the delegates at the congress consider the issue they thought most pertinent and pressing for sex workers themselves; namely, the lack of any health checks on men who were the clients of prostitutes. As the women pointed out, the entire burden of protection against venereal diseases was laid on the women themselves,

107 John Quigley, “The Dilemmas of Prostitution Law Reform: Lessons from the Soviet Russia Experience”, *American Criminal Law Review*, 29 (1991–1992), pp. 1197–1234, 1222.

108 Aral, “The Social Organization”, p. 40.

109 Robin Bisha, Jehanne M. Gheith, Chistin C. Holden, and William G. Wagner, *Russian Women, 1698–1917: Experience and Expression, an Anthology of Sources* (Bloomington, 2002), pp. 138–139.

and their own health was constantly placed at risk.¹¹⁰ As this petition demonstrates, sex workers in the period were aware of many of the public health and regulatory debates surrounding their profession, and were not afraid to voice their own position on the matter (albeit rarely).

In contemporary Russia, efforts to unionize have generally faced tough opposition by the government and legal authorities. Organizations such as the St. Petersburg group Silver Rose (*Serebrianaia Roza*) do exist, which seeks to (according to their website) “promote the development of state policy with regards to sex workers (*seks rabotniki*) on the basis of humanity, tolerance, the defence of health, dignity and human rights.”¹¹¹ However, such organizations are not officially recognized by the state. As recently as May 2013, Silver Rose made a request to register with the Ministry of Justice as an official NGO, and was denied on the basis that “sex worker” is not a recognized profession.¹¹² This decision is currently under appeal.

Prostitutes' Culture

Much of our image of prostitute culture comes from the records of brothel prostitutes from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as they are much more present in the historical record than either the criminalized women who preceded them or the street prostitutes of their own time. However, by extrapolating from this information we can make inferences about earlier or less legible sex workers as well. For example, we know from the data cited above as well as the structuring factor of urbanization that most prostitutes were new arrivals to St. Petersburg and Moscow, and they were peasant migrants from villages. Accordingly, many of the rituals associated with brothel life came from peasant folklore. For example, prostitutes and madams were said to invite

110 See “Prostitutes’ Petition”, translated by Laurie Bernstein, in *Ibid.*, pp. 139–140.

111 As per the “O nas” section of Silver Rose’s official website; available at: <http://www.silver-rose.org>; last accessed 10 July 2017.

112 The ongoing attempts to appeal this decision are recorded in the “Forum” of the website of the organization Silver Rose; available at: <http://www.silver-rose.org/?p=bbs&id=1&cmd=read&ms=642&page=1>; last accessed 10 July 2017. Silver Rose’s efforts have also been reported in tabloid newspapers such as *Komsomolskaia Pravda* and the website *Gazeta.ru*; see for example “Prostitutki khotiat svoi profsoiuz, a ikh pugaiut politsei”, *Komsomolskaia Pravda*, 9 June 2013; available at: <http://spb.kp.ru/daily/26089/2990464/>; last accessed 10 July 2017; “Net takoi professii: Sud otkazal prostitutkam v prave na professional’nye ob’edineniia i zashchitu”, *Gazeta.ru*, available at: <http://www.gazeta.ru/social/2013/12/24/5818081.shtml>; last accessed 10 July 2017.

seers and wise women to eject bad spirits from their establishments in order to attract more (and wealthier) clients.¹¹³

Commentators in the nineteenth century also claimed to perceive a strong tendency among brothel prostitutes to form same-sex relationships within the brothel. While sociologists and venerologists in Western Europe less commonly observed this, in Russia it appeared in the writings of physician Boris Benetov and gynaecologist Ippolit Tarnovskii.¹¹⁴ As Laura Engelstein has argued, in the hands of a sympathetic observer such as Tarnovskii, evidence of lesbianism in brothels could be used to challenge the supposed pathology of lesbian sex. Tarnovskii believed that it demonstrated disgust with men on the part of prostitutes, motivated by their experience of exploitation.¹¹⁵ The perception of lesbianism as particularly common among brothel prostitutes increased after 1905, when the image of the prostitute as victim was giving way to the notion of the prostitute as “sexually deviant”.¹¹⁶ Lesbianism among prostitutes also emerged as a popular motif in literary treatments of prostitution in Russia, as evidenced by Aleksandr Kuprin’s infamous 1915 novel about prostitution in an (unnamed) Russian port city, *Iama* (*The Pit*), and Sholem Asch’s classic Yiddish play *God of Vengeance* about a sexual relationship between the daughter of a pimp and one of his prostitutes in the Pale of Settlement.¹¹⁷

Society and Prostitutes

As noted above, prostitution went through a variety of legal frameworks in Moscow and St. Petersburg from 1600 to the present day. Throughout this period, but especially from 1843 with the dawn of regulation and continuing through the Soviet period (despite official denials that prostitution existed), the Russian state showed an abiding interest in careful control of commercial sex. In particular, the motivation for this attention was the protection of the military from venereal diseases, but also at times (especially in the Soviet

113 Bernstein, *Sonia's Daughters*, p. 167.

114 *Ibid.*, pp. 172–173; Laura Engelstein, “Lesbian Vignettes: A Russian Triptych from the 1890s”, *Signs*, 15 (1990), pp. 813–831.

115 *Ibid.*, p. 816.

116 See Healey, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia*, pp. 51–59.

117 Alexandre Kuprin, *Yama: The Pit: A Novel of Prostitution* (trans. Bernard Guilbert Guerney) (Honolulu, 2001); Sholem Asch, *God of Vengeance* (trans. Caraid O’Brien) (New York, 2000).

period) the desire to demonstrate an “emancipated” female populace and also to cleanse society of apparent sexual “perversions”.¹¹⁸

Operating symbiotically with this state attention to commercial sex was a deep concern on the part of non-state actors, particularly the Church and, increasingly throughout the nineteenth century, non-governmental social welfare groups. To take first the case of the Church, as noted above prostitution was initially in the seventeenth century viewed more as a religious/moral crime than a crime against secular law. The Russian Orthodox Church, the official church of the empire starting with the creation of the Holy Synod by Peter the Great in 1721, took a generally dim view of any form of adultery or sex outside of marriage, which included commercial sex. In the early nineteenth century, people affiliated with both Russian Orthodox and Lutheran churches were among the first to set up shelters and reformatories for prostitutes in St. Petersburg, ushering in a growing movement to provide both charity and moral uplift for women who would otherwise be prostitutes.¹¹⁹ This process preceded the regulation of prostitution in 1843 (the first “Magdalene House” to “promote the return of repentant public women to the path of honest labour” was set up in St. Petersburg by two Lutheran women in 1833).¹²⁰ Magdalene Houses and other philanthropic institutions designed to “save” fallen women proliferated in the nineteenth century, involving not only the church but also many aristocratic and medical activists.¹²¹

By the late nineteenth century, the philanthropic desire to save fallen women had begun to dovetail with discussions of the “woman question” which called for more civil rights for women to make them equal with men. This fostered the formation of a number of non-governmental associations that focused on the question of prostitution, the most prominent of which was the Russian Society for the Defense of Women (*Rossiiskoe Obshchestvo Zashchity Zhenshchin* or ROZZh) founded in 1899.¹²² Ostensibly most concerned with campaigning for an end to the international traffic in women (then emerging as a distinct focus for social activists in Russia), ROZZh also made it a goal to rescue prostitutes in Russia from sex work and to found homes for indigent and illiterate

118 See the section under “Definitions” above for a more precise investigation of the development of the laws and regulations surrounding prostitution.

119 Marianna G. Murav'eva, “Gosudarstvennoe Prizrenie Prostitutsii v Predrevoliutsionnom Peterburge”, *Zhurnal Issledovaniï Sotsial'noi Politiki*, 3 (2005), pp. 163–186.

120 Bernstein, *Sonia's Daughters*, p. 192.

121 Murav'eva, “Gosudarstvennoe prizrenie”, pp. 163–186.

122 Nadezhda K. Martynenko, *Rossiiskoe Obshchestvo Zashchity Zhenshchin v Bor'be s Prostitutsiei (1900–1915 gg)* (Togliatti, 2006).

girls to prevent their descent into prostitution. In 1910 it helped convene the first All-Russian Congress on the Struggle against the Traffic in Women, which attracted over 700 participants and resulted in the publication of a two-volume collection of conference proceedings examining in depth the social problems surrounding prostitution in Russia.¹²³

Women working as prostitutes in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Russia did not, however, only receive pity. They were also the subject of considerable censure and marginalization in a society that was highly disapproving of commercial sex. According to the official Ministry of Internal Affairs regulations on registered brothels, no brothels could be within a certain distance of a school, a church, or heavily residential areas (the exact distance stipulated waxed and waned over the course of the nineteenth century). The archival records of the St. Petersburg and Moscow Medical-Police Committees are full of petitions from concerned residents who were horrified at the prospect of a brothel in the vicinity of their homes and who insisted that the brothel in question contravened the required distance from a church or school (generally it didn't, but the local Committees often caved to the concerns of the residents).¹²⁴ Russian literature from the period generally presented a different, less accusatory attitude towards prostitution, one that reflected the concerns of engaged intelligentsia with the social problems of the day and saw prostitutes as "victims of the social temperament" rather than perpetrators of moral crimes. This can be seen most famously in the case of the saintly Sonia Marmeladova in *Crime and Punishment*, but also in characters such as Katiusha Maslova, the exploited former-maid-turned-prostitute in Tolstoy's *Resurrection*, or the characters in Gorky's 1902 play *The Lower Depths*.¹²⁵

In the early Soviet period, this image of the prostitute as a victim was only strengthened, although now the primary victimizer was not a nefarious criminal or pimp, but capitalism itself which drove women into poverty and thus forced them to sell sex for a living. This interpretation of the causes of

123 For the proceedings of the conference see *Trudy Pervago Vserossiiskogo S'ezda po bor'be s torgovlei zhenshchinami i ego prichinami* (St. Petersburg, 1911–1912).

124 See for example GARF, f. 102, opis' 47, Deloproizvodstvo 2, d. 297, "O dopushchenii domov terpimosti na rasstoianii blizhe 150 sazhen ot nachal'nykh gorodskikh lits", 1890; GARF, f. 102, Opis' 26, Deloporizvodstvo 2, d. 271, "O perenose domov terpimosti raspolozhennykh po Podolskoi i Peterburgskoi ulitsam goroda Dvinska", 1899.

125 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment* (New York, 1992) (first published in Russian in 1866); Leo Tolstoy, *Resurrection* (Oxford, 2009) (first published in Russian in 1899); Maksim Gorky, *The Lower Depths and Other Plays* (New York, 1978) (first performed in Moscow in 1902).

prostitution was indeed in accordance with much of the social data from the nineteenth century (as evidenced by the discussions above of the prevalence of former domestic servants and illiterate women among the ranks of prostitutes). However, it also led to the corollary claim that with the transition from capitalism to communism, prostitution would per force disappear. As a result of this ideological shift, by the late 1920s prostitutes began to be seen not so much as victims of fortune but as obnoxious evidence of the failure of Soviet society to remake economic relations and build real existing socialism.¹²⁶

In the 1980s, under the influence of perestroika and glasnost', Soviet commentators admitted what had gone unmentioned since the 1930s: prostitution continued to exist in the Soviet Union. Its continuation proved an analytic problem, however: in a society purported to have shed the vestiges of capitalism, the old explanation of prostitution as a result of economic inequality raised thorny questions. As historian Elizabeth Waters noted, most commentators solved this by reworking the classic Soviet understanding of prostitution as an economic problem and labelling it a moral failing instead; specifically, a moral failing on the part of the prostitutes themselves. This shift set the scene for the explicit condemnation of prostitution as an administrative offence during Gorbachev's *glasnost'* regeneration campaigns.¹²⁷

Conclusion

An examination of the history of prostitution in Russia demonstrates the deep ahistoricity of the cultural assumptions that link the spread of prostitution (and especially migrant prostitution) with the fall of the Soviet Union. The lack of historical research on commercial sex in the Soviet period in particular, when prostitution was deemed to have been eradicated (but archival glimpses suggest otherwise), arguably contributes to the contemporary wilful blindness towards prostitution as a part of the everyday fabric of Russian life. Such attitudes are not new. As this survey demonstrates, the shifting Russian definitions of and approaches to prostitution in both religious and secular contexts have generally shared one abiding characteristic: an insistence that the sale of sex is something deviant that needed to either be tightly regulated or entirely prohibited. Despite their loudly proclaimed plan to abolish punitive sanctions on women who sold sex, to be replaced by economic and social initiatives that

126 Frances Bernstein, *The Dictatorship of Sex*, pp. 185–190.

127 Waters, "Perestroika and Prostitution", pp. 4, 13.

would remove the need to do so, successive Soviet governments subjected suspected prostitutes to state power as violent as the imperial police, if not more so. From what little we know about prostitution in contemporary Russia, there is very little state or social protection for women working in the sex industry today, as evidenced by the refusal of state authorities to allow for official recognition of sex workers' NGOs or unions. Ambivalence towards commercial sex in Russia continues, even as the figure of the sex worker with a heart of gold, from Sonia Marmeladova to the *Interdevochka*, remains one of the most famous and abiding tropes in Russian literature and culture.

The Paradoxes and Contradictions of Prostitution in Paris

Susan P. Conner

Overview and Sources

Paris, France changed dramatically between the seventeenth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century. As the population of Paris increased from nearly 250,000 residents in 1600 to a current population of approximately 2.2 million in the city centre,¹ the city was redefined by its revolutions, subsequent industrialization and immigration, and wars. During those centuries, prostitution was redefined as well. Originally prostitution was a moral offense and an issue of public order. Individual prostitutes, who were defined collectively under the law, were typically poor, young women from the provinces.² They were dealt with in three ways: the judicial system if they committed other more serious infractions, prison hospitals if they were diseased, or the police in an effort to enforce order.

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- 1 Initially the walled city of Paris was defined by its customs barriers. Today the city centre is defined by its twenty *arrondissements* which include 2.2 million residents, and the metropolitan area includes nearly 12 million inhabitants and casual residents. Without the customs wall of the eighteenth century, there is little distinction between the city and the outskirts.
- 2 Court records confirm this demographic, although period writers often described prostitutes as lazy, slothful do-nothings who were courting luxury.

In the seventeenth century, the system of dealing with prostitution in Paris changed from sporadic toleration briefly to confinement. In the eighteenth century, toleration and social control characterized governmental practices. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, houses of prostitution or brothels (*lupanars*, *maisons closes*, *maisons de tolérance*, and *bordels*) were licensed, and the “French System” was inaugurated. As a regulationist system, it also allowed for toleration because prostitution remained untouched by governmental legislation. Functionally, the “French System” protected those prostitutes whom it enclosed while expanding police surveillance. Toleration continued to be a hallmark of the first half of the twentieth century, in spite of abolitionist assaults on the system. Even when the regulated houses of prostitution were closed after World War II, prostitution *per se* was unaffected. This position was consistent with how the French have historically defined prostitution in classical terms, i.e., prostitution as a “sewer in the palace” or an unavoidable necessity.

In 1960, the French adopted the UN “Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others” (1949), which officially placed France among abolitionist countries.³ Yet, the French also clarified their position; they would continue to respect the liberty of an individual to be a prostitute. There was little debate until the 1990s, so the police continued their surveillance and monitoring of prostitutes. Toleration, for all intents and purposes, continued. Only very recently has a new, systematic re-evaluation of prostitution taken place. Fundamentally this is because Paris has changed dramatically. There are far more defined types of sex work than even a half century ago, and morality is not an unimportant element in the debates. In Paris today, prostitution is not viewed as a singular type of female soliciting. There are multiple prostitutions, each with its own character, and they are viewed differently by those in authority. In fact, the most recent French national legislation (the Sarkozy Law) placed sex workers, the majority of whom are immigrants, under the legal umbrella of a “danger to domestic security.”⁴ As of 2013, with a change in the government, the debate on prostitution was

3 “Circulaire du 25 novembre 1960 à la répression du proxénétisme”, available at: http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jopdf/common/jo_pdf.jsp?numJO=0&dateJO=19601127&numTexte=10609&pageDebut=10609&pageFin; last accessed 7 July 2017.

4 “Loi n° 2003-239 du 18 Mars 2003 dite la Loi Sarkozy II pour la sécurité intérieure”, available at: http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do;jsessionid=83ED992BAE071FD7FA1CF83853CFF981.tpdjo1ov_3?cidTexte=LEGITEXT000005634107&dateTexte=20120426; last accessed 7 July 2017. See also Marie Elisabeth Handman and Janine Mossuz-Lavau (eds), *La prostitution à Paris* (Paris, 2005).

renewed, and on 4 December, the National Assembly (the lower house of the French Parliament) overwhelmingly passed a law to criminalize clients while reversing the Sarkozy Law and decriminalizing the outward manifestations of prostitution. When the French Senate received the bill for review and action, it was far less enthusiastic and referred the legislation to a Select Committee which rejected the stringent fines on customers, saying that prostitution would be driven underground, tying it more directly to human trafficking and endangering prostitutes further.⁵ Since then, the government has taken new action, rejecting the criminalization of clients and reinstating the crime of passive solicitation against prostitutes. One opponent of the 2015 Senate measure remarked, "Prostitutes are always the offenders; the client is always king."⁶

In this urban overview of prostitution in Paris, I have employed a number of studies defining prostitution, outlining its context, and delineating prostitutes' social profiles. I have also attempted to provide evidence about governmental and church responses to the work done by prostitutes in Paris, along with the challenging issues of migration, industrialization, late marriage, the impacts of war, and ultimately the market for sex. There are clear changes in policy during this four-century period, particularly the explicit gender and class differentiations that were firmly established in the nineteenth century.⁷ I will also address the agency of prostitutes themselves as they have, over time, exhibited different responses to their employment and their condition.

In France, commercial sexuality has most often been viewed in terms of its relationship with the authorities. Therefore, it is important to note that the legal, juridical, and administrative approaches to prostitution often obscure the ways prostitutes operated. Prostitutes had their own networks, whether they were members of a family in pre-industrial France, supporting the family, or separated from it. Later, in post-revolutionary France, industrialization alone did not set the context for prostitution; nor were prostitutes always voiceless as moral crusaders have typically characterized them. Their relationship to the French state and to bourgeois society was much more complex. Finally, it is

5 France 24 coverage of the National Assembly, available at: <http://www.france24.com/en/20131204-french-assembly-parliament-votes-fine-pay-sex-clients-prostitution/>; last accessed 11 March 2016. See also Gert Vermeulen and Nina Peršak, *Prostitution: From Discourse to Description, from Moralization to Normalization* (Antwerp, 2014), p. 200. For additional coverage, see "Congratulations to Sex Workers in France", available at: <http://prostitutescollective.net/2014/07/23/congratulations-sex-workers-france/>; last accessed 7 July 2017.

6 "Le Sénat pénalise les prostituées mais pas leur clients", *Le Monde.fr Société*, 30 March 2015, available at: http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2015/03/30/prostitution-le-senat-retablit-le-delit-de-racolage_4606124_3224.html; last accessed 7 July 2017.

7 See especially Jill Harsin, *Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Princeton, 1985).

true that police, court, and prison dossiers reflect the words of the bureaucrats who recorded them; but they also contain the words of their subjects, and those truths and fictions can be ferreted out.⁸

I have based this study of prostitution in Paris on the following types of sources: royal decrees, administrative and police circulars, and national laws; case studies (also collected as aggregate data) based on the records of tribunals such as the Châtelet and transcripts of the Correctional Police; prison ledgers such as those of the Salpêtrière and Saint Martin, as well as records of police clerks of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; scientific and medical treatises and studies on venereal diseases; the work of moral crusaders and crusaders for individual liberty; and the words of sex labourers themselves, as they have been collected.⁹

Finally, it should be noted that Paris is an interesting case study because of its historic paradox. During the Revolution of 1789, individual liberty was enshrined in the French pantheon of virtues (although large segments of the population, including women, were excluded at that time) while, at the same

8 See the approach taken by Natalie Davis in *Fictions in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth Century France* (Stanford, 1987).

9 The laws, decrees, and circulars through 1870 are itemized in a number of sources including *La prostitution à Paris et à Londres* by C.J. Lecour (Paris, 1870) who was commissioner and bureau chief at the Préfecture de Police. His work also includes descriptions of prostitutes, statistics on those who were registered and those who were not, and additional statistics on venereal diseases. Similarly, Handman and Mossuz-Lavau's work (see note 4) defines each type of prostitution in Paris in 2002–2004, with demographics and legal restrictions when applicable. Other works dealing with the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic periods use archival collections at the Archives de la Préfecture de Police [APP], the Archives de l'Assistance publique [AAP], and the Archives nationales [AN], as well as published works at the APP and the Bibliothèque nationale [BN]. Nineteenth-century studies rely heavily on the collections of the Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand. Contemporary works concerning the latter nineteenth century include Emile Richard, *La prostitution à Paris* (Paris, 1890), Josephine Butler, *Personal Reminiscences of a Great Crusade* (New York, 1896), Dr Oscar Commenge, *La prostitution clandestine à Paris* (Paris, 1897), and Louis Fiaux, *La police des moeurs devant la commission extraparlamentaire du régime des moeurs* (Paris, 1907–12). Important secondary sources include Philip Riley, *A Lust for Virtue: Louis XIV's Attack on Sin in Seventeenth-Century France* (Westport, 2001); Erica Marie Benabou, *La prostitution et la police des moeurs au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1987); Harsin, *Policing Prostitution on the nineteenth century* (see note 7) and Alain Corbin, *Women for Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850* (Cambridge, MA 1990) on the latter nineteenth century; and Mary Louise Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II France* (Chicago, 2013) and Lilian Mathieu, "The Emergence and Uncertain Outcomes of Prostitutes' Social Movements", *The European Journal of Women's Studies*, 10 (2003), pp. 29–50, on aspects of the twentieth century.

time and since then, there has been a continuing history of governmental regulation through which the public is deemed to need protection from disorder and particularly from disease. Three questions should be kept in mind in this regard. First, where does individual liberty end, including the right to use one's body as a means of labour? Second, where does governmental intervention for the protection of others begin? Third, during these four centuries, how and why did prostitutes navigate the spaces they inhabited or in which they found themselves?

Defining Prostitution in Paris

The next paragraphs provide definitions of the terms associated with the practice of prostitution in Paris and its regulation, focusing in particular on four words: prostitution, soliciting, pimping, and procuring. "Prostitution" has typically meant the provision of sexual services, later defined as the exchange of sexual services for payment. While it has generally been seen as a female profession, prostitution has not historically been gendered; and in Paris in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, prostitution has taken many forms among female, male, and transgendered practitioners.

"Soliciting", the second term identified with prostitution, is the act of attracting clients. While simple on face value, soliciting is strikingly complex because of its variations. Overt solicitation or *le racolage actif* has always been under legal sanction, whether in the army encampments of Louis XIV, under the arcades of the Palais Royal, or along the rue Saint-Denis. Penalties for overt solicitation were most often meted out by the police, and they varied dramatically. Passive solicitation or *le racolage passif* is something quite different because it assumes that the prostitute makes no strikingly outward overtures to the potential client. Yet, a slight glance, an uncategorized attitude, an inadvertent approach, or perceived provocative poses can all be deemed passive solicitation by authorities. Codified most recently under the Sarkozy Law, such actions were subject to police intervention.¹⁰ Historically, passive solicitation was considered a corollary of prostitution so long as it was not scandalous; but as of 2003, it was classed as criminal. Such remains the case today.

"Pimping", the third term associated with prostitution, is carried out by a pimp who serves as an agent for a prostitute, receiving a portion of the prostitute's earnings. In return, the pimp provides physical protection, advertising, and/or a location for practise of the trade. Contrary to contemporary

¹⁰ See above, note 4.

prostitution, during most of the pre-twentieth century Parisian brothels were actually run by madams, the female equivalent of a pimp. “Procuring”, the fourth term associated with prostitution, has been identified since the turn of the twentieth century with international slave trafficking and human bondage. Prior to that time, procurers were often synonymous with pimps and madams who lured prostitutes into their brothels, promising them a better life than unprotected street walkers. In the last several decades, procuring has taken on a more sinister meaning because of organized crime which is identified with cartels and mafia-type networks.

Another set of definitions is in order as well to set the stage for the history of French prostitution. In France from the sixteenth century to the present, there have been three governmental positions regarding the external manifestations of prostitution: toleration, regulation, and abolition. The legal position called “toleration” characterized most of the late mediaeval period, the early modern period except for the reign of Louis XIV, and the Revolutionary years. Prostitutes were free to practise their trade unless they were engaged in another proscribed activity or they engaged in notorious or scandalous behaviour. The legal position known as “regulationism” was incorporated into French practice and law by 1804. Under the system of regulation, the “French System” was established to register and monitor prostitutes. The intent was to encourage prostitutes to practise their trade in houses of prostitution (*maisons de tolérance* or *maisons closes*) that were under the surveillance of the state. Allegedly families were protected in this way, innocent women could venture from their homes without fear of being mistaken for prostitutes, and a healthy population was assured because of the examinations and confinement of prostitutes for venereal diseases. Ultimately France became a model for other countries in dealing with prostitution.

“Abolition” is the third position, and it is the most difficult to define. Two contradictory meanings have been associated with abolitionism: (1) the elimination of regulationist laws including particularly brothel prostitution, while allowing for the continued practice of prostitution, or (2) the eradication of prostitution, particularly forced prostitution.¹¹ The first meaning characterizes some debates and actions that occurred in the twentieth century, while the second meaning represents some of the current discourses.

11 Debates since the nineteenth century often have centred on whether any form of prostitution is a choice. According to some arguments, it cannot be a choice because it is either a form of sexual slavery to a procurer or pimp or a response to poverty and need.

A Social and Labour History of Prostitution in Paris

Antecedents: Mediaeval Prostitution as a Function of Urban Life

Throughout most of the history of Paris, efforts to suppress prostitution have been “few, short-lived and ineffective.”¹² While this study of prostitution in Paris officially begins in the seventeenth century, it is important to trace antecedents to earlier times. Prostitution was a fact of urban life; prostitutes were indeed sex labourers, and licensed brothels and bathhouses (public stews) were ubiquitous during the Middle Ages. Common language differentiated the types of prostitutes, e.g., public prostitutes in the brothels, street walkers, “easy women” who might also be vagabonds, and women who practised clandestinely.¹³ In Latin texts, prostitutes were called *meretrices*; in impolite French, *putain* or whore.¹⁴ Ultimately, prostitution was restricted to an area that today corresponds to portions of the 1st through 4th *arrondissements* on the Right Bank. The area was a labyrinth of narrow streets with colourful and earthy names that described the commerce that took place there: *la rue du Poil-au-con*, *la rue Tire-Vit*, *la rue Gratte-Cul*, *la rue Pute-y-Musse*, and *la rue Trousse-nonnain*.¹⁵

As the fourteenth century dawned, Paris boasted 200,000 inhabitants, making it the largest city in western Europe, and a reasonably loose code of morality governed the court, the well-off, and even the poor. While not widespread, there had been earlier church teachings that rendered judgement on whether or not prostitutes' earnings could be contributed to church coffers.

12 Jacques Rossiaud, *Medieval Prostitution* (New York, 1988), p. 9. The most notable attempts to eradicate prostitution were made by Louis IX in 1254 to expel all “women of evil life” from the kingdom of France and to confiscate their belongings. Two years later, Louis IX demanded that they be expelled from the centre of the city, particularly from anywhere near “holy places, such as churches and cemeteries.” Louis IX revised his position in 1269, establishing extramural areas for the practice of prostitution. His son took a repressive position regarding procurers (who were mostly female). Under the law they could be burned alive, subjected to the pillory, scourged, or mutilated. See also Leah Otis, *Prostitution in Medieval Society: The History of an Urban Institution in Languedoc* (Chicago, 1985), p. 20, and William Sanger, *The History of Prostitution: Its Extent, Causes, and Effects throughout the World* (New York, 1858), pp. 95–97.

13 Rossiaud, *Medieval Prostitution*, pp. 7–8.

14 Bronislaw Geremek, *The Margins of Society in Late Medieval Paris* (Cambridge, MA, 1987), p. 215.

15 See Jacques Hillairet, *Dictionnaire historique des rues de Paris*, 2 vols (Paris, 1961). One must search alphabetically by modern street names. See also Benabou, *La prostitution*, p. 21. I have not attempted to translate the names of these streets since words change over time. For readers who do not know French, note that the names generally reflect private parts of the body, the acts themselves, or anti-clerical fixations.

The question revolved around whether a prostitute was actually engaged in work. According to Thomas of Chobham, a canon of the cathedral of Notre Dame, women who took pleasure in the act of venal sex “accomplished *no* work”, and the church could not receive their offerings. On the other hand, he noted that the majority of prostitutes were women who had no choice: “they rent their body and furnish work.” In essence, he classed most prostitutes as working poor and therefore their offerings to the church could be accepted.¹⁶

The poor married late and female mortality was higher than male mortality, creating a gender imbalance. In this context, not only was prostitution accepted, it became a function of public order, institutionalized at the local municipal level.¹⁷ While prostitutes were among those regarded as marginal, their relationship to the police and to their clients placed them squarely in the labour market. In fact, police directives established their working hours, regulated their observance of holidays, and treated them more generously than people in many other occupations. In spite of our modern perceptions of prostitution as a nocturnal job, Parisian curfews affected all labourers, including prostitutes who were required to leave their brothels at dusk. Nonetheless, their working hours were allowed to be among the longest relative to other labourers in the city.¹⁸

Over the next two centuries, because of the prevalence of venereal diseases prostitutes sporadically would be driven from the streets; but, regardless of the ordinances and decrees, very little actually changed until the latter half of the seventeenth century.¹⁹ For the most part, the city of Paris practised toleration, which included the regulation of prostitution by the police.

The Seventeenth Century: Morality, Repression, and Confinement

By the time of Louis XIV in the last half of the seventeenth century, the population of Paris had grown to 500,000. Although Louis XIV had established his residence at Versailles, he kept an eye on Paris, and he intended to bring a regeneration of morality to the French kingdom’s largest city. As one historian

16 Rossiaud, *Medieval Prostitution*, pp. 82–83.

17 Otis, *Prostitution in Medieval Society*, pp. 100–102.

18 See Geremek, *Margins of Society*, p. 217; Rossiaud, *Medieval Prostitution*, p. 64.

19 A compilation of these laws and ordinances from 1496 to 1644 may be found at the Archives de la Préfecture de Police (Paris), *Les mœurs*, 2 vols (handwritten manuscript).

described the king, he was the “watchdog of Parisian sin”.²⁰ Systematically, Louis XIV chartered the Hôpital-Général in 1656, including the Salpêtrière as a prison-hospital for women, created the office of lieutenant of police in 1667 to consolidate royal authority, established the Bon Pasteur in 1698 for repentant prostitutes as a model for other places of refuge and Christian rehabilitation, and created systems to deal with petty crime, felonies, gambling, smuggling, sorcery, recalcitrant subjects, and anything that seemed outside of good public order. Because he had created a powerful bureaucracy and a policing system to work with him, he was the first French king to produce significant results.

Breaking with the historic French tradition of toleration, Louis XIV instigated the “Great Confinement”. The police swept “the mad, sinful, and non-compliant”, including prostitutes, into the Hôpital-Général.²¹ Corruption of the flesh and corruption of the soul were seen as being equally pernicious and in some ways synonymous, so both were placed under the control of the police. In essence, prostitution became linked to sin, and sin was linked to punishment, rehabilitation, and/or confinement.²² Simply speaking, the earlier discourse on public order had been taken to a new level; everything tied to prostitution was an assault on society and a denigration of the kingdom and God’s order. Prostitutes were not sex workers, they were “fallen women”.

The most significant statement of this conflation of social order and spiritual order was found in the *Réglement du Roi* of 20 April 1684. Its provisions included the following: (1) that debauched women, public prostitutes, women engaged in scandalous behaviour, or those who led others into prostitution would be imprisoned in the Salpêtrière by order of the king, the court, or the lieutenant of police; (2) that incarcerated women would be required to participate in mass, medical treatments if needed, a regimen of prayer and catechism, and appropriate work; (3) that they could wear only coarse homespun garments and clogs, eat only bread, soup, and water, and sleep on straw mattresses; and (4) that, if they deviated from their regimen or exhibited slothful behaviour, they would be subject to severe measures including solitary confinement and loss of any previously earned privileges.²³ It was a penitentiary regime in which prison terms were not specified, but up to six months tended to be the duration of their incarceration so long as they showed signs of remorse,

20 Philip Riley, *A Lust for Virtue: Louis XIV’s Attack on Sin in Seventeenth-Century France* (Westport, 2001), p. 15.

21 *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 111.

23 François André Isambert, *Recueil général des anciennes lois françaises depuis l’an 420 jusqu’à la Révolution de 1789*, 29 vols (Paris, 1821–1833), XIX, pp. 441–445.

repentance, or contrition. Three years later, Louis XIV further protected his “island of purity” by declaring that all prostitutes found in Versailles or within a radius of two leagues would be mutilated, i.e., their ears would be clipped. Regardless of whether prostitutes arrived in Paris alone or found companionship with other menial working girls, there appeared to be no subculture of prostitution. There was, however, a mixed message. Some prostitutes could be rehabilitated; others would be permanently marked for what they were.

The Eighteenth Century: Redefining Prostitution, Police Control, and Hygiene

At the end of Louis XIV's reign came the most significant ordinance that governed the remainder of the pre-Revolutionary eighteenth century. It was the *Ordonnance royale* of 26 July 1713. With this declaration, the authority of the police over prostitution in Paris was assured, shifting jurisdiction from courts such as the Châtelet directly to the police. Interpretations of this ordinance vary dramatically, but instead of providing common prostitutes with more due process, those who were rounded up in the raids were judged *en masse*. On average, 600 to 800 cases were handled by the lieutenant general per year. Only one or two cases were heard by the Châtelet (criminal court), and no appeals reached the *Parlement* (highest court of France). What did all of this mean? Ultimately there were two definitions spelled out in the royal ordinance. The first was public debauchery and scandalous behaviour, and the second was procuring. The first definition was expressly vague and therefore less punitive. Were these women prostitutes? According to the law, not necessarily, so they were judged by the lieutenant general, sentenced with a fine or forced to make a payment to charity, stripped of their belongings which were distributed to the poor, and required to leave the city or face more stringent penalties. If they chose to appeal, they would remain in custody until the appeal was completed. This first type of behaviour was classed as a misdemeanour, with no prison time necessarily assigned. According to studies of the period, few women chose to appeal, and their choice not to appeal was a very conscious one. They could begin again, reconstruct themselves, ply their trade elsewhere, and retain their economic independence. Ultimately, their survival depended on their ability to control their earnings.²⁴ Under the royal ordinance, the streets could be cleaned up rather quickly, and nightly rounds became more and more routine.

24 It is important to note the importance of families in the early modern period. As such, young women were part of the family economy, either leaving it to support themselves, so as not to be a drain on the family, or contributing to the entire upkeep of the family.

In the second case of procuring or organized prostitution, for which corporal punishment would likely be invoked, cases were remanded to the criminal courts. Because due process had to be carefully applied, evidence suggests that few cases went this route.²⁵ In other words, the system simply avoided the more difficult cases. While jurists argued the nuances of the law, the police took the most direct route to assuring public order, and prostitutes looked out for themselves.

During the time of the Regency after Louis XIV's death, the language of sin no longer dominated the discourse on prostitution. By mid-century, prostitution came more and more to be defined as a condition, not yet pathological, or as a state of being. Importantly, prostitutes served a purpose because they often led police to other criminal elements in society. Mistresses, who were under the surveillance of a Department of Kept Women beginning in 1747, were also important to the police. They were ultimately part of the intelligence apparatus of the Paris police inspectors.²⁶ Like many common prostitutes, the *dames entretenues* (kept women or mistresses) frequently came from the subordinate classes or the lower-middling groups in society, but their pathways led to greater economic security. They could move in the same circles as actresses or those in the theatre and opera, take on the style and pretensions of those above them, and negotiate relationships that sometimes provided permanent patron-mistress arrangements, marriage, or other access to steady income. The police watched them closely because it was believed that they could enfeeble and impoverish those who fell prey to them. Ultimately those who came to Paris, mostly from the north and east of France, followed several paths to elite prostitution. They were sold into elite prostitution to support their families, fled their families because of a sexual encounter, sought other ways to assist their families by seeking employment in Paris and ended up first as prostitutes and then as kept women, or consciously chose a better life among the Parisian

25 Benabou, *La prostitution*, pp. 24–25.

26 Nina Kushner, *Erotic Exchanges: The World of Elite Prostitution in Eighteenth Century Paris* (Ithaca, 2013), p. 30 ff; and Nina Kushner, "The Case of the Closely Watched Courtesans," *Slate* (15 April 2014), pp. 1–3, available at: <https://longform.org/posts/the-case-of-the-closely-watched-courtesans>; last accessed 29 June 2017. The Department of Kept Women was one part of a massive police apparatus that dealt with everything from markets to cemeteries and hygiene (as it was in the eighteenth century) and to the portion of the population that was not under the supervision of a family or husband. The incredibly rich dossiers that are part of the collection of the Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal detail how the demimonde was used to maintain order as police inspectors demanded current information from them, as the police also protected unsuspecting upper class males from *mésalliances* should they become too closely allied with one of the *dames entretenues*, and as the police created a growing network of surveillance in the eighteenth century.

demimonde.²⁷ What separates them from other prostitutes was their ability to accumulate more than subsistence earnings, either through their patrons or other networks. They worked a system that seemed to always have a place for them.

When it came to police targets, the eighteenth-century obsession was with non-resident paupers, the homeless, and beggars.²⁸ During this period of scarcity, more young women moved to Paris, looking for a marriage and a better life. Yet, the city had little to offer them. They were targets for unscrupulous employers and at the mercy of those who rented them furnished rooms. Not surprisingly they became easy prey for pimps and madams, particularly if they had no network or means of sufficient support. Many public women avoided police notice, but those who were disruptive or who had caused a scandal in the eyes of the police or their neighbours were rounded up for police audiences and transported in an open cart, often with their heads shaved and in chains, to prison-hospitals.²⁹

Additional ordinances in this century condemned sodomites and women found in military encampments. Interestingly, the ordinance only covered women who were not native to the area and who were without employment. By 1768, the ordinance was re-issued to cover all women who were suspected of prostitution. Penalties were increased to incarceration and treatment for venereal diseases. Laws were mute on prostitution *per se*, but its public manifestations were to be masked. Other pre-revolutionary ordinances in 1778 and 1780 established fines for renting properties to prostitutes, for allowing unmarried men and women to cohabit, for welcoming them into cabarets and places of entertainment, as well as for not filing the appropriate paperwork for persons living in boarding houses and furnished rooms. New curfews were also established.³⁰

The Demographics of Eighteenth-Century Prostitutes

Who were the Paris prostitutes of the eighteenth century? Based on the records of Saint-Martin for 1765, 1766, and 1770, over 97 per cent of the 2,069 women who were arrested were employed in some manner, although their occupations

27 Archives de la Bastille in Kushner, *Erotic Exchanges*, p. 72 ff.

28 Robert M. Schwartz, *Policing the Poor in Eighteenth-Century France* (Chapel Hill, 1988), pp. 27–28.

29 Benabou, *La prostitution*, p. 62.

30 Isambert, *Recueil général*, xxv, pp. 448–450.

were self-reported. Three-quarters of the women were between 18 and 30 years of age, and there were very few who were younger than 15, in spite of period literature that painted prostitutes as pubescent girls ready for the taking. Of the prostitutes in Saint-Martin, 49.3 per cent cited that they were employed in clothing, textiles, or decorative trades, e.g., from menders, seamstresses, artificial flower makers, and embroiderers to designers of luxury wardrobes. Yet, the greatest number of prostitutes fell among the most menial and least paid occupations.³¹ It was widely stated that the clothing trades were the pathways to becoming a prostitute or a courtesan, and that, in some cases, shops were used for soliciting. Table 7.1 provides specific data on their occupations.

For the most part, the women were single, either earning less than they needed to survive or not earning enough for the support of their families or partners. When the price of bread climbed dramatically in the 1770s, survival hung in the balance. During most of the eighteenth century, prostitution was not a particularly permanent profession, but it was employment. Women passed in and out of it as needed or as they wanted to finance a better life.³²

TABLE 7.1 *Occupations of women arrested for prostitution, Prison Saint Martin, 1755, 1765, 1770.*

Occupation	Number	Percentage of total
Clothing trades and textiles including fabrication, repair, sales	1021	49.3%
Washing	300	14.5%
Small business or shop assistants	272	13.1%
Servants	263	12.7%
Artisans (not including textiles)	94	4.5%
Day laborers	39	1.9%
Agricultural laborers	15	0.7%
Transport, message carriers, errand runners	11	0.5%
Entertainment	4	0.2%
Diverse	2	0.1%
Unemployed or not known	48	2.3%
Total	2069	99.8%

SOURCE: BENABOU, *LA PROSTITUTION*, PP. 280–285.

31 Benabou, *La prostitution*, pp. 280–285. Saint Martin was a transit location for women potentially destined for incarceration in the Salpêtrière after their police audience.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 319.

Regardless of the data, contemporary accounts of prostitution argued that permanent prostitution had become a scourge. In 1762, one writer estimated that there were 25,000 prostitutes in Paris, although another later writer speculated that there were 30,000 on the streets and another 10,000 who were kept women or who were brothel residents.³³ In that context, Nicholas Restif de La Bretonne published *Le Pornographe*, which was a treatise on prostitution, a call for public health measures, and a recommendation for the regulation of prostitution in what he called the Parthénions. These proposed “houses of pleasure” required clients to bathe, have appointments lasting no longer than half an hour with the resident prostitutes, and avoid drunkenness. Women would be subject to a regimen of reading, work of their choice, walking in the on-site park, or studying music or dancing. The Parthénions were also destined to have another function as “houses of populationism” because children borne from the liaisons would be raised there. In this way, the French population would grow, venereal disease would be managed, and prostitution would be contained. In particular, Restif argued that the basest, foulest forms of prostitution would be eradicated. The “meat markets” of brazen, half nude, lewd women would be gone from the streets of Paris. All prostitutes would be required to enter the Parthénions under penalty of prison, and outside of extraordinary circumstances like marriage, they would remain there for their entire lives.³⁴ Some of what Restif wrote sounded like a return to the mediaeval municipal brothels. But, the Parthénions were also idyllic, even romantic, in their plan, and they also were designed to remove the stigma of venal sex and illegitimate children.

In the writings of Restif and his contemporaries (and there were many) it was argued that prostitution should be firmly institutionalized.³⁵ A few *cahiers de doléances* (grievances to the king) on the eve of the Revolution condemned immorality with a broad brush; but, next to them, there was a wildly popular

33 See a recent version of the work by Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet, *La prostitution à Paris au XIX^e siècle: Texte présenté et annoté par Alain Corbin* (Paris, 1981), pp. 87–94. It was originally published in 1836. Women who lodged in brothels often paid for rent, food, and clothing. If they were unable to work because of pregnancy or an illness, they could accumulate large debts to the madam.

34 See Nicholas Restif de La Bretonne, *Le pornographe ou idées d'un honnête homme sur un projet du réglemant pour les prostituées* (Paris, 1769), p. 111 ff. *Maisons d'abbatage* were also called “slaughterhouses” in vernacular French.

35 Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Panorama of Paris: Selections from Le Tableau de Paris* (University Park, 1999), p. 148. Mercier, among others, counselled fellow Parisians to consider solutions like the Parthénions: “Administrators, mark, read, and digest *The Pornographer* of Restif de la Bretonne.”

trade in satires, lampoons, pornography, and scandal sheets. Those publications were joined by a number of almanacs of the “girls” of the Palais Royal that described prostitutes’ individual physical properties, the variety of sexual acts they could provide, their addresses, and their rates.³⁶ To a certain degree, prostitution was being confirmed as a fact of life, whether tolerated or regulated. Even the *Encyclopédie Méthodique’s* article on prostitution confirmed that a woman had the right to dispose of her body as she pleased. Ultimately the key was that notoriety be avoided and no scandals should result.³⁷ There were underlying reasons for prostitution: male desire and female misery. Neither was going to be remedied in the short term, if at all. The discussion during the Revolutionary years, therefore, dealt with individual liberty, public order, and public health.

Cleaning up the Streets: Prostitution and Social Control during the French Revolution

Among the first acts of the Revolution was a sweeping away the ordinances and decrees of the Old Order, creating the need for new principles of law and a new judicial structure. Yet again, regulations on prostitution *per se* were not introduced. A law of 16–24 August 1790 specified that good order in public places had to be maintained, and a decree of 10 July 1791 remanded women found in army barracks to the civilian police rather than to the military. The omnibus Code of 19–22 July 1791 brought no further direction to policing prostitution. While it dealt with problems like noise, public gatherings, counterfeit keys, rickety street-side display racks, transvestites, pots of urine thrown from windows, and pots of flowers perched perilously close to window ledges, definitions of anything relating to prostitution were entirely absent.³⁸

In this fluid population of 630,000 Parisians, the police went to work. The mandate was not just to purge the streets of undesirables and effluvia, but to

36 Hector Fleischman, *Les demoiselles d’amour du Palais-Royal: Avec la réimpression intégrale de dix pamphlets libres sur les filles publiques du Palais-Egalité et le bibliographie des libelles galants qui leur sont consacrés* (Paris, 1911).

37 Benabou, *La prostitution*, p. 501. Benabou was citing the *Encyclopédie méthodique ou par ordre des matières, par une Société de Gens de lettres, de savants et d’artistes* (Paris, 1782–1791) rather than the better known *Encyclopédie* by Diderot and D’Alembert which was published earlier.

38 “Décret”, 19–22 July 1791, in Jean-Baptiste Duvergier, *Collection complète des lois, décrets, ordonnances, réglemens, et avis du Conseil d’Etat de 1788 à 1824*, 78 vols (Paris, 1824–1878) III, pp. 114–126.

clean up any and all dangers to citizens. One of the most striking dangers was venereal disease. In 1793, when health inspections were required for all women who were arrested for soliciting, over 40 per cent of the women were found to be diseased. These women were referred to the Hospice des Vénériens for treatment; others were sent to nearby prisons depending on the gravity of their offences. Penalties for prostitutes who ended up at the Correctional Tribunal were significantly less severe than for offenses which were explicitly covered in the code. Begging, for example, carried a one-year prison term. Debauchery, if applied under Title 2 of the Code of 1791, carried a one-year prison term and a fine. Women who chose prostitution, however, generally served three to four months, even if they were caught committing a flagrant offense. If a woman could supply character witnesses, if there wasn't sufficient evidence to make a case against her, or if there wasn't enough space in the police holding tank, it was likely that she would be released within a period of hours or days.³⁹

The Demographics of Prostitutes during the French Revolution

Who were these women? According to one study of this period,⁴⁰ of the 251 prostitutes who were arrested for solicitation in the section of Paris called Butte des Moulins, 62 per cent were born in the provinces and had recently arrived in the city. Nearly 92 per cent were single. They were also younger than their counterparts earlier in the century. For the first time, a significant number of prostitutes stated that they had no occupation other than prostitution. Table 7.2 provides a more detailed view of the jobs of the 227 who reported an occupation.

Gone from the occupations were laundresses and errand runners. In many cases, their clients had emigrated from France prior to or during the Terror. In the case of washerwomen, the price of soap had become prohibitive, and the supply of clients was uncertain. Given the strict penalties for begging, being a prostitute had its positive aspects. If arrested, the prison sentence was shorter. If a prostitute lived in a house that was not known by the police, she could effectively be invisible and immune from prosecution. Policies such as these could not have gone unnoticed. While unstated, the national policy was nothing less than a form of social control. Prostitutes would frequently be swept from the streets and bawdy houses, they would be punished but not too severely, those who were diseased would be treated, and a firm moral order would be claimed by those in authority.

39 Susan P. Conner, "Prostitution and the Jacobin agenda for Social Control", *Eighteenth Century Life*, 12 (1988), pp. 42–51, 48.

40 *Ibid.*

TABLE 7.2 *Occupations of women arrested for prostitution in Butte des Moulins, 1792–1793.*

Occupation	Number	Percentage of total
Clothing trades and textiles including fabrication, repair, sales	91	40.0%
Small business or shop assistants	28	11.0%
Servants	13	6.0%
Artisans (not including textiles)	4	2.0%
Day laborers	24	10.5%
Diverse	16	7.0%
Prostitute or mistress	51	22.5%
Total	227	99.0%

SOURCE: SUSAN P. CONNER, "PROSTITUTION AND THE JACOBIN AGENDA FOR SOCIAL CONTROL", *EIGHTEENTH CENTURY LIFE*, 12 (1988), PP. 42–51.

The Birth of the "French System"

Already in 1791, the police had begun what was tantamount to registration. This practice was regularized under the Central Bureau of the Paris police by 1799. Prostitutes were also subject to medical examinations as early as 1792 and automatically sent for prison treatment if they were infected with the "venereal poison". This practice was institutionalized under Napoleon in 1802, and, in 1805, the Dispensary of Saint Lazare was established. By 1810, fortnightly medical inspections were mandated.⁴¹ According to contemporary accounts, *maisons de tolérance* (licensed brothels) began springing up in Paris, and 180 were recognized by the end of the First Empire in 1815. By 1823, all brothels were licensed. On two points, all French governments—Revolutionary, Napoleonic, and Restoration—agreed: there was a proper role for women as moral, upright mothers who taught their children the virtues of the Fatherland, but there was also a place for prostitution as a continuing means of social control. Men, who tended to marry later in life, needed an outlet for their "excess" sexuality; the family needed to be preserved; and women who fell into prostitution, whether through poverty, rape, or fornication, should be monitored because they would

41 Elizabeth A. Weston, "Prostitution in Paris in the Later Nineteenth Century: A Study of Political and Social Ideology" (Unpublished Ph.D., State University of New York at Buffalo, 1979), p. 25.

never turn back. Ultimately, public women played a role in the public life of France so long as they did not challenge bourgeois sensibilities.⁴²

From 1836 until 1848, under the Prefect of Police Gabriel Delessert a series of police ordinances and practices were put into place consolidating what was becoming the regulation of prostitution in France, particularly in Paris. Beyond the licensing of brothels and registration of prostitutes, many other aspects of venal sex had to be defined. It is important to note that at the beginning of the century prostitutes had already been designated as *soumises* or *inscrites* (registered) and *insoumises* (unregistered). The *Règlement* of 16 November 1843 finalized police action regarding the two types of prostitution: clandestine and tolerated. In both cases, according to authorities these women were likely to spread venereal diseases. According to the statute, the punishments should be severe enough to make them register or enter a licensed brothel because *maisons de tolérance* were governed by very specific regulations, including the daily surveillance of brothels, the expectation that madams would follow all police procedures including medical examinations for the residents, conformity to all curfews, and the interdiction of admitting students, uniformed soldiers, and youths under 18 years of age.⁴³ To a certain degree, madams had become agents of the government if they wished to continue their business.

As nineteenth-century bureaucrats, doctors, and politicians became obsessed with urban pathology, they studied prostitutes along with “other urban untouchables who work[ed] with mire, ordure, excrement, and carrion.”⁴⁴ Besides the scientific methods with which they intended to count everything, they also considered what they believed to be the needs of nineteenth-century bourgeois society. Railroads and industrialization had brought more young people into Paris. In fact, the city grew in size from 657,172 inhabitants in 1817 to over one million inhabitants in 1851.⁴⁵ Table 7.3 breaks down the numbers of unmarried males and females as of mid-century. It should be noted that according to common practice and Napoleonic law⁴⁶ men tended to marry later (by a half decade) and represented a larger portion of the population aged between 15 and 35.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 7. See also Susan P. Conner, “Public Virtue and Public Women”, *Eighteenth Century Studies*, 28 (1994–1995), pp. 193–219.

43 Yves Guyot, *La prostitution*, (Paris, 1882), pp. 555–559.

44 Alain Corbin, “Commercial Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century Paris: A System of Images and Regulations”, *Representations*, 14 (1986), pp. 209–219, 212.

45 *Statistique de la France*, 2nd series, *Territoire et population* (Paris, 1855) 2, p. 440.

46 Under the *Code Napoléon*, males could marry at age 25 and females at 21 with the consent of their parents, or their father alone if there was disagreement. Until 1965, married women did not have the right to work without their husband’s permission.

TABLE 7.3 *Married and unmarried males and females, Paris 1851.*

Age range	Unmarried males	Married males	Unmarried females	Married females
15–20	45,672	204	39,338	4,735
20–25	57,747	7,730	33,258	23,046
25–30	41,189	25,671	24,340	37,697
30–35	18,357	33,642	11,730	33,847
Total 15–35	298,703	213,246	244,823	215,845

SOURCE: *STATISTIQUE DE LA FRANCE, 2ND SERIES, TERRITOIRE ET POPULATION* (PARIS, 1855) 2, P. 440.

Among the most influential writers on prostitution in nineteenth-century Paris was Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet, whose *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris, considérée sous le rapport de l'hygiène publique, de la morale et de l'administration* was published in 1836. In his meticulous study of registered prostitutes, he searched for anything that would define them sociologically, biologically, or geographically.⁴⁷ Of the 12,707 prostitutes who registered between April 1816 and April 1831, he traced father's employment, domiciles, ages, networks, and physical features, including whether or not their genitalia were like non-prostitutes. He concluded that for the most part the prostitutes were "constrained by economic need to practice [their] trade." If they were Parisian born, they generally were daughters of artisan fathers who were not well educated and who became domestics or were employed in the trades. One out of two was marginally literate, and only one fourth of the women were illegitimate. Of more than 5,000 prostitutes who provided a reason for taking up prostitution, half reported that they had chosen to do so because they were destitute or had lost their parents or home. Of the remainder, they had been abandoned by lovers, soldiers, or students, or they were responsible for family members, from siblings to elderly parents. Finally, there were those who had come to Paris to escape their previous provincial existence and to find a better life in the city. Among the prostitutes whom Parent-Duchâtelet interviewed, he found that they often took on pseudonyms, used argot peculiar to their trade, and drank hard liquor but they formed communities in which they cared for

47 A more recent edition is Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet, *La prostitution à Paris au XIX^e siècle: Texte présenté et annoté par Alain Corbin* (Paris, 1981), p. 70 ff. In the text of this article, I have preferred to use the original title.

each other, nursed each other during pregnancies, and communally cared for children.⁴⁸

Although Parent-Duchâtelet first hypothesized that that vice was hereditary, a belief common among many of his contemporaries, his evidence did not support that position. In the end, he saw prostitution as a passage in life, a category of labour. He stated, "Like begging, like gambling, it is an industry, a resource against hunger or against dishonour, because one does not know to what ends an individual will go when they have no resources."⁴⁹ Because his conclusions were very nuanced, *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris* was used both as an apology for and a justification of regulated houses of prostitution.

The Second Empire and the Formalization of the "French System"

Growth during the Second Empire doubled the size of Paris yet again.⁵⁰ This increase in the population was partially a continuing result of migration from the provinces, typically from the north of France. The pattern of employment had also changed as industrialization grew. Although entire non-Parisian families had been employed in small enterprises in the first half of the nineteenth century, by the latter half men were the most likely to be employees in larger factories that required some level of skill. Nonetheless, Paris had more adult bachelors than any other city in the French state because salaries were still too low for them to support dependents. As a corollary, single women who moved to Paris were the least likely to find employment, and salaries were predicated on the assumption that females had membership in a family. Therefore, salaries for young women were even lower, often forcing them into multiple positions, including prostitution.

While prostitution did not increase in proportion to the growth of the city, concerns about venereal disease did. The language of depopulation again surfaced, and there was the further fear that prostitution would undermine families. As the result of an administrative note of 1864, prostitutes could no longer refuse to register if they were in police custody or working in brothels.⁵¹ Individual liberty, it appeared, had been sacrificed to public protection. By 1878 and 1879, additional regulations supporting the *police des mœurs* (vice squad) had been added to remind madams of their service to the government; brothels

48 *Ibid.*, pp. 80–107.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 204.

50 Part, but not all, of this growth can be attributed to the expansion of the city limits.

51 Guyot, *La prostitution*, p. 62.

had to be dispersed to avoid scandals, windows had to be shuttered or covered, a potentially diseased woman had to be taken to the dispensary immediately, and madams were responsible for the actions of their prostitutes even outside of the house of prostitution.⁵² Was it a form of labour? Yes, the police and other regulationists agreed. Was it consistent with bourgeois sensibilities? The answer depended on the point of view. William Acton, who studied prostitution in Paris and London, noted that the Parisian system calmed the streets and led to less bawdiness and gaudiness. Therefore, it protected sensibilities.⁵³ Other writers repeated that it was not consistent with bourgeois sensibilities, but it was a necessity of life to avoid even worse sexual abuses and dangers to the family.

Demographics of Late Nineteenth Century Prostitutes

Prostitution during the last quarter of the century was directly related to women's place in the economy and their personal circumstances. By 1876, the workforce in Paris was more than half female, and 80 per cent of those female workers were wage labourers. While it is difficult to know how many prostitutes in total (registered and unregistered) there were in Paris, the vice squad reported there were 4,242 registered prostitutes in 1872 and 5,440 in the 1880s. Almost 75 per cent were over 21, and the vast majority of them were born outside of Paris. As registered prostitutes, they were considered to have no other occupation. Of the unregistered prostitutes who were arrested by the police, 39 per cent reported being domestic servants and 30 per cent were seamstresses.⁵⁴ According to one period writer, a garment worker could earn two or three francs per day, but even if she were healthy and never absent from work, her earnings would most often be insufficient to cover her expenses. Likely she would live in a garret and consume a diet of starchy food.⁵⁵ Not only did women's salaries remain low, they declined relative to prices throughout the century. Furthermore, the percentage of single women in Paris increased as a result of the overall scarcity of jobs for females even in the rural areas surrounding Paris and more young women were cut off from their families. Writers like Parent-Duchâtelet and Commenge, who published his study of prostitution in 1894, bemoaned the poverty in which prostitutes typically found themselves, but

52 *Ibid.*, pp. 64–65.

53 William Acton, "Prostitution in France", as extracted from the edited 2nd edition by Peter Frye (London, 1968), pp. 97–107, available at: <http://chnm.gmu.edu/history/faculty/kelly/wciv/women/prostitution.htm>; last accessed 7 July 2017.

54 Weston, "Prostitution in Paris", ch. 2; Corbin, *Women for Hire*, p. 42.

55 *Ibid.*, p. 53.

they made no recommendations.⁵⁶ The sentiment was that prostitution was more of a solution than a problem, as long as it was regulated. Furthermore, prostitution came to be viewed as a “state of being” rather than a profession.⁵⁷ Proponents of the “French System” noted that there was a certain pathology attached to women who registered. On the other hand, survival often hung in the balance; prostitution was an economic choice.

Turn-of-the-Century Reform Efforts

The end of the nineteenth century brought new reasons to deal with prostitution: the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts in England, the visits of international reformers like Josephine Butler, and the continuing spectre of venereal diseases. The new discourse of abolitionism combined civil liberties, double standards, medical reform, and the protection of women. Some abolitionists demanded the elimination of the vice squad while others established a crusade against immorality, debauchery, and the victimization of women. Although some momentum was gained through this abolitionist coalition, the governmental crisis of 1877 halted national debates. In the interim, the *Union internationale des amies de la jeune fille* stepped in to monitor employment bureaux and railroad stations which were widely seen as the hubs of the white slave trade.

Just after the turn of the century, two other sources of abolitionist sentiment rekindled the debate. Cases of venereal disease in France and among French troops in the colonies had increased alarmingly, and the international press thrived on exposés of white slavery. In Paris, for example, from 13 to 15 per cent of the male population was syphilitic,⁵⁸ infants allegedly died at an alarming rate, and, in its later stages, the ravishing disease could be undetectable. In the case of white slavery, it was argued that procurers established themselves at railway stations near the Tour Saint-Jacques in the city centre and on the heights of Montmartre providing promises of lodging and employment. By the time of the 1902 international conference on white slavery, newspapers widely reported that there was a traffic in virgins, suppliers were growing wealthy, and the overseas military was playing a role in creating demand for prostitutes.⁵⁹ The results of the conference were promulgated in France in 1905, but

56 Commenge, *La prostitution clandestine à Paris* (Paris, 1897).

57 Corbin, *Women for Hire*, p. 30.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 204.

59 *Ibid.*, pp. 289–293.

the international convention functionally reaffirmed surveillance rather than abolishing the trade.

Throughout the debates, there was one other position voiced on prostitution: neo-regulationism. In the absence of national or international law, this became the new “French System”. The system blended bourgeois values and a more humane treatment of prostitutes. Over time, fewer and fewer prostitutes lived in *maisons de tolérance* and more practised their trade in what were called *maisons de rendez-vous*, which were non-residential houses of prostitution. Owners monitored the women who worked there, photographing and registering them, forbade alcohol and advertising, and required that prostitutes undergo their medical examinations. The change to *maisons de rendez-vous* had taken place gradually, so much so that by 1903 less than 1 per cent of prostitutes lived in the houses where they worked.⁶⁰ Furthermore, proposals made by the Prefect of Police, Louis Lépine, carried the day: a sanitary office replaced the hated *police des mœurs*, health cards and health inspections were required, and a more humanitarian treatment of venereal diseases was instituted. Although debates continued at the municipal level, the only national legislation that was passed was the Rousseil Law of 15 April 1908 which dealt with the prostitution of minors.⁶¹

From the World Wars to Abolitionism

In the period just before World War I, neo-regulationism, toleration, and increased surveillance defined prostitution. During the war, prostitutes left Paris briefly, fearing that they would be confined to work camps, and three-quarters of the brothels closed. By the time of the armistice, however, new *maisons de rendez-vous* had been established, some of them quite deluxe. More policing occurred around railway stations and barracks, and sanitary measures were dramatically increased. Already in decline, the *maisons de tolérance* did not reappear; in fact, no more than thirty were in existence after the war.⁶² In the interwar period, as sexuality became less confined, dance halls, cinemas and theatres were combined with *maisons de rendez-vous* to draw clients into the establishments. *Maisons d'abbatage* also sprang up, offering quick sex without

60 Weston, “Prostitution in Paris”, p. 65. See also Emile Richard, *La prostitution à Paris* (Paris, 1890). Richard was a leading neo-regulationist.

61 *Ibid.*, pp. 173, 178. Minors under the age of 21 were not to be registered, and those who were arrested could be taken from their parents as wards of the Bureau of Public Assistance.

62 Corbin, *Women for Hire*, pp. 334–336.

entertainment or any ambiance. In these larger establishments, each prostitute typically serviced thirty to fifty clients per day.⁶³ Allegedly, any type of sex could be requested.

World War II, the fall of France, and the German occupation created an interesting new political coalition between the reactionary right and the republican left. The 1930s, after all, had been perceived as entirely too liberating, particularly for women, and it was argued that patriarchal authority needed to be re-established. Not surprisingly, there were serious discussions about ending the “French System” but what occurred instead was a movement to purify morals and protect the family. *Maisons de tolérance* were recreated, soon becoming a “masterful piece of the social and moral order” because they were discrete, carefully regulated, and provided a service.⁶⁴ Under the German occupation, certain brothels were reserved for officers, while others were maintained for enlisted men. Brothels, made famous by their earlier clientele, gained new notice, e.g., Le Chabonais, Le Sphinx, and the One Two Two.

The first major change in French policy occurred immediately after World War II with the Marthe Richard Law, so named for a former prostitute and member of the municipal council of the 4th *arrondissement* of Paris. Reflecting on the use of brothels by the German Wehrmacht and French collaborators, Richard demanded their closure, citing the sordid memories attached to the houses of prostitution, the vast numbers of women whose heads had been shaved and who had been assaulted for “horizontal collaboration”, and an increase in venereal diseases that had taken place in spite of alleged health examinations.⁶⁵ All prostitutes—whether registered, independent, or occasional—were, in a common phrase, “spreading disease like shotgun pellets”.⁶⁶ Furthermore, Richard championed a new regard for women, stating unequivocally: “A woman is a human being, not merchandise.”⁶⁷ Richard was not alone in wanting the brothels closed, and a short-lived coalition provided the votes. When all was said and done, 178 brothels were closed along

63 *Ibid.*, p. 339.

64 Patrick Buisson, *Années érotiques: De la Grande Prostituée à la revanche des mâles* (Paris, 2009), pp. 172–174.

65 Another view of the postwar environment leading to the closing of *maisons de tolérance* may be found in Mary Louise Roberts, “The Silver Foxhole: The GIs and Prostitution in Paris, 1944–1945”, *French Historical Studies*, 33 (2010), pp. 99–128. She argues that the number of American soldiers on leave in Paris destabilized the entire regulationist system.

66 Buisson, *Années érotiques*, p. 631.

67 Marthe Richard, *Mon destin de femme* (Paris, 1974), p. 336. Significant portions of Marthe Richard’s memoirs are fictionalized. See also Natacha Henry, *Marthe Richard, l’aventurière des maisons closes* (Paris, 2006).

with 6,000 hotel rooms that were turned into lodgings. Police registration was ended, and the formal elements of regulationism were dismantled.⁶⁸ Yet, only a few days after enactment of the Marthe Richard Law, a new social and health registration was placed on the books.⁶⁹

Abolitionism, French Equivocation, and Prostitute Protests

French policy toward the outward manifestations of prostitution officially changed from regulationism to abolitionism in 1960 when the French government ratified the UN “Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others.”⁷⁰ In spite of adopting an abolitionist position, the following three decades in France saw little change in the governmental response to prostitution. Police cleaned up the streets, defined offenses as they saw them, and acted on interpretations of the law because there were few absolutes. Only in 1975, when police harassment became particularly visible, was there a visceral response by prostitutes themselves. The response began in Lyons on 2 June 1975, when nearly a hundred prostitutes occupied a church to bring media attention to police harassment. Paris prostitutes immediately joined what became a national demonstration, going on strike and demanding health benefits and changes to the Penal Code.⁷¹ However, without continuing formal leadership, the movement died out by spring 1976.

What had occurred was the beginning of a dramatic change. Prostitutes explicitly defined themselves as sex workers, became their own advocates, expressed their own grievances, sought allies, and began a social movement. Historically, regulationists and abolitionists had excluded prostitutes from debates about them. As such, prostitutes often were characterized as having no agency, being mere pawns because they had no choice, or being pathologically

68 “Loi n° 46–685 du 13 avril 1946 dite Marthe Richard tendant à la fermeture des maisons de tolérance et au renforcement de la lutte contre le proxénétisme”, *Journal officiel de la République française* (14 April 1946), pp. 3138–3139.

69 “Loi n° 46–795 du 24 avril 1946 portant institution d’un fichier sanitaire et social de la prostitution”, cited in Sarah-Marie Maffesoli, “Le traitement juridique de la prostitution”, *Sociétés*, 99 (2008), pp. 33–46, 39.

70 “Circulaire du 25 novembre 1960 à la repression du proxénétisme”.

71 Lilian Mathieu, “An Unlikely Mobilization: The Occupation of Saint-Nizier Church by the Prostitutes of Lyon”, *Revue française de sociologie*, 42 (supplement, 2001), pp. 107–131, 107.

inclined to delinquency.⁷² Furthermore, prostitutes tended to come from the lowest classes and often had little education. According to a study of French prostitutes, “only 39 per cent had access to health insurance; approximately 50 per cent lived in temporary accommodation (hotel or no fixed address); 37 per cent were dependent upon one or several drugs (including alcohol); and 33 per cent had been victims of physical assault during the five months preceding the study.”⁷³ It is not surprising that aid societies, Christian organizations, organizations offering medical support, and the occasional liberal feminist became the spokespersons for prostitutes.

In the late 1990s, debates on prostitution resurfaced at the same time as international and European measures were endorsed on child pornography, child prostitution, and transnational crime cartels. In Paris, the increase of immigrants created a new focus, reflecting on all forms of prostitution—female, male, and transgendered. As such, the Penal Code of 1994 provided a specific definition of procuring in a number of paragraphs in Chapter 5, Article 225: (1) making a profit from prostitution or receiving an immoral income; (2) living above one’s own means, while either living with a prostitute or being in continual relations with one or more habitual prostitutes; (3) selling or offering non-public locations to known prostitutes; and (4) selling, leasing, or providing vehicles that could be used in forms of prostitution.⁷⁴ Because of the specificity of the definitions, prostitutes actively challenged the law. The sanctions could, in fact, encompass taxi drivers who took them to their clients, hotel managers and staff who rented rooms to them, and even an unemployed or invalid husband who lived from the proceeds of his wife’s prostitution.

Lines were drawn in a false dichotomy of abolitionism versus regulationism. New abolitionists adopted a platform of aid to victims, defining all prostitutes as victims and not questioning distinctions between forced prostitution and voluntary (free) prostitution. According to them, prostitution needed to be eradicated to protect women from violence and dehumanization. In opposition,

72 *Idem.*, “The Emergence and Uncertain Outcomes of Prostitutes’ Social Movements”, *The European Journal of Women’s Studies*, 10 (2003), pp. 29–50, 30.

73 François-Rodolphe Ingold and Mohamed Toussirt, “Le travail sexuel, la consommation des drogues et le VIH: Investigation ethnographique de la prostitution à Paris (1989–1993)”, *Bulletin épidémiologique hebdomadaire*, 27 (1994), pp. 119–120; for additional statistics, see also Anne Serre *et al.*, “Conditions de vie de personnes prostituées: conséquences sur la prévention de l’infection à VIH”, *Revue d’Epidémiologie et de Santé publique*, 44 (1996), pp. 328–336.

74 “Code Pénal” (as amended); available at: <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichCode.do?cidTexte=LEGITEXT000006070719&dateTexte=19960810>; last accessed 7 July 2017. See particularly Book 2, Title 2, Chapter 5, Articles 225-4-1 to 225-4-9 and 225-5 to 225-12.

sex workers, their allies, and their advocates framed their arguments around labour rights, arguing that prostitution was a legitimate economic choice and practitioners should be given rights and protections under the law.

In 2002, with the election of a centrist-right government, prostitution became a “law and order” issue of domestic security.⁷⁵ Even before the Sarkozy Law had been fully vetted, masked Parisian prostitutes took to the streets, protesting the criminalization of passive soliciting which could lead to “six months in jail for a smile.”⁷⁶ Issues included lengthier detentions for illegal immigrants and the potential deportation of non-French prostitutes if they did not identify their pimps. According to a well-known abolitionist organization, 70 per cent of immigrant prostitutes who work in France have no identity papers. More than half of the prostitutes are foreigners and most come from eastern Europe and former French colonies in Africa.⁷⁷ Because they are often controlled by pimps and foreign procurers, according to the police, they are a threat to law and order. They are also engaged in a lucrative trade that attracts further crime. According to government statistics, they each annually pay approximately €150,000 to their pimps for massive earnings of millions of euros.⁷⁸

When the government of France moved forward with its anti-crime agenda, the mayor of Paris conducted his own enquiry into the implications of the Sarkozy Law. He authorized a group of scholars and urban researchers affiliated with the *Centre national de recherche scientifique* (CNRS) to gather facts, statistics, and human stories. The result of their research was a 300-page volume, simply titled *La prostitution à Paris*.⁷⁹ Without making value judgements, they identified and interviewed male, female, and transgendered prostitutes, bar girls, street walkers (regardless of gender), and those who practised their trade in cars and vans.

75 Gill Allwood, “Prostitution Debates in France”, *Contemporary Politics*, 10 (2004), pp. 145–157, 145.

76 “French Prostitutes March against Ban on Soliciting”, *The New York Times International*, 5 November 2002, available at: <http://nytimes.com/2002/11/05/international/05WIRE-FRANCE.html>; last accessed 7 July 2017.

77 Statistics from the *Office Central pour la répression de la traite des êtres humains*, according to La Fondation Scelles; available at: <http://www.fondationscelles.org/>; last accessed 7 July 2017. The statistics date to 2011.

78 “Proxénétisme: des réseaux démantelés chaque année”, *Le Figaro*, 27 February 2012; available at: <http://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/2012/02/27/01016-20120227ARTFIG00544-proxenetisme-la-realite-des-chiffres-en-france.php>; last accessed 7 July 2017.

79 Handman and Mossuz-Lavau, *La Prostitution à Paris*.

As the mayor's enquiry progressed, certain areas in Paris came to be viewed as "prostitute-friendly" including the Bois de Boulogne and the Bois de Vincennes.⁸⁰ Researchers interviewed their subjects in those areas, while also developing a classification of current prostitution. Unlike the taxonomies of Parent-Duchâtelet, twenty-first century prostitution is defined by location as a function of age, longevity as a sex worker, drugs, and nationality. Along the old streets in the centre of the city, traditional French prostitutes still remain. Averaging 40 years of age, they are viewed as vestiges of a certain Parisian lifestyle. Along the boulevards named for the marshals of France and around the old city customs barriers, one finds Africans and eastern Europeans. With the arrival of sex shops in the 1970s, more Chinese entered the trade. In the Bois de Boulogne, South-American transsexuals, along with other male prostitutes, work the winding paths and conduct their trade in parked cars. According to voyeurs, of whom there are many, there is a certain theatricality to the activities in the Bois de Boulogne. In the Bois de Vincennes, on the eastern periphery of Paris, prostitution is more traditionally female, made up predominantly of African immigrants and conducted in panel trucks or vans.⁸¹

For the researchers involved in the mayor's project, there was only one conclusion: prostitutes who wished to leave sex work should be assisted in doing so, and the conditions for prostitutes who continued their profession should be ameliorated.⁸² To "exit" prostitution is costly, potentially dangerous, and fraught with delays. Prostitutes must pay retroactive taxes to the government; and, if they are immigrants, they must divulge the name of their pimp or procurer, leading to his or her arrest. If they do not have identity cards, they can be deported even if they inform on their pimp or procurer. Critics of the current system charge the government with acting as a pimp. It receives tax revenues from prostitutes and benefits from their earnings.

While there is an historic and literary French nostalgia about prostitution, new, young, non-French, racially and ethnically diverse prostitutes have not been romanticized. Instead, the discourse about prostitution has left prostitutes entangled in a web of contradictory practices. While prostitution remains a civil liberty, the increasing number of foreign sex workers, the assaults on neighbourhood security by crime cartels, and illegal immigration have all placed sex work in the popular press and on the floor of the National Assembly. In December 2011, French deputies, both of the left and right, adopted a non-binding resolution reconfirming the UN Convention of 1960 and the proposed

80 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

81 *Ibid.*, pp. 48–60.

82 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

sentencing of clients of prostitutes to six months in prison with a fine of €3,000. Headlines declared, “The deputies adopted an anti-prostitution resolution”.⁸³ Yet, even when the French government adopted the UN “Resolution Suppressing the Traffic in Persons”, it did so with a caveat: “The free exercise of prostitution is allowed for those who practise it individually.”⁸⁴ In this statement, one can almost hear the voices of Augustine, Aquinas, and the French Revolutionaries: i.e., prostitution is a necessary part of life *and* an individual liberty. So, prostitution *per se* remained outside the statute, and prostitutes continued to be subjected to police harassment and arrest, although *le racolage passif* (passive soliciting) was removed from the Sarkozy Law in 2012, but only briefly.

As of December 2013, with the support of the socialist Hollande government, the French National Assembly overwhelmingly approved a bill to impose a €1,500 fine on persons who pay for sex.⁸⁵ Seen as one of the most expansive pieces of legislation for the abolition of prostitution, it was patterned after the Swedish model of going after clients of prostitutes. When the bill reached the French Senate in early 2014, the Senate established a Special Commission to review the findings and implications of the proposed legislation. For the first time, legislators actually gathered testimony from sex workers. On 8 July 2014, the Senate commission highlighted the two most significant provisions: continuation of the decriminalization of soliciting and removal of the fine for clients.⁸⁶ The latter elicited significant responses from both sides of the political spectrum. Ultimately, the debate continued, even with topless prostitutes taking over the Senate chamber in support of their clients.⁸⁷ As of 30 March 2015, the Senate returned to a position akin to the Sarkozy Law.⁸⁸ Since then, both

83 Kim Willsher, “Scandal-weary France to Vote on Outlawing Prostitution”, *The Observer*, 3 December 2011; available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/dec/04/france-prostitution-scandal-imprisonment/>; last accessed 7 July 2017.

84 The intent was to prohibit procurers, pimps, and organized prostitution in accord with the UN Convention while confirming individual liberty.

85 France 24 coverage of the National Assembly vote, available at: <http://www.france24.com/en/20131204-french-assembly-parliament-votes-fine-pay-sex-clients-prostitution/>; last accessed 7 July 2017.

86 Report of the *Commission spéciale chargée d'examiner la proposition de loi renforçant la lutte contre le système prostitutionnel*, available at: www.senat.fr/commission/spec/lutte_contre_le_système_prostitutionnel/index.html; last accessed 7 July 2017.

87 France 24 coverage of the FEMEN protest on 17 July 2014, available at: <http://www.france24.com/en/20140717-femen-members-do-topless-protest-french-senate-prostitution/>; last accessed 7 July 2017.

88 “Le Sénat pénalise les prostituées mais pas leur clients”, *Le Monde.fr Société*, 30 March 2015, available at: http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2015/03/30/prostitution-le-senat-retablit-le-delit-de-racolage_4606124_3224.html; last accessed 7 July 2017.

houses of France's parliament have made further modifications to the statute, particularly concerning the links between prostitution and human trafficking, reinsertion of former prostitutes into French society, and what to do about Internet sites for cyber soliciting.

While prostitution cannot be separated from disease, violence, crime, and human trafficking, the French situation is complex and fraught with paradoxes. Where does individual liberty end, including the right to use one's body as a form of labour? Where does governmental intervention for the protection of others begin? Is prostitution forced or free? Are all prostitutes victims, or do some practise prostitution as a choice? Is prostitution a form of labour? If prostitutes use parts of their bodies to ply their trade, in doing so, are they so different from manual labourers who use their arms, backs, and hands to earn a living?

Over a half century has passed since the adoption of the UN Convention and more than a decade since the Sarkozy Law magnified the contradictions in French policy. The French are attempting to find a middle path, but it is not possible to separate prostitution from prostitutes, whether they are French or immigrant. If prostitution is permissible under the law, then it might be argued that prostitutes should be entitled to equal protection and equal benefits. If they attempt to leave prostitution, government support should be provided, including access to social services, health care, and transitional training and employment. If there are other issues, e.g., crime cartels, a continuing traffic in human beings, and international procuring, then those issues must be dealt with on their own terms. In the end, there are no easy answers, but as they have been framed, the current laws remain unsatisfactory.

Prostitution in Stockholm: Continuity and Change

Yvonne Svanström

Introduction

In 1889 a woman wrote to the Prostitution Bureau in Stockholm, Sweden, asking if she really did have to keep on visiting the bureau since she was working: "...when I return [from visiting relatives] I will myself come and can perhaps talk to the Constable if I have to visit the bureau since I work every day but if they only once see you outside they think you are only looking for men."¹ The bureau the woman is referring to embodied the regulation system in the 1800s; in 1889 it had been in place in Stockholm for more than thirty years and was a part of everyday life for people in Stockholm. It was supposedly in place to control the spread of venereal diseases through medical examinations of women involved in prostitution. But the woman was also referring to the arbitrariness of a system that was created through force and had developed into an administration of prostitution rather than a tool for disease control; according to her letter, she had another trade and should not have to be subject to such examinations. But the system had created an identity known as a "prostitute", which meant that such women had less space for mobility.

The main purpose of this chapter is to discuss continuity and change concerning what is termed prostitution. Trying to cover a time-span of 400 years, starting off when prostitution in the capitalist sense did not exist, and ending in a time when the purchase of what is termed "sexual services" is illegal, makes comparisons problematic. This chapter has an empirical character and it tries to cover both the social aspects of the lives of the women involved in prostitution as well as consider the economic, spatial, and cultural aspects involved. However, since Sweden, and thus Stockholm, was the first country to criminalize the purchase of sex, this institutional change will be given some space. Recently what has been termed "feminist institutionalism" has been the focus in feminist political science specifically as regards the political.² For

1 EI Inkomna skrivelser 1859–1918, Prostitutionsbyrån, Överståthållarens arkiv (ÖÄ), Stockholm City Archive [hereafter SSA].

2 Fiona Mackay "Conclusion: Towards a Feminist Institutionalism?" in Lena Krook *et al.*, (eds), *Gender, Politics and Institutions* (Basingstoke, 2010), pp. 181–196.

gender historians, the aim of discussing and understanding change or a lack of institutional change and its consequences for gender relations has been the focus for a long time. Sweden has had a strong state, from the absolute state into the modern welfare state, and during the latter period it has been referred to as “women-friendly”, although it has a labour market that is segregated according to gender combined with a pay gap between men and women.³ How the state has acted when it comes to prostitution has had impacts on both formal and informal institutions; legislation has changed, but have the gendered power relations and attitudes towards prostitution changed?⁴

Prostitution is historically constructed, and political and economic institutional changes over time have led to both change and continuity in how prostitution is comprehended. However, the changes that have occurred during the period covered here have been immense. Stockholm in the 1600s was an impoverished small town in the Swedish Bothnian Empire which was more or less constantly at war; four hundred years later Stockholm is a medium-sized city (by European standards) in a post-welfare state which was left out of the two World Wars. In the early 1600s Sweden had a harsh Protestant society comprised of four estates in which women were subordinated to men. In the 2000s, Sweden is a supposedly gender-equal secularised democratic state, but with widening economic and societal gaps. The settings are thus essentially different, as is prostitution and how it has been perceived.⁵

Legislation on Extra-Marital Relations

Until 1999 the only legislation concerning prostitution pertained to brothel-keeping and procuring. Brothel-keeping and procuring according to the 1734 criminal code were, and still are, illegal; women were fined, sent to the workhouse, or flogged if sentenced when found in a brothel.⁶ However, the charge was not prostitution but fornication. In the criminal code of 1864, procuring

3 Helga Hernes, *Welfare State and Woman Power: Essays in State Feminism* (London, 1987); Anette Borchorst and Birte Siim, “Woman-friendly Policies and State Feminism”, *Theorizing Scandinavian Gender Equality, Feminist Theory*, 9 (2008), pp. 207–224.

4 Yvonne Svanström, “Through the Prism of Prostitution: Conceptions of Women and Sexuality in Sweden at Two Fins-de-Siècle”, *Nordic Journal of Women’s Studies*, 13 (2005), pp. 48–58, 55–56.

5 For the sake of simplicity I will use the term “prostitution” throughout the chapter.

6 *Underdånigt betänkande angående åtgärder för motarbetande af de smittosamma könssjukdomarnas spridning*, 4 vols, (Stockholm, 1910) 1, p. 179; Yvonne Svanström, *Policing Public Women: The Regulation of Prostitution in Stockholm 1812–1880* (Stockholm, 2000), p. 120.

was penalized by forced labour for a period of six months to four years.⁷ At the beginning of the second millennium, grave procuring is punished with a maximum sentence of eight years imprisonment.⁸

Still, extra-marital sexuality was harshly penalized by both the state and the church during the early modern period, in some instances by death. The death penalty was introduced through the reformation, and perhaps because of the country's rural character the harshness regarding extra-marital sexuality seems to have lingered on longer in Sweden than on the continent.⁹ Sexual intercourse between unmarried couples, i.e. fornication, was also punished by heavy fines, and if the parties could not pay they were sentenced to forced labour. Both women and men were punished. It was the immorality of the crime, the breaking of the commandments, that was penalised; hence both parties had to pay. The severity of the punishment for these crimes was lessened over time, and in practice the parties in adultery cases were often pardoned from death.¹⁰ It was also common that the death punishment was reduced to flogging.¹¹ Still, when the first national codex was passed in Sweden in 1734, it was largely uninfluenced by the Enlightenment, and even by contemporary commentators it was considered to be conservative, especially concerning the family and sexuality which it codified in the early-modern tradition.¹² A number of liberal reforms introduced in the late 1700s and early 1800s concerning extra-marital sexuality mitigated the early modern legislation, and in the new criminal code of 1864, illegitimate sexual intercourse was decriminalized.

A piece of legislation that prevailed through the better part of the period and was used to monitor prostitution was the vagrancy law. Under the terms of the law, persons without employment or legal means to support themselves would receive a warning and a chance to find employment, and if they did not they would be incarcerated in the workhouse or sentenced to forced labour.¹³ A new vagrancy law came into effect in 1885 and two categories of vagrants were constructed: persons who wandered between different locations

7 *Underdånigt betänkande*, I, p. 46.

8 *Svensk författningssamling*, Brottsbalken, Ch. 6, §12.

9 Jonas Frykman, *Horan i bondesamhället* (Stockholm, 1993), *passim*.

10 Jan Eric Almquist, *Karl IX och den mosaiska rätten* (Uppsala, 1942), pp. 24–25.

11 Rudolf Thunander, *Förbjuden kärlek: Sexualbrott, kärleksmagi och kärleksbrev i 1600-talets Sverige* (Stockholm, 1992), pp. 27–29.

12 Jan Sundin, *För Gud, staten och folket: Brott och rättskipning i Sverige 1600–1840*, (Stockholm, 1992), pp. 135–136. Sundin compares Sweden to the puritan colonies in North America and finds that their legislation was more liberal.

13 Hans Wallentin, *Lösdriveri och industrialism: Om lösdriverifrågan i Sverige 1885–1940* (Östersund, 1989), pp. 4–5.

and those whose lifestyles were a threat to common decency and society at large. The legislation on extra-marital sexuality and the vagrancy legislation constituted the legal foundation on which the regulation of prostitution was built. After the abolishment of the regulation system, the vagrancy legislation became the sole way of monitoring prostitution. The legislation was kept in place until 1964.¹⁴

Early-Modern Stockholm: A Small Town

Stockholm was a small town for quite a long time. The town was poorly built and had wooden houses and narrow alleys. However, during Sweden's period as a great power in the 1600s, the town changed; in 1634 the Royal Court, the government, the parliament, and the central administration were located in Stockholm which led to an influx of merchants, civil servants, soldiers, and citizens. In 1600 there were around 9,000 inhabitants and that figure increased to 40,000 by the year 1700, largely due to immigration.¹⁵ Only after 1750 did the population of Stockholm increase through birth. In fact, the many wars, the decline of Sweden as a great state, and pestilence and cholera resulted at times in decreases in the population. After losing the Great Northern War in 1721, Sweden's period as a super-power was over. In the 1700s Stockholm was Sweden's largest manufacturing town, but there were high levels of unemployment and poverty because of the stagnating economy, and the capital experienced long-term stagnation and slow population growth until 1850. The consumption of alcohol was high and so was mortality.¹⁶ Thus, during this long period of both supremacy and stagnation Stockholm remained a small town, and there were major economic differences between the estates and those outside the estates, and women were at the bottom of that scale.

For One Daller and a Pair of Gloves: Prostitution in the 1600s

Society in the 1600s was patriarchal. The husband acted as the legal guardian of the household and his wife. The religious ideology after the reformation upgraded matrimony, and extra-marital sexuality was condemned both by the

14 Yvonne Svanström, "Prostitution as Vagrancy: Sweden 1923–1964", *Journal of Scandinavian Studies in Criminology and Crime Prevention*, 7 (2006), pp. 142–163.

15 *Rapporten befolkningen i Stockholm 1252–2005*. Stockholm with the closest suburbs, p. 55.

16 Lars Nilsson and Margareta Rye (eds), *Staden på vattnet 1* (Stockholm, 2002).

church and the state. This development coincided with a central state with increasing power and a strong military complex, together with an increasing bureaucratization of society. Living conditions were poor, especially as the result of constant wars and the taxes levied to finance them. Still, the absence of men due to constant warfare created openings for women when it came to undertaking novel labour. Women also started living with other men, since their husbands had been gone for long periods of time. Such cases sometimes ended up in court as adultery. The numbers of extra-marital relations were probably rather low in this God-fearing Protestant small town, and a reasonable assumption is that the women who *were* involved in “whoring” during this time were among the worst off and already outside society.

The Stockholm City Memorials, a series of protocols or memoranda kept at the magistrates’ courts, provide evidence of cases of “whoring” in the early 1600s.¹⁷ There were also cases of “insults” in which both men and women had been called “whores” or accused of “whoring”. In one case, the maid of a man named Christopher Keise was accused of having “earned 16 *r.daller* through whoring.”¹⁸ If the accusation was true, prostitution seems to have been very well paid; 16 *r.daller* would equal more than €400 in 2007.¹⁹

In the Stockholm City Memorials for 1618 there are references to what seems to have been a fairly well-established brothel where a woman received 1 *daller* and a pair of gloves for intercourse.²⁰ The customers mentioned were both married and unmarried: several merchants from Germany, a shoemaker, the man-servant of a military commander, a soldier, a Dutch emissary, and others. The married men who had had intercourse with married women at the brothel were sentenced to steep fines (200 *daller*, the equivalent of more than €5000 in 2007), and when only one of the parties was married the fine was halved. The women escaped from prison during the proceedings but appeared in court again five years later for whoring and theft. Two of the women, one of whom was also accused of procuring, were to lose an ear, be flogged by the pillory, and be banned from the city. The other two were to “go by the cart for a time”

17 For this chapter, the period 1614–1635 is what has been possible to research, and obviously the court material says nothing on the prevalence of “prostitution” as a whole.

18 *Stockholms tänkeböcker från år 1592, Utgivna av Stockholms Stadsarkiv*, vol. VIII, 1614–1615, 27 March 1615; *Stockholms tänkeböcker*, vol. X, 17 June 1618; *Stockholms tänkeböcker*, vol. XII, 1620–1621, 27 September 1621. Also 17 December 1623; *Stockholms tänkeböcker*, vol. XIII, 1622–1623, 22 August 1623, 17 October 1623.

19 Available at: <http://www.historia.se/>; last accessed 7 July 2017. Measured against consumer price index. Rodney Edvinsson, and Söderberg, Johan, 2011, “A Consumer Price Index for Sweden 1290–2008”, *Review of Income and Wealth*, 57 (2011), pp. 270–292.

20 *Stockholms tänkeböcker*, vol. X, 4 November 1618.

(i.e. pull the latrine cart) and be flogged if they reappeared.²¹ About a week later some of the women reappeared in court in connection with theft and "... it was proven that Limping Margret has been whoring while her husband was alive, and she will lose her life."²²

Twelve years later, in 1635, the pattern was different. Of the sixteen cases in which sentencing occurred, there were no accusations of whoring.²³ Instead the cases concern adultery and fornication. Two women and three men were sentenced to death (in at least one case this was carried out), two men were pardoned, and seven women and three men were sentenced to fines.²⁴

Based on the small sample investigated for this chapter, flogging and being banned from the city seems to have been the most common punishment for whoring/prostitution, and the only death sentence seems to have been concerning adultery, or fornication when both parties were sentenced.²⁵

"Maiden Cages" and the Mitigation of Sexuality: Prostitution in the 1700s

Studies on Stockholm for the period of the 1700s mention frivolous attitudes towards sexuality and there was a softening in perceptions of extra-marital sexuality. At the turn of the 1700s, Stockholm had a population of 40,000 and around 1,200 establishments licensed to sell liquor on their premises. Many of these were run by women, with other women working as servant girls and some establishments were run as brothels. By 1813 the number had decreased to 700, and a new decree from the office of the governor stated that the number of taverns should be further reduced to 400 in order to control what was regarded as excessive alcohol consumption among the citizens.²⁶ So-called coffee-houses eventually earned a bad reputation and were no longer "visited

21 *Ibid.*, and vol XIII, 22 September 1623. Two days later it was reported that the punishments had been carried out.

22 *Stockholms tänkeböcker*, vol. XIII, 4 October 1623.

23 In one case where an illegitimate child had been born the woman stated that the man had promised her marriage and given her blue woollen socks for the harsh winter. This is the only mention of gifts or remuneration. *Stockholms tänkeböcker*, vol. XXIII, 30 January 1635.

24 *Stockholms tänkeböcker*, vol. XXIII, 1635, pp. 2, 6, 20, 31–32, 37, 49, 62–63, 65, 90, 97, 103, 197, 202, 216–217, 223, 225, 230, 234, 244, 246, 259, 281, 290, 306–307, 312.

25 *Stockholms tänkeböcker*, vol. XII, 1620–1621, 28 March, 13 December 1620; 1 January, 14 March, 17 March, and 13 August 1621. In three cases the sentence was transformed.

26 Svanström, *Policing Public Women*, p. 55

by proper people”, and in the 1800s they were more or less associated with prostitution.²⁷ The euphemism for brothels in the 1700s was “maiden cages” and one case shows what seems to have been a well-known brothel in Stockholm that catered for high-class clientele.²⁸ The father of one of the girls at the brothel brought his daughter to court in 1747, and the madam was indicted as a procurer.²⁹

In the late 1700s a Polish Jesuit named Albertrandi visited Stockholm. He wrote in a letter in 1789 that drinking alcohol was customary among men, women, and children and that prostitution was plentiful; as he said, there was “...an unrestricted looseness, which among the women in particular, knows no boundaries; there are not even any attempts to keep this a secret.”³⁰ The women were said to be especially prone to wandering close to the theatres, indicating a connection between the arts and prostitution.³¹ In the early 1700s, vagrancy and begging was a growing problem and the number of men and women without property increased. In 1724 a spinning workhouse was established in Stockholm “to fight vagrancy and begging”. “Loose” women who “ran with baskets in the streets and inside the houses” were to be taken to the spinning workhouse. According to the authorities, the selling of fruit was a cover for engaging in prostitution. The same held true in the 1800s when “orange girls” (young girls selling oranges) were assumed to be involved in prostitution.³² Earlier research into the social and economic conditions of the late 1700s shows that the majority of the women sentenced for “prostitution”, i.e. fornication, were categorized as thread spinners. It is likely that the decline of the manufacturing industry in

27 Claes Lundin and August Strindberg, *Gamla Stockholm*, (Stockholm, 1882 [1974]), p. 506.

28 Among those were one major and two barons. Mila Hallman, *Målare och urmakare, flickor och lösdrivare. Historier från Gamla Stockholm* (Stockholm, 1907), p. 123.

29 Hallman, *Målare*, pp. 126–27; Södra förstadens kämnärsrätt, A3A Protokoll och domar i kriminalmål 30 June–2 October, 1747, SSA. The madam, Lovisa von Platen, is also mentioned in the well-known composer and poet Carl Michael Bellman’s “Fredmans Testamente”, n. 149. The street mentioned is Baggensgatan, a street where a substantial number of informal brothels existed during the 1800s. Svanström, *Policing Public Women*, pp. 298, 373, 463–464, 466.

30 Dagmar Anckarsvärd, “Stockholm 1789–1790 skildrat av en polsk kanik [Johannes Baptista Albertrandi], in *Samfundet St. Eriks Årsbok*, (Stockholm, 1933).

31 The notion that women at the opera or the ballet in the 1700s at times acted as “call girls” is to some degree corroborated through archival evidence, but the extent is not known. Gunilla Roempke, *Vröstens makt. Dansös i mätressernas tidevarv* (Stockholm, 1994).

32 Gunnar Rudstedt, *Långholmen: Spinnhuset och fängelset under två sekler* (Stockholm, 1972), p. 14.

the late 1700s, together with more lenient judicial practices, led women to try other ways to make a living, perhaps by prostitution.³³

Regulated Prostitution in the Modern Era

As in many other cities, the 1800s was an era of regulation and a fully-fledged system was launched in the second half of the century. For the Swedish population, the century began with the Napoleonic wars, but in 1809 a peace treaty was signed by which Sweden lost its territory of Finland to Russia and entered a long period without wars. The increase of venereal diseases and infected soldiers in the garrisons became the stepping stone for a regulation scheme.

Stockholm was still in demographic and economic stagnation and continued to be so until the mid-1800s. Industrialization took off rather late in Sweden, but during the last decades of the century Stockholm stood out as a booming industrial town which attracted immigrants from the rest of the country. Women mostly worked as unskilled labourers in factories or as home workers. In the 1860s the textile industry's workforce consisted of up to 67 per cent women, and the cigar industry employed women as well, but 66 per cent of all working women in Stockholm worked as domestic servants.³⁴ The early introduction of a public school system guaranteed that the majority of the inhabitants could read and write on a basic level.

Extra-marital sexual relations were still punishable at the beginning of the century, but the inhabitants' sexual habits had already made the legislation obsolete. "Stockholm-marriages" was used as a term to describe common-law marriages in the 1800s, indicating that Stockholm was a town where sexual and family norms were different from other parts of Sweden. The number of children born out of wedlock in Stockholm was considerably higher than in any other town in Sweden and also higher than in larger cities in Europe.³⁵

Early Attempts at Control

The prevalence of venereal diseases in the country led the Four Estates to issue a Royal Circular in 1812 stipulating that before issuing in-country travelling passes, "wandering" groups in society should be subjected to medical

33 Johan Söderberg *et al.*, *A Stagnating Metropolis: The Economy and Demography of Stockholm, 1750–1850* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 62.

34 Hammarström, *Stockholm i svensk ekonomi*, p. 11. Table 1:1. Söderberg *et al.*, *A Stagnating*, p. 54.

35 Svanström, *Policing Public Women*, p. 52.

examinations, and that included “loose women” but also men who were part of “wandering trades”. In Stockholm, the municipality chose to focus solely on women from the start, raiding certain coffee houses and inns and examining the women there. The military filed complaints, asking for further measures because the number of infected soldiers had increased. Attempts in 1835 to force women in the streets to undergo medical examinations failed after violent opposition from the women themselves.

The next attempt made by the authorities was the establishment of municipal brothels in 1838, although these establishments were illegal according to the existing legislation. The brothels were named the Stadt Hamburg and the London, as seen in the area shown in Map 8.1, signifying that this “sin” came from abroad. The high prices at these brothels suggest that they catered for a high-class clientele. These establishments only stayed open for a couple of months and after some protests and rioting they were shut down in their municipal capacity.³⁶

The actual regulation of prostitution in Stockholm started in 1847 with municipally organised medical examinations, but it was not until 1859 that a proper regulation system was established. The Stockholm system was partly fashioned after the French model; the section that stipulated women’s mobility and dress-codes was an exact replica of the French by-law, but after the incident in 1838, brothels were never included in the statutes. However, there were a significant number of unofficial brothels, so-called coffee-houses (indicated on Map 8.1 as domiciles), where regulated women lived and were subjected to medical examinations.³⁷

The Demographic and Economic Patterns of Regulated Women

Among the women involved in the regulated system of prostitution in 1859, 79 per cent had previously worked in domestic service.³⁸ This pattern holds true for the remainder of the century, although over time the number of women who had been involved in industrial and manual labour increased somewhat.³⁹ During the period 1885–1904, the background of some women was lower middle-class but the majority came from poorer segments of society and the majority of the women were born in Stockholm.⁴⁰ This is of course related

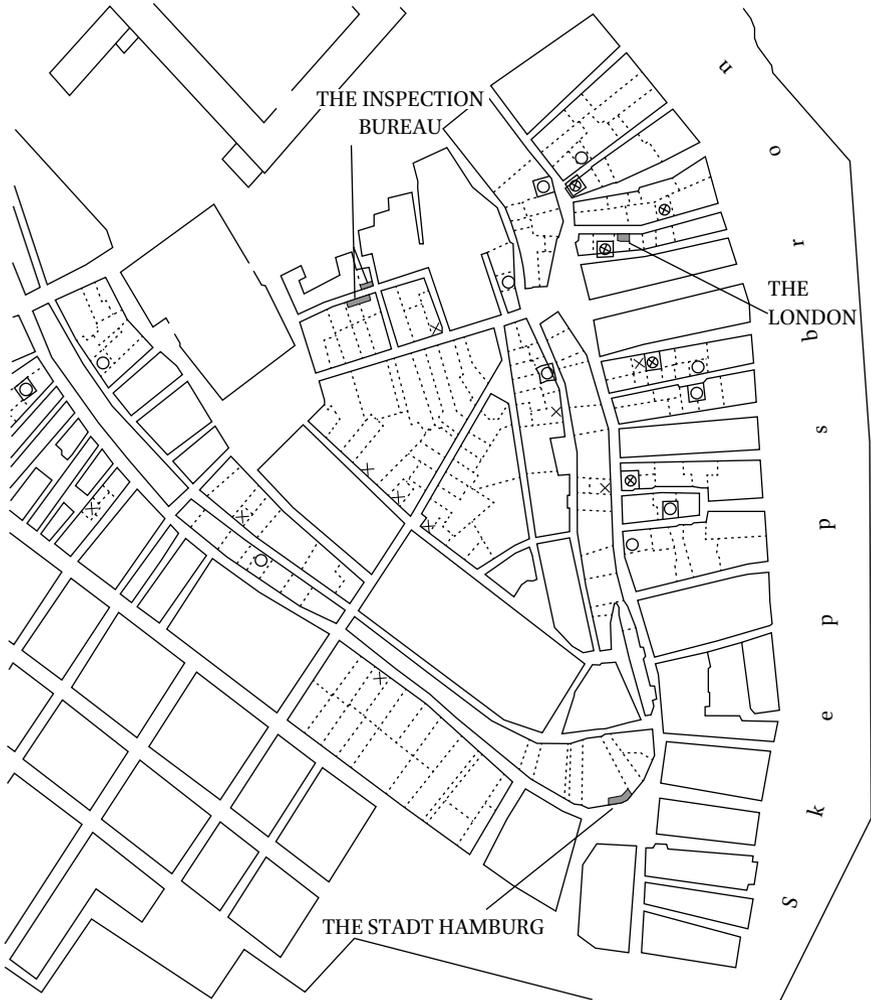
36 *Ibid.*, pp. 259–275, 328–329.

37 *Ibid.*, *passim*.

38 Stamrulla 1 1859–1866, DVa1, Prostitutionsbyrån, ÖÄ, SSA.

39 Johan E. Johansson, *Reglementeringen i Stockholm*, (Stockholm, 1913), p. 47.

40 Johan E. Johansson, “Statistisk utredning angående reglementeringen i Stockholm 1859–1905” in *Underdånigt*, vol. III, pp. 75–76.



- × Domicile of medically registered women in 1847
- Domicile of regulated women in 1859
- ⊗ Domicile of medically registered women in 1847 and regulated women in 1859
- ◻ Domicile of regulated women in 1859 and 1869
- ⊠ All indicated domiciles had three or more regulated women as inhabitants at the same time

MAP 8.1 *Stockholm between the bridges showing domiciles of registered and regulated women, 1847–1869 (currently the Old Town).*

SOURCE: *POLICING WOMEN*, P. 352.

to the limitations of travel but still in the late 1900s the majority of the women involved in prostitution were born in Sweden.⁴¹

The women were on the whole very young when they were first taken into the system; during the period 1859–1904, the median age varies from 21.1 to 24.3 years of age. The highest median age, 24.3, dates from 1859, which can be explained by the fact that the women who were then registered in the new system had been active for a long time and were already known to the police.⁴² Of all the women registered in the first year, 30 per cent had children but in 14 per cent of those cases the children were dead. Only 3 per cent of the women had children while registered in the system and very few of them were married. The figures for the period 1885–1904 show that 29 per cent of the women had had children before being registered.⁴³ As regards religion and ethnicity, Sweden was a fairly homogenous country during the major part of the period discussed in this chapter, and as many as 66 per cent of the regulated women had given their confirmation.⁴⁴

The Structure of Prostitution

As can be deduced from Map 8.1, the Old Town had a large number of coffee-houses and this area was also where soliciting was primarily carried out until the 1870s. With a booming economy came a restructuring of the town with new industries and shopping areas, and prostitution moved to Norrmalm, an area close to the Opera House, and to the garrison area, Östermalm, which in the late 1870s was restructured and gradually was frequented by high-class clientele. Women who were registered for the first time in 1869, all gave one of those two areas as their area of residence. Left in the Old Town, by then a dilapidated area, were women who were in trouble with the police, whereas the more “professional” women had moved to the new areas.⁴⁵ At the end of the 1800s and in the early 1900s so called “party-hotels” appeared on the scene, renting out rooms by the hour to “parties of two”. The ill-reputed street Norra Smedjegatan in Norrmalm had seven hotels with a total of 130 rooms.⁴⁶ At the beginning of the 1900s so-called “girls’ places” were also very common. These were run by a madam or the proprietor of the house; only in 4 per cent of the

41 Johansson, “Statistisk”, p. 69.

42 Johansson, *Reglementeringen*, p. 41; Stamrullor 1859, DVa1, Prostitutionsbyrån, ÖÄ, SSA.

43 Johansson, “Statistisk”, p. 68.

44 Johansson, *Reglementeringen*, p. 41. Stamrullor 1859, DVa1, Prostitutionsbyrån, ÖÄ, SSA.

45 Svanström, *Offentliga*, p. 268.

46 The same area, but further north, has since the 1970s been connected to street soliciting and kerb crawling, where the street Malmkillnadsgatan is singled out.

cases were any of the women also actively involved in prostitution herself, a pattern that seems to hold true also in more recent times. The places were run more or less like brothels, sometimes with a common room for “socializing” with over-priced drinks and fruit. The women lived in the brothels.⁴⁷

An official investigation was appointed in 1902 concerning the regulation system and resulted in a report which stated that male procurers or brothel owners were not as common as they were on the continent. However, the capital was an exception, and the pimping business was a permanent phenomenon in the late 1890s, most commonly in the Old Town, but few of the women worked with pimps.⁴⁸ There is no substantial evidence concerning violence or the conditions in which the women worked. The majority of the registered women in the 1800s had had venereal diseases, but there is little data concerning other conditions. However, the mortality rate among registered women during from 1871 to 1890 was twice as high as among unmarried women on the whole in Stockholm.⁴⁹ Data show that some of the women tried to protect themselves from diseases; more than 73 per cent performed some sort of check-up on the men before intercourse or insisted on contraceptives. At times they would also let themselves be examined, and some women showed marks of candle and cigarette burns which they stated came from those occasions, but more likely those were marks resulting from violence.⁵⁰

Careers in Prostitution? Creating “the Prostitute”

The regulation dating from 1859 did not mention prostitution in terms of work or discuss economic remuneration; rather, the focus was on offenses against public decency and morals. The women who were to be examined were

47 Johansson, “Statistisk”, p. 179.

48 Hjalmar von Sydow, “Om soutenörväsendet”, in *Underdånigt*, vol. IV, p. 11. von Sydow was the chief of police in Stockholm in 1898 and 1899. Letters to the Prostitution Bureau also bore witness to women living with men and accepting customers at the same house. AGW Hillerstrand, Letter to the Prostitution Bureau, Stockholm den 20 April 1867, E1 Inkomna skrivelser 1859–1918, Prostitutionsbyrån, ÖÅ, SSA.

49 Johansson, “Statistisk”, pp. 105–106.

50 Anders Lindgren, “Statistisk undersökning angående skörlevande”, in *Underdånigt* vol. III, pp. 38–39. Nevertheless, there is good reason to be careful when using these figures, since all women in the research population except 41 (who were in Magdalene homes or at the poor house) were at the lock hospital, and the person interviewing them was the chief physician at the same hospital. His approach in the report is quite misogynist.

described as women who were “engaged in lecherous living [...]”⁵¹ In 1875 the system of regulation was revised, and for the first time the commercial character of prostitution was mentioned as well as the word “prostitute”: “A prostitute is considered to be each and every woman who has been proven to be leading a lecherous life as a profession.”⁵²

Until the last decades of the 1800s, payment is hardly mentioned in pamphlets and other documents on prostitution. Prostitution was portrayed as an immoral act rather than as an (immoral) economic transaction. A study conducted on 800 women at the lock hospital between 1904 and 1906 gives some indications regarding remuneration in the early 1900s. Prices ranged between 25 öre to 25 crowns per sexual contact (mostly intercourse). Older women had the lowest pay; one of them stated that sometimes she only got a couple of drinks as payment, and if she occasionally got a crown it was “grand”.⁵³ 5–10 crowns per act of intercourse was the average payment, and according to a contemporary investigation the absolute minimum a working class woman needed for sustenance was 10 crowns a week.⁵⁴ 10 crowns in 1906 would equal around €50 in 2007.⁵⁵ However, statistics show that the women on average spent about 25 per cent of the year off the streets, either in forced labour, the lock hospital, or in prison (see also differences between groups in Table 8.1.) and thus were unable to make money. Registered women also had to pay more than the average rent.⁵⁶

As many as 64 per cent of the women registered in 1859 left the regulated system after six years or less and had few or no dealings with the authorities, and they were fairly young. The remaining 36 per cent were older and stayed in the system between 14 to 18 years. Two different types of life stories may be distinguished here: one a sort of “professional” career with little contact with the police or physicians, and the other a more troubled life with several arrests and periods spent at the lock hospital (see Table 8.1).

51 Svanström, *Policing Public Women*, p. 146.

52 Clas Malmroth, “Om de smittosamma könssjukdomarnas bekämpande i Sverige m. m”, in *Underdånigt*, vol. IV, p. 197.

53 Lindgren, “Statistisk undersökning”, p. 50.

54 Gerda Meyerson, *Våra arbeterskors ställning och medlen att förbättra den* (Stockholm, 1907).

55 Available at: <http://www.historia.se/>; last accessed 7 July 2017. Measured against consumer price index.

56 Lindgren, “Statistisk undersökning”, pp. 51–59.

TABLE 8.1 *'Careers' of regulated women, Stockholm 1859.*

Group N=211 ^a	Age(median) of last notation in register	Years at the Bureau (median)	Punishments (average)	Visits at the kurhus (average)	Number of women and % of N
1. Beginners	26	1	0	0	62 (29%)
2. "Average"	31	6	0.7	0.7	73 (35%)
3. Professionals	40	14	2.1	1	26 (12%)
4. Disorderly	42	18	7.9	8	50 (24%)
Total					211 (100%)

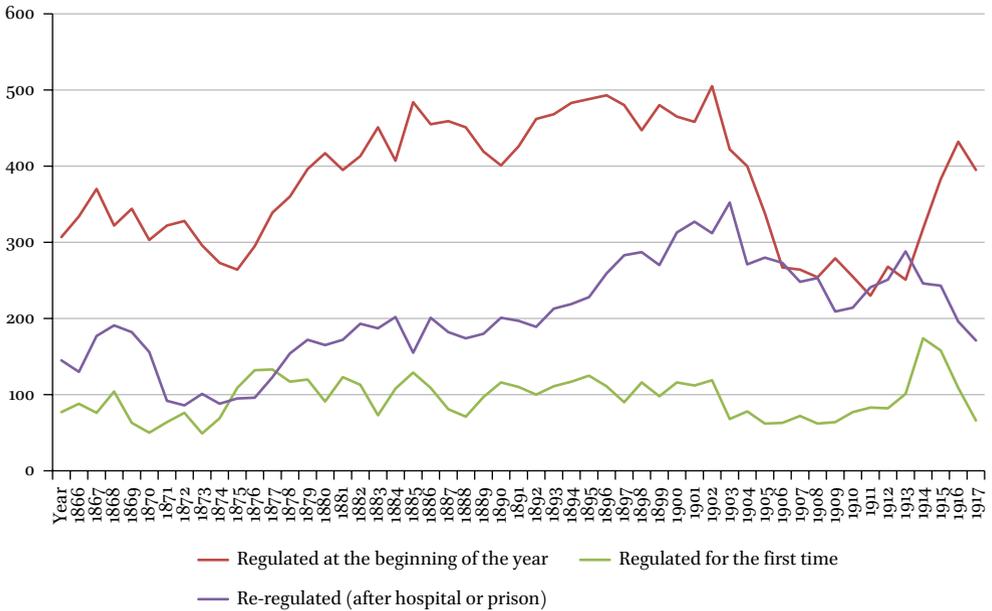
a The total number of regulated women in 1859 was 220, but due to falling offs the number is here reduced to 211.

SOURCE: STAMRULLA 1, 1859–1866, DVAIA, PROSTITUTIONSBYRÅNS ARKIV, ÖÅ, SSA (HERE FROM SVANSTRÖM, *POLICING PUBLIC WOMEN*, P. 384)

Over time it seems that the women tended to stay longer in prostitution. The number of women who stayed in the system steadily increased although the number of women who were registered for the first time (mean value) remained at around 109 women per year (see Graph 8.1). This increase is most likely explained by the system itself, in terms of increased police attention in combination with women's increased awareness of the system; entering prostitution may have been a calculated risk or a sign of destitution but either way the regulation system was a reality. The revision carried out in 1875 also entailed an intensification of controls.

Graph 8.1. also indicates that there was a significant decrease in registered women from 1902 until the outbreak of World War I. A public commission tasked with investigating the future of the regulation system was appointed in 1902, meaning that the vigilance of the police wavered as they awaited the outcome. The increase in registered women from 1914 until 1917 must be seen in light of World War I and military preparedness; the increased number of Home Guards and drafted servicemen in the capital city drew the attention of the police towards possible soliciting. In 1904, the number of registered women was at its peak with 904 women in the system in Stockholm.⁵⁷ Over time it became more and more difficult to leave the system of regulation, which resulted in the creation of a group of "professionalized" public women.

⁵⁷ Johansson, "Statistisk", p. 7.



GRAPH 8.1 *Number of regulated women in Stockholm, 1866–1917.*

Absolute numbers.

SOURCES: GRAPH EARLIER PUBLISHED IN SVANSTRÖM, *OFFENTLIGA KVINNOR* WHERE THE SOURCES ARE ACCOUNTED FOR.

Questioning the System: The Abolishment of the Regulation of Prostitution

Sweden and Stockholm were not the first to abolish the regulation system; in fact, in the Nordic context, it was the last. When the system of regulation was abolished in 1918, it had outlived itself by far. A law which dictated mandatory medical examinations for both sexes (when individuals themselves suspected they were infected, or when they were reported on by others for suspicion of venereal diseases) was voted through in parliament in 1918.

On the one hand, we could say that the system of regulation created modern prostitution, a phenomenon overseen by the state and its acting institutions such as legislative, punitive, and medical institutions. The system was enforced at the municipal level when the country was still governed by the Four Estates, but more to the point it was upheld during a period of liberal breakthroughs by which individual rights for women gradually increased and the system of regulation was revised according to the commercial standards of an industrial market society. The rights of the women whose lives were controlled by the regulation system thus decreased over time. On the other hand, when change

finally came about it came from within the state itself, although it was preceded by the critiques of autonomous groups of different kinds.

The Aftermath of the Regulation System

Sweden did not actively take part in World War I, but Stockholm was affected in terms of food crises and the rationing of food, which led to revolutionary tendencies and food riots. The presence of the Home Guards during the war years increased police alertness regarding prostitution (see Graph 8.1.). The interwar years were a period of transformations in different ways; a population explosion occurred and the population increased by almost 100,000, and by 1930, Stockholm was a city of 502,000 inhabitants.⁵⁸ Most women worked in trade and public services.⁵⁹ Unemployment was high, around 25 per cent in the early 1920s and 10 per cent for the rest of the decade. Unemployment increased again in the 1930s, and not until after World War II did those figures drop down to around 1–2 per cent. In 1921 women acquired the right to vote, and married women gained their legal majority—three years after the regulation system was abolished. The old shacks in various areas in Stockholm were demolished and replaced by apartment buildings, but the need for housing was great. It was during the postwar years that the Swedish economy really took off and a welfare society developed.

Prostitution as Vagrancy or Psychopathology

After the abolition of the regulation system, there is scattered information about prostitution in Stockholm. The control of women involved in prostitution continued but on a less transparent level, and there were complaints about the arbitrariness of the legislation. During the interwar years, which were marred by high unemployment and numerous strikes, anti-vagrancy legislation was often invoked—both for men and women—and after the regulation system was abolished, vagrancy legislation was the sole control mechanism for prostitution. In this period it was argued that prostitution had changed and that “full-time” prostitutes did not exist anymore; instead the women were younger and held regular employment, and did prostitution on the side.⁶⁰ This was also the opinion stated in various government reports on vagrancy.

58 *Rapporten befolkningen i Stockholm 1252–2005*, p. 55.

59 Lena Eriksson, *Arbete till varje pris: arbetslinjen i 1920-talets arbetslöshetspolitik*, (Stockholm, 2004), p. 152.

60 *Tidevarvet*, 1930:51/52, p. 2. However, the occurrence of youths in prostitution is a common subject for debate, and also occurred in the late 1800s as well as the late 1900s.

The reports and discussions in the 1800s had focused on what was seen as depravity and the “sinful” disposition of the women involved in prostitution. From the 1920s onwards this approach was replaced by the then-current development of psychopathology. The mental state of these women was given centre stage, and state investigations showed the expected result: the majority of prostitutes were “sociopaths”, prostitution was seen as hereditary, and sterilization was proposed as one way of preventing future prostitution.⁶¹ Pimping was reported to have increased and the claim was made that some male pimps who worked with women were also prostituting themselves to other men and then blackmailing them. According to the same report the women held prostituted men in contempt.⁶²

During the period 1923–1937, between 412 and 550 women were warned, detained, or arrested yearly for vagrancy and 68 per cent of the time it was for soliciting.⁶³ For the period 1945–1959 that figure decreased from 675 in 1945 to 250 in 1959; the high figure in 1945 was likely the result of military preparedness during World War II which resulted in an increased number of men in the capital and police alertness.⁶⁴ We cannot assume that all of the women who were arrested for vagrancy were involved in prostitution but it makes it possible to make a rough guess. In the 1950s the legislation on vagrancy was invoked less, and in 1964 it was abolished.

The Swedish Sin

During the immediate after-war years and in the 1950s and ‘60s Sweden enjoyed a period of almost zero unemployment. During such times of prosperity it was possible for some married women to stay at home, but because the majority of the Swedish population was involved in agricultural production well into the 1930s, most married women were working alongside their husbands. The 1950s are thus seen as a period when married women from all segments

61 Svanström, “Prostitution as Vagrancy, pp. 148–152.

62 Gustav Jonsson, “Soutenören som psykologisk och social typ”, in *Festskrift tillägnad Olof Kinberg på 65-årsdagen 23/9 1938 av vänner och lärjungar* (Stockholm, 1938), p. 190. Homosexuality was a criminal offence until 1944, and termed a psychological disorder until 1979.

63 *Betänkande med förslag till lagstiftning om åtgärder mot lösdriveri samt åtgärder mot sedeslöst leverne av samhällsskadlig art*, (Stockholm 1929), p. 205. An additional six women of foreign nationality had been arrested for vagrancy. In 1928 Stockholm only had around 474,000 inhabitants. *Betänkande med förslag till lag om arbetsfostran m.m.*, (Stockholm, 1939), Bilaga D., p. 22.

64 *Samhällsfarlig asocialitet* (Stockholm, 1962), p. 212.

of society could and perhaps were expected to refrain from work and stay at home. During this period there seems to have been no need to investigate or debate prostitution as a societal phenomenon, or even as a work-related problem regarding women.⁶⁵ The 1960s was a decade when “sexuality became the talk of the day”, and there were concerns about Sweden’s reputation abroad because of what was perceived as a massive export of pornographic magazines and a more liberal attitude towards portraying nudity and sexuality in motion pictures than in other countries.⁶⁶ Massage parlours and nude photograph studios were established, and at the end of the 1960s the first topless cafés started opening in Stockholm, and some of these later developed into brothel-like establishments.⁶⁷ At the same time, reports about what were seen as the shortcomings of the welfare state described prostitution as a “white stain on the otherwise so detailed map of the welfare state.”⁶⁸ In the early 1970s the publishing of “material offensive to public decency” was decriminalised, and pornographic pictures could be printed freely.⁶⁹ The evening papers’ Stockholm editions were filled with advertisements for pornographic shows and sex clubs. Street prostitution, nude studios, and sex clubs could be established and operate with little or no interference from the authorities.⁷⁰

The Structure of Prostitution

At the beginning of the 1970s the number of massage parlours and nude posing studios was around 100 to 110, but ten years later it had decreased to twenty.

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- 65 However, there were reports of both prostitution and procuring in the late 1930s and in the ‘40s and ‘50s: “We are around 10–12 in the gang—it is almost possible to form a union. We all walk the street, us girls, but the others also have a permanent position so they don’t get caught. The boys don’t do anything, they mostly live off us.” Gunnar Inghe and Maj-Britt Inghe, *Den ofärdiga välfärden* (Stockholm, 1968), p. 163.
- 66 Klara Arnberg, “Under the Counter, Under the Radar? The Business and Regulation of the Pornographic Press in Sweden 1950–1971”, *Journal of American History, Enterprise & Society*, 13 (2012), p. 350–377; Lena Lennerhed, *Frihet att njuta: Sexualdebatten i Sverige på 1960-talet* (Stockholm, 1994), p. 99.
- 67 Leif G.W. Persson, *Horor, hallickar och torskar: en bok om prostitutionen i Sverige* (Stockholm 1981), pp. 68–69; Arne Borg *et al.*, *Prostitution: beskrivning, analys, förslag till åtgärder* (Stockholm, 1982), p. 513.
- 68 Inghe and Inghe, *Den ofärdiga*, p. 164.
- 69 Klara Arnberg, *Motsättningarnas marknad: Den pornografiska pressens kommersiella genombrott och reglering av pornografi i Sverige 1950–1980* (Lund, 2010), p. 277.
- 70 A proposal for state-run brothels was raised in parliament by a conservative member of parliament but was opposed. Susanne Dodillet, *Är sex arbete? Svensk och tysk prostitutionspolitik sedan 1970-talet* (Stockholm, 2009), pp. 52–64.

The decline had to do with restrictions on placing advertisements in the newspapers, and the fact that the market was saturated. Police attention increased after a number of illegal brothels were discussed in the media, which scared some landlords into not renting out their apartments to women in prostitution (see below). In these establishments around 145 women had been active, fifty of them on a regular basis. The majority was born in Sweden and around 15 per cent of the women were from countries in eastern Europe. Around 30 per cent of the women were married. In general they were older than the women involved in street prostitution.⁷¹ At the end of the same decade street prostitution in Stockholm constituted about 50 per cent of the total street prostitution in Sweden. The areas used for streetwalking were more or less the same as in the late 1800s. More than 95 per cent of the prostitution was at Malmskillnadsgatan, and on a daily basis from fifty to hundred women were active day and night.⁷² Although the majority of the women were still of Swedish origin (74 per cent), the number of women born outside of Sweden had increased. Of those, 14 per cent were from Finland and the rest were from Poland, Yugoslavia, Turkey, and some non-European countries; very few were married.⁷³ Only around a hundred women were active in prostitution for more than three years—a significant change compared to the period of regulation.⁷⁴ In 1977 the price for intercourse was estimated to be 300 crowns, around €130.⁷⁵ Pimping occurred but had become more professionalised; although men living off one “girlfriend” continued to exist, the prevalence of men who “kept” a number of women had increased.⁷⁶

Reactions against a “Commercialisation of Sexuality”

In the mid-1970s a number of events coincided which changed how prostitution was perceived, both nationwide but mostly in the country’s capital. In 1976 a public commission’s report on sexual crimes suggested that the severity of the penalty for rape, incest, and sexual contacts with children, should, among other things, depend on the victims’ actions before the occasion. The report

71 Borg, *Prostitution*, pp. 476–478.

72 *Ibid.*, pp. 468–469, Persson, *Horor*, pp. 57–58, 80–82.

73 Persson, *Horor*, pp. 83–84. Because of issues relating to social security numbers the group was reduced from 339 to 309. Borg, *Prostitution*, pp. 471–472.

74 *Ibid.*, p. 474.

75 *Ibid.*, p. 465. More available at: <http://www.historia.se/>; last accessed 7 July 2017. Measured against consumer price index.

76 Persson, *Horor*, pp. 131, 138–139.

was severely criticized and as a consequence a new public commission on sexual crimes was appointed, together with a separate commission tasked with looking into prostitution.⁷⁷

The same year a call girl ring in Stockholm was broken up after extensive police surveillance. It led to imprisonment for the woman in charge. There were around forty women involved in the business, some of them underage. The case received much media attention, especially since there were rumours that high-ranking politicians were among the clients.⁷⁸ A series of television shows in 1976–1978 had a major impact. In one programme young girls on Malmskillnadsgatan were interviewed which led to an extensive debate in the media. Another mapped the prevalence of apartment brothels in Stockholm; it was estimated that 170 brothels existed and landlords had organized them, acting as brothel-keepers and charging the women over-priced rents. The result of the television programme was that the landlords evicted these women out of fear of being accused of pimping and intensified raids by the police.⁷⁹

In the print media a debate emerged in which three prostitutes who had established a small organization called the Sexual Political Front (*Sexualpolitisk front*) participated.⁸⁰ They had ten demands, and they identified three approaches to handling prostitution: legalization, criminalization, or abolition. The merits of the last alternative were pointed out: “It would help prostitutes get away from pimps and move on to education, work and a new identity.”⁸¹ However, the Sexual Political Front saw the first approach as being more realistic: “Only when prostitutes pay tax [...] can they have demands on society.”⁸² Their other demands were liberalized legislation on procuring and putting a halt to clampdowns on visible prostitution. They also pointed out that the recruitment of women into prostitution could also be stopped by enabling “women’s right to work with decent pay.”⁸³ In Stockholm a number

77 Ulrika Thomsson, “Rätten till våra kroppar”: Kvinnorörelsen och våldtäktsdebatten”, *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift*, 4 (2000), pp. 51–64.

78 Hanna Olsson, “Från manlig rättighet till lagbrott: prostitutionsfrågan i Sverige under 30 år”, *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift*, 4 (2006), pp. 52–73.

79 *Kvinnobulletinen*, 4–1 (1977/78), pp. 36–37. Persson, *Horor*, pp. 213–215.

80 *Kvinnobulletinen*, 4–1 (1977/78), pp. 36–37. The organisation was rather small. Of the three women two were based in Stockholm and the third was in Malmö.

81 *Kvinnobulletinen*, 2 (1977), p. 4.

82 *Ibid.*

83 *Sexualpolitisk front*: “Detta är sexualpolitisk front: Förbundet presenterar sitt program”, *Pockettidningen R*, 7 (1977), pp. 128–129.

of public protests occurred where political groups that would not normally come together joined in protests against what was seen as a more brutal and commercialized form of sexuality, and they demanded that prostitution and pornography be abolished.⁸⁴

The period 1918–76 can be seen as the aftermath of the regulation system of the 1800s, a time that was characterized by both a state and municipality that was clutching at straws when it came to handling prostitution, which, needless to say, affected women involved in prostitution and society's views.

Criminalizing the Purchase of Sexual Services

The 1980s marked a turning point in how prostitution was discussed and characterized. In 1981 the commission on prostitution that had been appointed in 1976 produced its results.⁸⁵ The politically appointed commissioner proposed to the government that the organizing of public pornographic shows should be prohibited (which would in effect put the so-called sex-clubs out of business) and state economic support for preventive work against prostitution should be provided.⁸⁶ The ensuing bill produced by the government was similar in content; it was voted through in parliament and implemented in 1982.⁸⁷ Prostitution was framed as a societal issue and a result of a patriarchal and capitalist

84 Jeanette Gentile (ed.), *Ta strid för kärleken—kamp mot porr och prostitution: En antologi utgiven av Aktionens kamp mot porr och prostitution* (Stockholm, 1979); Gunilla Fredelius (ed.) *Ett onödigt ont: En antologi mot porr och prostitution* (Stockholm, 1978). Protests had occurred earlier as well; in 1973 about thirty women went into one of the sex clubs and protested against the selling of sex. The women in the club threw them out, after allegedly having been told by the manager they would not get paid if they did not act against the protesters. There were different reactions within the women's movement about whether this was an efficient way to protest, as it would seem that women within the autonomous women's movement and women in prostitution were in disagreement. *Kvinnobulletinen*, 3/4 (1973), p. 34.

85 Persson, *Horor*, pp. 215–218; Dodillet, *Är sex arbete?*, pp. 124–127; Borg, *Prostitution*, p. 15; Olsson, "Från manlig rättighet", p. 62.

86 Undercover research by a sociologist participating in the public commission came to the conclusion that if there was prostitution at the sex-clubs in Stockholm "it must be both discreet and of little degree." Persson, *Horor*, p. 74.

87 *Regeringens proposition* 1981/82:187, pp. 1–4. Noteworthy is that the commission report, and also the separate publication from the experts, all advised against a legislation that would only criminalize the client.

society, whereas earlier reports had described women in prostitution as either morally depraved or psychologically abnormal. Furthermore, the focus started to shift from the seller in prostitution to the demand for sexual services.

Increased Parliamentary Activity

After the change in legislation in 1982 there was increased activity in parliament. From 1983 to 1993 more than fifty bills were presented regarding prostitution, and of those about thirty proposed criminalizing the purchase of sex. In 1992 another public commission on prostitution was appointed; it was to map out the prevalence of both homo- and heterosexual prostitution and also to look into possibilities of criminalization. When the result came back, there were disagreements within the commission on the final recommendation about whether or not to criminalize both the client and the seller of sex. According to the commissioner this was to be undertaken in the name of Swedish gender equality; since there were two parties involved, both should be criminalized.⁸⁸ The report was severely criticised, both in the media and in the *remiss*⁸⁹ procedure: only two of the sixty-four bodies invited to give an opinion supported the proposal. After the 1970s and '80s when the issues of exploitation, male patriarchy, and women's rights were on the agenda, the proposal made by the commission can be seen as a nullification in which gender equality was reduced to counting participants, regardless of society's power structures. The report did not lead to a government bill and instead the government awaited the recommendations from the commission on violence against women. In the final bill, prostitution was taken up together with violence against women. The criminalization of the client, rather than both parties, was proposed and voted through in parliament and the legislation was introduced in 1999. Until 2010 the maximum penalty was 6 months imprisonment which in 2010 was increased to one year. The debate around the legislation was intense, and it continued among researchers and in the media and parliament, and continues to do so. Women involved in prostitution argued both for and

88 Yvonne Svanström, "Criminalising the John: A Swedish Gender Model?" in Joyce Outshorn (ed.), *The Politics of Prostitution: Women's Movements, Democratic States, and the Globalisation of Sex Commerce* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 225–244, 233–235.

89 The "remiss" procedure is where parts of the state apparatus and organisations outside the state with special competence give their expert opinion on reports before a legislative bill is drafted.

against the legislation, and so did others. This was more or less the first time the term “sex worker” was used in the debate.⁹⁰

Voices Speaking Out about the Legislation

The change that took place in the early 1900s when the regulation system was abolished was by no means responded to with silence, nor was the legislation that replaced it. In the same way, the legislation dating from 1999 was both globally unique and celebrated, and also criticised and ridiculed. Since then the legislation has been copied in various countries, but is hotly contested. What the advocates of the legislation hoped to achieve was to support women in prostitution, using the legislation as a deterrent both for women to enter and to make it easier to leave prostitution while deterring prospective clients from buying sex. Critics argued that the legislation would only increase the number of violent clients since the “good guys” would refrain from taking part. It was also predicted that prostitution would go underground, making it more difficult to assist women in need of help.

In 2008 there were two organizations for women involved in prostitution: The Prostitutes’ Rights/Revenge in Society PRIS (*Prostituerades Rätt/Revansch i Samhället*) and The Sex Sellers’ and Allies’ Network in Sweden SANS (*Sexsäljares och allierades nätverk i Sverige*).⁹¹ The 1999 legislation has been interpreted in diverse ways among women working in prostitution. How these opinions are dispersed differs depending on which report or research you rely on. Some argue that you cannot see that people involved in prostitution are less enthusiastic about the legislation than those who have left sex work, whereas others argue that there is such a pattern.⁹² On the one hand, some sex workers say that the legislation deters women from prostitution (and men from buying) and that they would be personally offended if the authorities accepted prostitution. On the other hand, some women argue that the legislation gives women poor protection. One woman stated that if she experienced violence as an escort she did not report it for fear of being exposed and losing customers.⁹³

90 Svanström, “Criminalising the john”, pp. 225, 236–241.

91 *Förbud mot köp av sexuell tjänst: en utvärdering 1999–2008*: SOU 2010:49 (Stockholm, 2010). The first organization is available at: <http://www.nätverketpris.se>; last accessed 7 July 2017. The second organization’s webpage cannot be found.

92 *Kännedom om prostitution 2007* (Socialstyrelsen, 2007), p. 47; *Förbud mot köp av sexuell*, pp. 129–130.

93 *Kännedom om prostitution 2007*, p. 47

Initially, when the legislation to criminalize the purchase of prostitution was launched, there was, if no resistance, still certain question marks regarding how judicial institutions implemented the legislation. Special consideration was shown to the buyers of sex; summons to interrogations in connection with reported crimes were sent to men's places of work rather than to their homes.⁹⁴ Public polls showed that there was strong support for the legislation and many agreed with the idea that buying sexual services is wrong: from 2001 to 2009, 76 to 71 per cent of the population supported the legislation.⁹⁵

The Structure of Prostitution in the Second Millennium

Immediately after the legislation on prostitution was put into place, street prostitution in Stockholm decreased by 64 per cent, and while it varied over the following ten-year period that the legislation has been in place, that decrease has remained constant. The prevalence of prostitution in Stockholm has been estimated more or less regularly since the legislation was implemented in 1999. Figures from the early 1990s, however, are more difficult to obtain. In an interview in 1992, a social worker at Malmskillnadsgatan estimated that the number of working women in street prostitution was around 200 and that they had varying backgrounds and education levels (see Table 8.2).⁹⁶

TABLE 8.2 *Estimates of number of women in street prostitution, Stockholm 1998–2008.*

Stockholm	1998	1999	2003 ^a	2005	2006	2008
	280	170	200	150	200	180

Population in 1998 736 113, in 2008 810 000

a There was a high level of discrepancy in Stockholm between estimates in 2003. Social services estimated the number of women to between 180 and 200, and the police estimated 50–60 women. The report (*Kännedom om prostitution, 2004*) suggests the discrepancies may derive from groups of women being in the street at different hours and on different weekdays. I have chosen to use the highest estimates in this table. Another version of this table was earlier published in Svanström, "Prostitution in Sweden" in Gangoli and Westmarland (2006).

SOURCE: *FÖRBUD MOT KÖP AV SEXUELL TJÄNST. EN UTVÄRDERING 1999–2008*, SOU 2010:49, STATISTISKA CENTRALBYRÅN, BEFOLKNINGSSTATISTIK 2001.

94 Svanström, "Handel", p. 310

95 *Förbud mot köp av sexuell*, pp. 124–125.

96 Interview with Inger Lantz, City Section, Stockholm, in *Kvinnobulletinen*, 1992:3, p. 7.

The demographic structure in prostitution has changed dramatically: in 1993, between 20–30 per cent of the women were born outside of Sweden, and in 2008 more than half of the women came from abroad. The majority came from the Baltics or eastern Europe (countries such as Hungary and Romania are mentioned), but some women also came from other parts of the world. Part of the explanation, according to people in the field, is the ease of moving across borders, but also the worsening of the economic circumstances in countries in eastern Europe.⁹⁷ The age structure has changed since the 1970s; in the second millennium the majority of women who take part in other activities aside from street prostitution were between the ages of 18 and 30, while thirty years ago they were all above 25 years of age. However, when it comes to women forced into prostitution and procuring, the women are mostly younger, around 20 years old.⁹⁸

No sex buyers have been sentenced to prison; so far, the sentences have only involved fines and summary punishments. The most recent investigation about the legislation showed that street prostitution in Stockholm and Sweden has not increased in recent years, while it has in neighbouring countries such as Norway and Denmark, where it has increased by close to 50 per cent.⁹⁹ According to recent research, the number of women involved in prostitution is still low, and the number of buyers has gone down compared to the time before the legislation was put into effect.¹⁰⁰

However, as in many other countries prostitution on the internet has increased, but its prevalence is difficult to ascertain.¹⁰¹ A national survey by the National Board for Health and Welfare undertaken in 2007 determined that there were 299 web pages and 304 sellers (fifty-seven men), mostly serving clients in the Stockholm region. The use of mobile phones and the mediating of telephone numbers seem to have reduced the use of internet advertisements since 2007, but the anonymity of internet advertising may also have lowered

97 *Förbud mot köp av sexuell*, p. 108. In a few cases women were from Albania and Thailand. It has also been noted that the number of women from Nigeria has increased. *Människohandel för sexuella och andra ändamål, RPS rapport 2011, Lägesrapport 12* (Stockholm, 2011) p. 21.

98 *Förbud mot köp av sexuell*, pp. 110–113.

99 Jari Kuosmanen, "Tio år med lagen: Om förhållningssätt till och erfarenheter av prostitution i Sverige", in Charlotta Holmström and May-Len Skilbrei (eds), *Prostitution i Norden: Forskningsrapport* (Köpenhamn, 2008), pp. 357–382.

100 *Förbud mot köp av sexuell*, p. 157.

101 One seller can be behind several advertisements, or more than one person behind one advertisement. Furthermore, these advertisements can stay on the internet after the service has ended.

the threshold for entering prostitution. Ethnicity stood out as an important marketing strategy: the advertisements almost invariably stated nationality or skin colour.¹⁰²

Trafficking and Carrying Out the Legislation

In the 1800s what was called “the white slave trade” was a topic in many European countries and larger cities. Some argue that this was a hysterical reaction with racial overtones, others claim that the slave trade was a fact and was organized by criminal networks. Sweden had organizations such as *Awareness*, situated in Stockholm, which scrutinized newspaper advertisements for employment offers abroad and offered rooms in a hostel in Stockholm for women who came in search of employment.¹⁰³ The Stockholm chief of police responded to inquiries from Europe regarding Stockholm. Nevertheless, the records show little evidence of trafficking at the turn of the last century. For instance, a request in 1910 from the chief of police in Czernowitz and Vienna, Austria, led to an investigation into persons advertising for girls to play in a women’s orchestra in Stockholm. The police found nothing indicating a “white slave trade”.¹⁰⁴

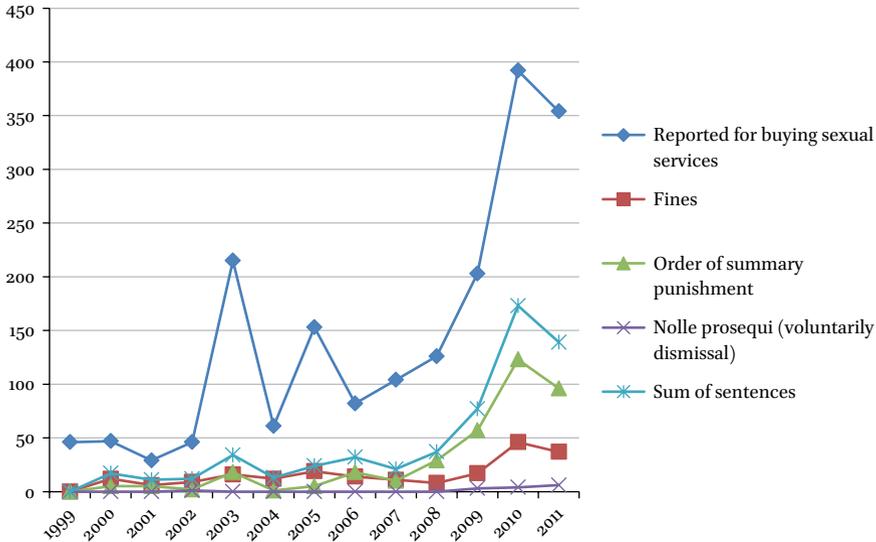
In 2000, the Swedish government ratified the UN Declaration on trafficking, which was criminalized in Sweden in 2002.¹⁰⁵ Trafficking in today’s Stockholm is believed to be comparatively rare; the legislation makes it less “profitable” to traffic women to Sweden since using women in street prostitution is more risky. Thus, the majority of trafficking cases have been discovered after police surveillance of apartment brothels in Stockholm (see Graph 8.2). Recent reports

102 *Kännedom om prostitution 2007*, pp. 8, 27–30.

103 Ann Hallner, “Från vit slavhandel till trafficking: En studie om föreställningar kring människohandel och dess offer”, *Historisk tidskrift*, 129 (2009), pp. 429–433.

104 Rapport angående Gerschberg, Adele, 25 February, 1910, and Rapport angående Berger, Frans, 23 August, 1910, FXIV1 Handlingar angående vit slavhandel, 1905–23, Detektivavdelningen, Handlingar angående vit slavhandel, 1905–23, Polismästaren, Detektivavdelningen, ÖÄ, SSA.

105 See Svanström, “Handel med kvinnor: Debatten i Sverige och Nederländerna om prostitution och trafficking” in Christina Florin and Christina Bergqvist (eds), *Framtiden i samtiden: Könsrelationer i förändring i Sverige och omvärlden* (Stockholm, 2004), pp. 290–323, for a discussion on the discrepancies between the Swedish state approach concerning trafficking, where the state for a long time argued for proof of a woman actually being forced into prostitution through trafficking, versus the offence of buying sexual services where “choice” is irrelevant, all buying of prostitution being illegal. In 2010 the legislation on trafficking changed and the so-called “control prerequisite” was replaced.



GRAPH 8.2 *Reported crimes and sentences for buying sexual services, Stockholm County 1999–2011.*

Absolute numbers. The information on reported crimes can be accessed for Stockholm city, but has been downloaded for the county to make comparisons possible with sentences (which can only be downloaded on the regional level). SOURCE: BROTTSFÖREBYGGANDE RÅDET, [HTTP://STATISTIK.BRA.SE/SOLWEBB/ACTION/INDEX](http://statistik.bra.se/solwebb/action/index) AND [HTTP://WWW.BRA.SE/BRA/BROTT--STATISTIK/STATISTIK/PERSONER-LAGFORDA-FOR-BROTT.HTML](http://www.bra.se/bra/brott--statistik/statistik/personer-lagforda-for-brott.html) BROTTSFÖREBYGGANDE RÅDET, TABLE 521, 01, STOCKHOLMS LÄN.

show a change in the countries from which women are trafficked; earlier, Estonia and Russia and to some extent Poland were the most common countries of origin but in 2012 the most common were Romania and Nigeria. Furthermore, the trafficking organizations are believed to be less “multi-criminal” and more focused solely on sexual trafficking. Prostitution is organized both in apartments rented for a week or so and in hotel rooms at bargain hotels where the reception is located in another building, or at self-service hotels. The women are also used in what is phrased “outcalls”, i.e. they are brought to the clients’ home.¹⁰⁶

In practice, the crime of buying sexual services is a “surveillance crime”, i.e. more resources for the police equals more reported crimes. This is also what is signalled in Graph 8.2, in which the increase in reported crimes in 2003, for

106 *Brottslighet och trygghet i Malmö, Stockholm och Göteborg: En kartläggning* (Stockholm, 2012), pp. 176–177.

instance, was generated through the breaking of an apartment brothel ring on the outskirts of Stockholm.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, the increase in reported crimes in 2005 and later from 2008 onwards can be explained through the increase in resources made available to the police on a national scale for working against trafficking.

Concluding Remarks

If we look at the last 400 years of prostitution in Stockholm, two things stand out. Firstly, prostitution in Sweden and Stockholm has been a quantitatively small phenomenon relative to the country's and city's population (the exception being the late nineteenth century with increasing industrialization and immigration paired with a regulation system that locked women in). Secondly, the state and the municipality have been involved in regulating extra-marital sexuality and prostitution for the better part of that period.

There seems to have been two different state institutional approaches: legislation and *laissez-faire*, although these approaches have varied over the centuries. The 1600s had a harsh regime that gradually gave way to a more permissive attitude towards sexuality in the late 1700s that eased the harsh legal institutions. A regulation system was put into place in the mid-1800s followed by the abolishment of the system in 1919 until the early 1980s, when a *laissez-faire* system was applied; in this system, women in prostitution were taken up within the scope of the vagrancy law, but the state fumbled in its attempts to find ways to control prostitution. From the 1980s onwards, there was a change in the state's views about how to tackle prostitution and it was seen as a societal problem, not the individual problem of women. The institutional approach manifested itself in the legislation in 1999, criminalising the purchase of what was then termed sexual services—a complete ideological turnaround in how to conceptualize prostitution. From the material available for this overview it is possible to at least hypothesize about the consequences of institutional measures and the magnitude of prostitution; regulating prostitution increased the number of women involved in prostitution, whereas legislating against extra-marital relations with severe punishment in a small-sized town with harsh corporal a moral punishments based on Protestant religious beliefs seems to have kept prostitution at lower levels. Still, institutional measures are not enough to interpret how prostitution changes. It is apparent that the social and economic circumstances of the women involved matter: living conditions in the early 1600s were harsh, and the majority of the citizens lived in

107 Svanström, "Handel", pp. 308–309.

severe poverty and getting involved in activities that would render them the death punishment may have been a small price to pay for some money and food. The changing circumstances during the growing industrial period in the 1800s as well as changing economic circumstances in countries/cities outside of Sweden in the early 2000s may make prostitution a viable alternative. Still, the level of prostitution is lower than in many other cities and countries, which at least for the earlier periods must be seen in light of the rural character of the country and small-town character of the city; only in 1960 did the city attain a population of over 800,000. However, as with many studies on individuals on the margins of society, the historian often gets information through the very channels that are controlling the same individuals, which is also the case here.

Focusing on the last two hundred years we could say that the Swedish regulation system, which presented itself in Stockholm in its fullest form, came together with an equivalent development in other countries and cities. Large parts of the system were imported to Stockholm. Needless to say, the long period of regulation had a profound effect on women in general, and on women who were registered in particular. Over time, the women stayed in prostitution for longer and longer periods. In the end, it was the state itself that initiated which was then a radical step in introducing a legislation that covered all citizens—at least on paper. During a period of almost sixty years, controlling prostitution was not on the state agenda more than in passing, and only in the 1970s was there another shift. Although underrepresented in the debates, the women involved in prostitution presented their demands to the state, asking for changes in legislation and a change of terms. However, when it came to the more radical change, i.e. to criminalizing the purchase of sexual services, it was again the state itself that made the decision, although NGOs such as the women's movements and others played a significant role in promoting the legislation. Needless to say, the Swedish state has changed. The presence of women in political parties fundamentally changed how certain questions pertaining to women and women's bodily integrity have been politicised. What effect has this development had on prostitution and the women involved in prostitution—or for all women, for that matter? The legislative changes in recent years have been received differently among women—both inside and outside prostitution—and some are critical while others welcome it. However, supporting a change in formal legislation is not the same as changing norms, as informal institutions change slower. The late 1800s and the regulation system was pivotal in the matter of crafting “the prostitute”, and that image still lingers in terms of how women involved prostitution are perceived. Still, the 1999 legislation was unique at the time, and has in a sense turned attention from prostitution as a question of women or the “seller” to a question of men and their demands for sexual services.

SECTION 2

Africa and the Middle East



Prostitution in Cairo

Hanan Hammad and Francesca Biancani

Prostitution, in Arabic *bigha'*, *da'arah*, and *'aharah*, is the providing of sexual services for payment. This definition makes prostitution in Islamic law a practice of adultery, *zina*, which includes any sexual intercourse between an unmarried couple except a master and his female slave, *jar'iyyah*. Very recently, sex work and illicit sexuality in Egypt have become new terrain for historical enquiry. Lack of historical sources has been a major challenge, of course. While reconstructing the history of ordinary people is always a difficult task, it is even more so as regards those who practised such a highly gendered and legally controversial activity as prostitution. Local historiographers of mediaeval and pre-modern Egypt's capital Cairo tended to overlook sex work as a social practice in the urban fabric. Some of them made references to the existence of prostitutes in passing in the chronicles and biographies of rulers and notables and in comments on the state system. European travellers in pre-modern Egypt gave accounts of nomadic and urban groups practicing prostitution in Egyptian towns. Given the lack of corroborating sources, however, it is quite difficult to differentiate between what is myth, fiction, and reality in these accounts. Yet, these sources are useful for exploring the European construction of sexuality in Egypt.

Some recent Egyptian studies have succeeded in bringing to light a great deal of obscure local sources from the nineteenth century and hence have provided ground-breaking ethnographies of areas which used to have licensed prostitution throughout the first half of the twentieth century.¹ Although this scholarship is valuable and bravely steps into a field that has previously been

* This article is the result of joint research and an ongoing dialogue between the authors about the social history of sex work, gender, sexuality, and society in Egypt. We would like to note that Hanan Hammad authored the introduction and the sections about prostitution during the periods of Mamluk and Ottoman rule and during abolitionism and postcolonial times. Francesca Biancani authored the section on colonial prostitution. The paragraph about prostitution under Muhammad Ali and the conclusion was jointly written by the two authors.

1 'Abd al-Wahab Bakr, *Mujtama' al-Qahirah al-sirri, 1900–1951* (Cairo, 2001); 'Abd al-Wahab Bakr, *al-Jarimah fi Misr fi al-nisf al-awwal min al-qarn al-'Ishshrin: ash-Shawari' al-khalfiyyah* (Cairo, 2005); 'Imad Hilal, *al-Baghaya fi Misr: Dirasah tarikhiyyah ijtimaiyyah 1834–1949* (Cairo, 2001).

overlooked in Egyptian historiography, it replicates a particularly static image of prostitution quarters that has been rendered in popular fiction and orientalist writings. Western scholarship has started to explore prostitution in Egypt through broad discussions of gender history, state-society relationships, and the role of power discourses in restructuring society, an approach that could be very promising.² Employing the same approach, this paper traces the history of prostitution in Cairo from Ottoman times until today. The focus is on the formal relationship between the state, society, and prostitution. It highlights the shifting trajectory ranging from fiscal control without strict regulation in pre-modern times, when Cairo was the capital of an Ottoman province enjoying virtual autonomy from the Empire's centre, to the state regulation of sex work during the British colonial period and the subsequent abolition and criminalization of sex work in the post-independence era.

This paper aims to give an overview that is as extensive as possible of the ways in which sex work was practised and how it changed over time from the 1600s until today. Far from considering prostitution to be the "oldest profession", this overview endeavours to set up the context for studying prostitution as a complex historically situated phenomenon. This study reveals how the management of gender and sexuality were closely connected with the story of the state and its capacity for penetrating, controlling, and disciplining society, and it tells us about the ways in which women, as well as men, adapted to sweeping social and economic changes.

Prostitution under the Mamluks and Ottomans

Cairo entered the seventeenth century as the provincial capital of Egypt under the Ottoman Empire. Consistent with their tradition of governing newly conquered territories, the Ottomans preserved many institutions and administrative systems from the Mamluk period (1250–1517), and the Mamluks themselves were incorporated into the ruling elite. Thus, many Ottoman governors

2 Liat Kozma, *Policing Egyptian Women: Sex, Law, and Medicine in Khedival Egypt* (Syracuse, 2012); B.W. Dunne, "Sexuality and the 'Civilizing Process' in Modern Egypt" (Unpublished Ph.D., Georgetown University, 1996); Francesca Biancani, "Let Down the Curtains around Us: Sex Work in Colonial Cairo, 1882–1949" (Unpublished Ph.D., London School of Economics, 2012); Khaled Fahmy, "Prostitution in Egypt in the Nineteenth Century", in Eugene Rogan (ed.), *Outside In: On the Margins of the Modern Middle East* (London, 2001), pp. 77–103; Judith E. Tucker, *Women in Nineteenth-century Egypt* (Cambridge, 1985).

continued the Mamluk tradition of tolerating prostitution as an urban service. Aside from the orthodox Islamic prohibition on sex outside marriage and between masters and slaves, prostitution in Cairo can be traced back to the Fatimid period (969–1171).³ Sex workers in Cairo were more integrated than ostracized and were part of the larger labouring class. Dressed in the traditional *milayyah*, which is a wrapping cloth, and a *tarhah*, a loose head veil, sex workers were distinguished with red anklets on their legs.⁴ They were visible in marketplaces and public festivities. They were also concentrated in particular areas known as *harat al-Khawaty* or *harat al-Zawani* (quarters of “fallen” or adulterous women).⁵ These quarters were mostly hilly areas that were distant from the residential neighbourhoods or adjacent to entertainment centres around lakes. This location outside residential areas distinguished prostitutes from *al-ahrar*, which literally means “free people” but was used as a term in pre-modern times until the early twentieth century to refer to “respectable” people. This distance helped to ease social anxieties about public morality. Social protests against prostitution were usually stirred up when sex workers lived and openly practised their trade in regular neighbourhoods.

Brothels and taverns also mushroomed in entertainment areas around lakes such as the Azbakiyyah and al-Ratli lakes, where male and female slaves were employed in sex work.⁶ Prostitutes in Ottoman Cairo were active during festivals, including the celebrations of saints, known as *mawalid*. This was a continuation of mediaeval practices in which some festivals became characterized by sexual overtones.⁷ Prostitutes attended the celebrations of the annual increase of the waters of the Nile when they reached the point that the dam could be opened and flow into the Azbakiyyah Lake.⁸ The prostitutes of the Azbakiyyah area openly conducted their trade and performed alluring dances. A street show called the Bee Dance became very popular under the Ottomans. In that show, which seems to have been a sort of strip dance, women pretended to have a bee in their clothing and started to take off their clothes one piece after another, keeping on only a light unveiling garment. Al-Azbakiyyah attracted

3 Taqi al-Din Ahmad ibn ‘Ali al-Maqrizi, *al-Mawaiz wa al-‘itibar bi dhikr al-khitat wa al-athar*, 2 vols, (Cairo, 1997), II, p. 357.

4 Ahmad ‘Abd al-Raziq, *al-Mar‘ah fi Misr al-mamlukiyyah* (Cairo, 1999), p. 39.

5 Jamal al-Din Abu al-Mahasin Yusuf bin Taghribirdi, *al-Nujum al-zahirah fi muluk Misr wa'l-Qahirah*, 2 vols, (Cairo, 1929), II, p. 389 and al-Maqrizi, *al-Mawaiz*, p. 658.

6 Al-Maqrizi, *al-Mawaiz*, p. 750.

7 Boaz Shoshan, *Popular Culture in Medieval Cairo* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 43.

8 Muhammad Sayyid Kilani, *Fi-Rubu‘al-Azbakiyyah: Dirasah adabiyyah, tarikhiyyah wa ijtimaiyyah* (Cairo, 1985), p. 10.

many men who would spend their nights free from any moral bondage, causing “immoral chaos”.⁹

Al-Ratli Lake was another area where prostitution was practised openly around the year. It was part of the Ard at-Tabbalah area, which was so well known for illicit activities that men from all over the town visited it for sex and hashish.¹⁰ Poets celebrated their pleasures in the area by drinking, consuming hashish, listening to music, and watching unveiled “moon-faces”. When the rulers demanded that all the owners of the buildings around the lake prohibit illicit sexual activities, its sex workers and entertainers moved to Azbakiyyah.¹¹ In the late eighteenth century, well-known Egyptian historian Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti (1754–1825) mentioned that religious scholars at al-Azhar patronized prostitutes.¹² Lower-class workers and peasants were able to afford inexpensive prostitutes among the Gypsy and Gi’idi tribes. The Azbakiyyah, particularly Wajh al-Birkah Street, became such a famous spot among Cairene pleasure seekers that one scholar noted that a literary genre called Wajh al-Birkah flourished among contemporary authors.¹³ Some of that literature was so sensational that it spoke of the quality of male organs and encouraged the public to commit adultery.¹⁴ An eighteenth-century poet named Muhammad Shabanah (d. 1795) mentioned a brothel owned by a certain Kuwaik in Azbakiyyah who secured boys and women for customers.¹⁵ Without state intervention in Wajh al-Birkah, cafés were open late at night, dancers appeared almost naked, and prostitution and illicit activities that people did not allow in their residential neighbourhoods were carried out.¹⁶

Prostitution was associated with lower-class entertainers, e.g. male and female musicians and dancers. This would explain the use of the term *maghani*, literary male singers, for prostitutes in pre-modern times. Lower-class entertainers who performed for male and female audiences on streets and in cafés were called *ghawazi*. They were different from *awalim*, high-ranking performers for female audiences who only performed in wealthy harems or sang for mixed groups from behind the *mashrabiyyat*, carved wood windows

9 Cited in Kilani, *al-Azbakiyyah*, pp. 12–13.

10 Muhammad Ibn Ahmad Ibn Iyas, *Bada’i’al-zuhur fi waqai’al-duhur*, 6 vols (Istanbul, 1931), v, p. 11 and al-Maqrizi, *al-Mawaiz*, pp. 357, 750.

11 al-Kilani, *al-Azbakiyyah*, p. 12.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 19.

13 *Ibid.*, pp. 36–49.

14 An example of that poetry is mentioned in al-Kilani, *al-Azbakiyyah*, pp. 47–48.

15 Mustafa As’ad ibn Ahmad al-Luqaymi, *al-Mudamah al-urjwaniyyah fi-al-maqamah al-ridvaniyyah*, unpublished manuscript cited in Kilani, *al-Azbakiyyah*, pp. 13–14.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 27.

overlooking the salons of upper class houses.¹⁷ According to British traveller Edward William Lane, who toured Egypt in 1825–28, many *ghawazi*, while being “public women”, meaning that they were available for promiscuous sex for money, were in fact married and dominant over their subdued husbands.¹⁸ Singers, male and female dancers, prostitutes, and beggars were grouped into distinct trade groups and participated in guild processions, marching at the end of the parade, but it seems they were not fully integrated within the guild system. According to Ottoman traveller Evliya Çelebi, three pimps controlled most of the prostitutes in seventeenth-century Cairo and pimps operated in a system that was close to the guild. Known as *Sheikh al-'Arsat* or the head of pimps, those three pimps kept records of all the prostitutes and supervised their work.¹⁹ Nonetheless, prostitution was not institutionalized with the segregation of licensed sex workers in state-authorized brothels. At the same time, women workers in general experienced a great deal of exclusion and marginalization in the guild system.²⁰

Pre-modern sex work was a highly informal sector. In Mamluk and Ottoman Cairo, the state subjected sex workers to taxation. Under the Mamluks, these taxes, known as *maghani* taxes, were substantial sources of revenue for the state.²¹ A female tax collector known as the *Daminat al-Maghani* functioned as a tax farmer who bought from the state the right to collect taxes with a profit and kept records of the prostitutes. These taxes were taken in return for the state protection of prostitutes; hence it could be taken as state recognition of sex workers as a professional group.²² In the seventeenth century, the state designated the position of *aminshikar*, and whoever was in charge of that position collected taxes from prostitutes. The position and the tax were annulled in 1643.²³ Subsequently, taxes were imposed again on prostitutes as part of what became known as *khurdah* taxes that were levied on people with lowly occupations such as snake charmers, hashish sellers, and mountebanks.

17 Karin Van Nieuwkerk, “Changing Images and Shifting Identities: Female Performers in Egypt”, in Ann Dils and Ann Cooper Albright (eds), *Moving History/Dancing Cultures: A Dance History Reader* (Middletown, CT, 2001), pp. 136–143.

18 Edward William Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians, the Definitive 1860 Edition Introduced by Jason Thompson* (Cairo, 2006), pp. 380.

19 Hilal, *al-Baghaya*, p. 115.

20 Judith E. Tucker, *Women in Nineteenth-century Egypt*, p. 108.

21 Ibn Taghrabardi, *al-Nujum al-Zahirah*, 1, p. 47.

22 'Abd al-Raziq, *al-Mar'ah fi Misr al-mamlukiyyah*, p. 40.

23 Hilal. *al-Baghaya*, p. 30.

Prostitution and taxation also intersected in the slave trade.²⁴ Caucasian and *farangi* (European) girls were brought to Cairo for sex work.²⁵ A particular tax called the *huquq al-qinat* was imposed on every male and female who provided sexual services in taverns.²⁶ There was also a similar tax on those slave-prostitutes known as *huquq al-Sudan*.²⁷ Court records of the Ottoman period reveal cases in which pimps bought women for their brothels.²⁸ A European traveller to Egypt mentioned that some *ghawazi* forced their African slaves to practise prostitution.²⁹ Slave merchants operated brothels in Cairo and in once case the head of their guild complained of a lack of state control over this illicit business.³⁰

Taxes on prostitutes constituted an important source of revenue for the governor, the *wali*, and his Turkish policemen, the *aghas*. They functioned as tax farmers who bought from the state the right to collect taxes from prostitutes and retain a certain amount of profit. In the eighteenth century, Vasir Abdullah Pasha Alkibralli had to provide huge financial compensation.³¹ In the rest of the Ottoman period, the police chief kept records of prostitutes for taxation purposes. The authorities were abusive in their tax-collecting practices and casual female labourers were constantly under threat of being registered as prostitutes. *Khurdah multezim* (the *khurdah* tax-collector) and state officials had a free hand in placing women's names on the registers and removing them, and this often depended on whether a good bribe had been paid or not.

Evliya Çelebi estimated that there were forty policemen who oversaw the brothels and made sure that every prostitute stayed at home overnight.³² This heavy policing might have been related to public security issues in addition to fiscal ones. There were accounts of gangs that employed "fallen" women in their thieving operations. The women of a gang called the *al-baqar al-wahshi* (antelopes) walked around the Wajh al-Birkah to pick up wealthy-looking customers. If they succeeded in being invited to their victims' homes, they would

24 See 'Imad Hilal, *al-Raqiq fi Misr fi al-qarn al-tasi' 'ashar* (Cairo, 1999).

25 Al-Kilani, *al-Azbakiyyah*, p. 13.

26 Al-Maqrizi, *al-Kutat*, p. 144; Jalal al-Suyuti, *Husan al-Muhadarah*, II, p. 218.

27 Al-Bayumi Isma'il, *al-Nuzum al-maliyyah fi-Misr wa al-sham zaman salatin al-mamalik* (Cairo, 1998), p. 201.

28 Hilal, *al-Baghaya*, p. 115.

29 E.D. Lane, *Customs and Manners*, p. 328.

30 Hilal, *al-Raqiq*, p. 227.

31 Ahmad Shalabi 'Abd al-Ghani, *Awdah al-isharat fiman tawla Misr al-Qahirah min al-wuzara' wa al-bashawat* (Cairo, 1978), pp. 574–575.

32 Hilal, *al-Baghaya*, p. 30.

get them intoxicated and rob them, and kill them as well at times.³³ Another gang was called the *al-Baqar al-Sarih* (roaming cows) and their women would go to drink with their customers at their homes. Once the man got drunk, they would rob the house and then flee.³⁴ Theft and murder involving prostitution was a two-way road. Prostitutes also fell victim to the abuses of their customers. In one incident in mediaeval Cairo, three men habitually invited prostitutes to their homes and then murdered them and stole their clothes. Ultimately they were executed and their corpses were carried through the streets together with cages containing the bones of their victims.³⁵

In Mamluk and Ottoman times, the position of prostitutes and brothels was unstable. On the one hand, the brothel provided sources of revenue and was accommodated or de facto recognized by the state. Society tolerated it as long as it was marginalized outside the regular residential neighbourhoods where the *ahrar* lived. On the other hand, sex work was resented for both moral and practical reasons. It offended religious sensibilities and the collective notions of propriety and decorum. It sometimes caused problems for urban security, particularly when prostitution was associated with theft and public drunkenness as mentioned above. The authorities sporadically outlawed prostitution in Cairo for moral reasons. The last Mamluk Sultan, Qunsuh al-Ghuri (1501–1516), ordered the destruction of the prostitution shacks around the al-Ratli Lake.³⁶

The Ottoman *vasir* Husayn Pasha (r. 1635–1637) was the first Ottoman ruler to shut down brothels. The story goes that he had a man hung on the spot when he saw him leaving one of the shacks around the Mujawarin Lake and ordered that all the brothels in Bab al-Luq be demolished.³⁷ The prostitutes fled and their shacks were removed. Shortly after, prostitution became relatively free again until Maqsud Pasha (r. 1642–1643) banned it along with public singing and dancing.³⁸ Up until the end of the century, the state tolerated prostitution for taxation purposes, and complaints about prostitution and their taxes were ignored. Yet, there is an account that the eighteenth-century *vazir* Isma'il Agha ordered severe physical punishment for a prostitute and her customer when he saw them close to the hilly area of al-Tibi Mosque.³⁹ In 1733 Isma'il Agha

33 al-Kilani, *al-Azbakiyyah*, p. 50.

34 *Ibid.*, pp. 50–51.

35 Shoshan, *Popular Culture in Medieval Cairo*, p. 5.

36 al-Kilani, *al-Azbakiyyah*, p. 10.

37 Muhammad bin Abu al-Surur al-Bakri, *al-Rawdah al-ma'nusah fi-akhbar Misr al-mahrusah* (Cairo, 1996), p. 148.

38 al-Bakri, *al-Rawdah al-ma'nusah*, p. 158.

39 'Abd al-Ghani, *'Awdah al-Isharat*, p. 218.

ordered that all brothels and pubs had to be shut down. As a way of dealing with the resentment the policemen felt because they had lost their share of the taxes, he offered them the compensation of twelve cases of money from the provinces, so the police chief there had to live off the prostitutes' earnings.⁴⁰ It is believed that this was a single incident and the state's policy of tolerating prostitution continued for the sake of taxation until the French invasion.⁴¹

During their campaign in Egypt (1798–1801) the French authorities first imposed health and security regulations on prostitutes in an effort to protect their soldiers from infection. Al-Jabarti wrote in 1798 that when the French came to Egypt "loose women and prostitutes of low breeding became attached to the French and mixed with them."⁴² Initially, the French required that prostitutes register and undergo health inspections. They also issued orders stating that the soldiers could only visit registered prostitutes and they considered using registered pimps who would be responsible for the safety and protection of the soldiers. The regulations required that the doors of brothels be lit by lamps and open onto streets so that soldiers could easily get help if they experienced problems.⁴³ The costs of spending time with a prostitute were posted outside the brothels in both writing and symbols to minimize any disagreements or misunderstandings caused by language barriers. Eventually, the death toll brought about by venereal diseases among both the French troops and Egyptians alarmed the French about contact between their men and local prostitutes.

In the first two years of the occupation 2,419 French men died of venereal diseases.⁴⁴ Subsequently the French authorities had about 400 infected women drowned in the Nile and imprisoned many more.⁴⁵ Napoleon Bonaparte banned women who were known for practicing prostitution from being in Cairo.⁴⁶ This war on prostitutes was a short-lived bout of hysteria rather than a systematic policy, and hardly a dent was made in the sex trade.⁴⁷ Sex workers were sent to the countryside in order to prevent them from having relations with the soldiers garrisoned in towns, but they practised their trade openly away from police harassment in provincial towns such as Dusuq, al-Mahallah

40 *Ibid.*, pp. 574–575.

41 Hilal, *al-Baghaya*, p. 32.

42 Cited in Louis Awad, *The Literature of Ideas in Egypt* (Atlanta, 1986), pp. 22–23.

43 al-Kilani, *al-Azbakiyah*, pp. 56–57.

44 Juan Cole, *Napoleon's Egypt: Invading the Middle East* (New York, 2007), p. 235.

45 André Raymond, *Égyptiens et Français au Caire 1798–1801* (Cairo, 1998), p. 303.

46 Fahmy, "Prostitution in Egypt in the Nineteenth Century", p. 78; Tucker, *Women in Nineteenth-century Egypt*, p. 150.

47 Cole, *Napoleon's Egypt*, p. 235.

al-Kubra, and Tanta in the middle of the Delta. Moving to provincial towns made it easier to avoid taxation, but it deprived them of the bulk of their customers, who were French army officers. In cities under French occupation, women often exchanged sexual services for greater economic stability, although their vulnerability in the sex-gender system always made them vulnerable to abuse and violence; they often also became mistresses of French officials or lived with them as concubines.

Sex Work in Muhammad 'Ali's Cairo

Under the reign of Muhammad 'Ali (r. 1805–48), sex workers enjoyed a strong presence in Cairo and were subject to taxation until Muhammad 'Ali banned the sex trade and ordered that the brothels be shut down in 1834. In 1836, he banished many sex workers to Upper Egypt. Historians cite different motivations behind this change in Muhammad 'Ali's treatment of prostitution.⁴⁸ Judith Tucker emphasises the influence of the Muslim 'ulama, while Khalid Fahmy argues that concerns over health and public order were behind the banishing of sex workers to areas outside Cairo.⁴⁹ Banishing sex workers to provincial towns that were far from the main cities, schools, and barracks deprived the women of their sources of income and worsened their economic condition in general. According to a contemporary witness, clandestine prostitution nonetheless managed to survive underground.⁵⁰ More importantly, the ban on prostitution and female entertainment deprived self-employed women of much of their autonomy and control over their profession. State intervention invariably led to the marginalization of prostitutes and to their subordination to pimps and procurers in return for protection from coercive state power. Around the 1860s, prostitutes and dancing girls came back to Cairo, maybe as the opportunity to tax them acquired primacy over every other consideration. In 1866, Khedive Isma'il introduced a new tax on public women which allowed tax-farmers to assess the amount levied. Lady Lucie Duff Gordon, an aristocratic Englishwoman travelling in Egypt at the time, reported the grievances of a dancer as tax farmers made each woman pay according to her presumed gains, i.e. her good looks, and the poor women were exposed to all the caprices

48 Karin Van Nieuwkerk, *A Trade like any Other* (Austin, 1995), pp. 31–32.

49 Tucker, *Women in Nineteenth-century Egypt*, pp. 151–152; Fahmy, "Prostitution in Egypt in the Nineteenth Century", pp. 77–103.

50 See Gustave Flaubert, *Flaubert in Egypt: A Sensibility on Tour* (London, 1992), p. 39.

and extortion of the police.⁵¹ This taxation led some people in Egyptian society to refer to Isma'il as "Pimp Pasha."⁵²

Colonial Prostitution: Urban Change

Cairo grew very rapidly to become a global metropolis from the 1860s onwards. While Khedive Isma'il (r.1863–1879) was the first to launch an ambitious programme of urban planning, rapid processes of economic and social change boosted by the British occupation in 1882 radically transformed the city.⁵³ The British deposed Isma'il and installed his son Tawfiq in 1879 and eventually occupied Egypt in response to a broad proto-nationalist movement which developed around the figure of Colonel Ahmad 'Urabi in 1882. The occupation of Egypt developed into a full-fledged colonial enterprise lasting formally until the country's unilateral independence in 1922 but which truly ended in 1952 with the Free Officers' Revolution. In this way, the British secured control over the Suez Canal, the key sea-route to India.

Egypt was integrated into the global market as a supplier of raw materials to the British textile manufacturing industry and a purchaser of finished goods. Relations of production and patterns of land ownership in rural areas changed as an export-oriented plantation economy was encouraged with the aim of maximizing output for the global market. Peasants watched as the pace of the processes of dispossession they had been subjected to since the middle of the nineteenth century rapidly increased. Rural migration to urban centres was a major consequence, and one that greatly changed the face of Egypt's main urban centre, Cairo, although it was a complex and gradual process.⁵⁴ Colonial elites, a foreign comprador bourgeoisie, and rich locals populated the wealthy quarters, which seemed to combine European high society life with the exoticism of the Orient. Meanwhile, "subsistence migrants" from southern Europe (Italy, Malta, Greece, and France in particular) crossed the Mediterranean to compete with local unskilled labourers. Due to favourable investment conditions under the Capitulations, the European presence in the city was constantly growing.⁵⁵ According to urban historian André Raymond, Cairo's population

51 Lucie Duff Gordon, *Letters from Egypt* (London, 1997), p. 322.

52 *Ibid.*

53 André Raymond, *Cairo* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 318.

54 Roger Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy, 1800–1914* (London [etc.], 1981), p. 235.

55 Raymond, *Cairo*, p. 320. Aggregate data given by Raymond again show that the number of foreign residents in Cairo rose from 18,289 in 1882 to 76,173 in 1927.

increased from 374,000 in 1882 to 1,312,000 in 1937, that is, by 250 per cent in forty-five years.⁵⁶ This steady population growth resulted in the dramatic expansion of Cairo's built-up area from 1,000 hectares in 1882 to 16,330 hectares in 1937.⁵⁷ The urban landscape changed with the introduction of municipal utilities such as gas lighting and piped water in the rising middle-class areas. Transportation in the city was made easier via the paving of large tracts of the street system and the development of large-scale transport infrastructure in the form of electric tramlines.⁵⁸ Between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, Cairo's spaces became increasingly sanitized with the introduction of clinics and hospitals and, more importantly, a drainage and sewage system. The four districts of the Mediaeval City quickly became overpopulated, and services and infrastructure started to crumble.⁵⁹

In this new urban context, sex work was restructured and transformed into a dramatically new phenomenon. The expansion of prostitution had much to do with the encroachment of the global capitalist economy and colonial state power over the lives of individual Egyptians, men and women alike. New opportunities materialized in the bustling and booming metropolis with its financial and real estate speculation, internal and international migration, the advent of mass tourism, colonial warfare during World War I and World War II, and the emergence of a local middle class with greater purchasing power; all these fundamental factors accounted for the diffusion of prostitution as a response to the increased economic and social vulnerability of women within the capitalist wage labour market. Women faced great difficulties in adapting to the urban job market which left them very few occupational choices outside the casual and informal sector. In some cases, working conditions could be so strenuous and unrewarding that prostitution could be a more desirable occupational alternative. Most working women were active in domestic service and as servants, and they were often tacitly expected to give sexual services to their masters as well.⁶⁰ It is no coincidence that agencies recruiting domestic workers frequently collaborated with procurers and bordello-keepers to fill the ranks of brothels with inmates.

56 Raymond, *Cairo*, p. 319.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 322.

58 See John T. Chalcraft, *The Striking Cabbies of Cairo and Other Stories: Crafts and Guilds in Egypt, 1860–1914* (Albany, NY, 2004), pp. 134–135.

59 Marcel Clerget, *Le Caire, etude de géographie urbaine et d'histoire économique*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1934), I, pp. 242–244.

60 Women's Library, London [hereafter WL], 4/IBS/6/044, Cairo, Miscellaneous Correspondence, 1924–1930.

The Legal Framework: Regulationism and the Colonial Order

Cairene prostitution changed qualitatively with the enforcement of new legislation aimed at the strict supervision and containment of women engaged in sold sex. Sex workers were given a definite social persona, that of the prostitute, according to which women were essentially identified with a certain type of anti-social behaviour: promiscuous sexual activity in exchange for money. In order to protect “decent” people from their “corrupting” influence, prostitutes had to be supervised and restricted to certain areas of the city where they could ply their trade in licensed houses and be under medical control. That is, in short, the philosophy of regulationism. Following decades of administrative interventionism without strict regulations, an Egyptian version of a French-inspired regulation system was introduced by the British authorities in 1882. It was aimed at securing tax revenues from sex trade practitioners and other low-status and “morally suspect activities”, which included dancing and singing. Regulationism meant the institutionalization of prostitution by the establishment of state-licensed brothels in reserved urban areas where registered sex workers would offer their services under close surveillance by the authorities. It also entailed the creation of a system of oversight, constituted by the brothel, where prostitutes worked under the supervision of brothel keepers and were subjected to weekly medical inspections as well as the lock hospital, where the treatment of venereal sex workers took place. Regulationism was framed by an extensive medical discourse on social hygiene, which reflected the emerging political priority of creating a normative corpus of knowledge concerning all that was biological. Moreover, the regulationist project was characterized by blatant class and gender biases, since its stance was directed at the control of working-class women.

On the 31 October 1882, the first law disciplining sex work was drafted in Egypt. The “general decree” of 1882 aimed to define carefully segregated and contained spaces for medicalized commercial sex. Regular medical check-ups were made compulsory for licensed prostitutes with the establishment of inspection rooms in Cairo and Alexandria managed by the central health administration. Women’s names had to be listed in special registers, which recorded the results of their weekly examinations. If found diseased, women would be hospitalized for treatment; they could resume their activities after being dismissed from the lock hospital upon issuance of a medical certificate. Prostitutes had to obtain licenses as proof of their professional status and, more importantly, third parties were granted the right to legally run brothels by applying for a regular license.

The general decree was passed only fifteen days after the occupation of Egypt by the British army. According to Egyptian social historian 'Imad Hilal,⁶¹ the British authorities forced the Egyptian government to adopt legislation that would have been vehemently opposed back in Britain. Sex work was condoned as a professional activity recognized by the state as a means to protect the health of the troops, given their eagerness to consort with prostitutes and the difficulty of preventing them from doing so. Such a decision was predicated on a belief in the existence of a racial moral double standard, by which prostitution was considered to be endemic in the "backward" Orient and women were considered loose and debased.⁶² Local women were not considered amenable to moral regeneration and were designated as professional prostitutes to be placed in clearly signalled brothels. The general decree of 1882 constituted the first attempt by the Egyptian administration to organize and supervise sex work. It was subsequently followed by a number of legal texts specifying the aspects that were perceived to be the most detrimental in the trade, namely the sanitary emergency brought about by the spread of venereal diseases (syphilis, gonorrhoea, and cancrroid) and the disturbance of public order.

In accordance with this, in July of 1885 an ordinance was promulgated by the Minister of the Interior, 'Abd al-Qadir Hilmi Pasha, on the medical inspections of prostitutes.⁶³ It stipulated that the inspection bureaus of Cairo and Alexandria would be staffed by one or two doctors, a nurse, a secretary with knowledge of Arabic and French, a police officer, and a suitable number of guards. According to Article 3 of the decree, every prostitute working in a place known for prostitution was obliged to register her name with the local police in the bureau of medical inspection. She was given a card that showed her name, age, address, personal characteristics, and the name of the brothel keeper for which she was working. The women had to undergo weekly sanitary inspections, the results of which were reported on her card. Inspections took place daily from 8 A.M. to 1 P.M. in summer and from 10 A.M. to 2 P.M. in winter; doctors were prohibited from carrying out sanitary check-ups at the women's domiciles. Those prostitutes who were unable to attend the weekly sanitary inspection because of an illness had to send a certificate from their medical doctors on the day designated for their medical check-up proving that their condition

61 Hilal, *al-Bighaya*, p. 165.

62 WL 3/AMSH/B/07/05, Reports of VD's amongst soldiers in Egypt (1916).

63 *al-Qarrarat wa al-manshurat al-sadirah sanat-1885*, (Cairo, 1886), pp. 153–157; *Dikritat wa Lawa'ih Sahhiyyah* (Cairo, 1895), pp. 54–56.

prevented them from being present at the medical inspection. The same kind of provisions applied to female brothel keepers, with the exception of women older than fifty. The concern for clearly defining the marginal status of prostitutes is evident in Article 13; every prostitute who wished to leave the trade either through marriage or repentance had to produce two witnesses and apply to the Public Health Administration in order to have her name crossed off the registration list.⁶⁴ Pecuniary fines were used to enforce the law; all women who failed to attend medical examinations or did not produce their certificates at their regular weekly medical check-ups were subjected to a fine of fifty piasters in the first instance, followed by a fine of 100 piastres or imprisonment for two to eight days in the second instance.⁶⁵

A number of decrees reiterated and specified norms regarding the functioning of brothels as contained in the general decree of 1882 until the promulgation of a comprehensive Law on Brothels (*La'ihah Buyut-al-'ahirat*) dated 15 July 1896.⁶⁶ This law marked the real beginning of licensed prostitution in Egypt and it constituted the basis of the 1905 Arête which, as the ultimate legal text on state-regulated sex work, disciplined the activities of licensed prostitutes who were resident in brothels until the abolition of prostitution in 1949. Article 1 of the 1896 law defined a brothel as "the place where two or more women are living permanently or assembling temporarily for the purpose of prostitution." According to Article 5, in order to open a brothel it was necessary to present a written request to the Governorate or the Provincial Administration at least fifteen days prior to the proposed opening date. The name, birth place, and nationality of all applicants, as well as information about the location of the establishment, the number of rooms, and details about the legal owners of the premises was also to be included in the request. All applicants, both foreigners and locals, could apply for a permit provided they were not minors and had never been indicted for a crime. A detailed list with the names of registered prostitutes and other people living and working in the house, such as servants, had to be supplied by the brothel keeper to the authorities. Prostitutes had to be at least 18 years old, and every prostitute was given a photo-card by the police which was to be renewed annually. Moreover, according to Article 15, women had to submit to a weekly medical examination.

The whole text was characterized by an emerging preoccupation with segregated areas set aside for sex work and keeping their inhabitants away from the rest of the population; Article 2, for instance, established that brothels could

64 The content of this article was further specified in a special decree in November of 1885.

65 *La'ihah maktab al-kashf 'ala al-niswah al-'ahirat*, article 14.

66 Nidarrah al-Dakhiliyya, *al-Qawanin al-idariyyah wa al-jina'iyyah, al-juz' al-rabi' al-qawanin al-khususiyah* (Cairo, 1896), pp. 430–435.

be opened only in reserved areas of the city. There could be no more than one door opening onto the street and the brothel was to be completely detached from “other buildings, shops or public places”, so as to avoid grievances from respectable people. Women were not allowed to stand in the doorways or windows of brothels; ideally they were to be invisible. There was, however, a striking contrast between the strict segregation described in legal texts and the reality described in coeval narrations.⁶⁷ Russell Pasha described sex workers in the Wass’ah district as sitting in front of brothels and behind the iron bars of the windows of ground-floor rooms. Women would solicit openly in the streets and invite their prospective customers to follow them into buildings along the alleys. This image was in fact typical of orientalist iconography, evoking women’s sexual segregation in the *harim* and sexual enslavement, traits which were considered instances of Muslim backwardness according to western stereotypes. The idea of a hyper-sexualized *harim* space, for example, was a recurrent theme in early twentieth century pornographic studio portraits in which indigenous women, mostly sex workers, posed naked behind iron bars.⁶⁸ A specific apparatus of control and supervision was devised which, although largely ineffective, aimed to contain and neutralize prostitution and its dangerous social effects; these included the brothel, the medical inspection bureau, and the lock hospital for the treatment of diseased women, as well as the police station.

The Geography of Sex Work

The spatial organization of sex work in Cairo was somewhat dualistic, circumscribed, and highly visible on the one hand, and decentred, multiple, and absolutely undefined on the other. The main red-light area in Cairo was in the city centre, not far from the Azbakiyyah quarter. Officially opened in 1872, the Azbakiyyah Garden was located on the original site of the Birkat-al-Azbakiyyah, the Azbakiyyah Pond. The octagonal park was surrounded by large streets and four large squares: Opera, ‘Ataba al Khadra’, Khazindar, and Qantarat-al-Dekkah. From the 1840s onwards, an increasing number of traditional buildings were replaced by western-style constructions. Cafés, taverns, and dancing halls mushroomed, and there a mix of Italian, Turkish, Greek, Arab, and French songs were played and heavily made-up European women welcomed customers. A heterogeneous crowd of travellers and locals, street vendors of various

67 See Sir Thomas Russell Pasha, *Egyptian Service: 1902–1946* (London, 1949), p. 80; WL, 4/IBS/6/034, Egypt- Messageries Maritimes (1925–1930).

68 Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem* (Minneapolis, MS, 1997), p. 24.

types, mountebanks, snake charmers, storytellers, and others populated the esplanade. Cairo's main red-light district was located a stone's throw from the Azbakiyyah. The brothel area was divided into two zones. The Wajh-al-Birkah had the highest concentration of foreign prostitutes who were licenced. The street was flanked by three-storey Mediterranean-style buildings with balconies extending out over the streets. Women wearing light gowns would lean out over the balconies, trying to catch the attention of those promenading on the street.⁶⁹ The Wass'ah quarter was an area for regulated native prostitution where Egyptians, Nubians, and Sudanese solicited in front of their "shops" which were one-room shacks, and they also assembled in front of the larger establishments.⁷⁰ Cairo's sex zones, however, were not in any way limited to the licensed area. Much of the trade took place outside the segregated areas, disguised under a cover of decorum in anonymous flats in "respectable" neighbourhoods. From 1926 to 1936, the Cairo City Police found and raided 2,654 clandestine brothels,⁷¹ and that number is most probably far from the totality of illicit establishments present in the city.

The vast majority of Cairo sex workers did not work in the brothel system and they plied their trade on a more flexible basis in clandestine *maisons de rendez-vous*.⁷² A Cairo City Police memorandum on prostitution issued in 1926⁷³ confirms that transactional sex was integrated rather than marginalized in the everyday lives of popular neighbourhoods, as long as it did not disturb the public order. Clandestine sex workers came from a variety of working-class backgrounds; most of the time they were women living on the margins of the peddler economy as seamstresses, washerwomen, dressmakers, servants, and shop assistants. Despite the strain of economic hardship and impoverishment, these women retained their family ties; many of them were married and practised prostitution in order to supplement their meagre family incomes.

69 Douglas Sladen, *Oriental Cairo: The City of the Arabian Nights* (London, 1911), p. 60; Guy Thornton, *With the Anzacs in Cairo: The Tale of a Great Fight* (London, 1917?), pp. 77–78.

70 W.N. Willis, *The Anti-Christ in Egypt* (London, 1914), p. 28.

71 See Wizarat-al-Dakhaliyyah, *Taqrir bulis madinat-al qahirah li-sanat 1935* (Cairo, 1936), p. 102; Wizarat-al-Dakhaliyyah, *Taqrir bulis madinat al qahirah li-sanat 1936* (Cairo, 1937), p. 102; see Abu Bakr, *al Mugtama' al-Qahira*, p. 160, on the 'awwamas, boathouses moored on the Nile's shore in the Gezirah and Imbabah.

72 Corbain's term is used here to define a private house the tenants of which made it available to third parties for commercial sexual encounters. Women were not inmates, but frequented the house for the purpose of prostitution. Clients could be either procured by the keeper or by the women themselves. See Alain Corbin, *Women for Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 174–175.

73 WL, 4/IBS/ 5/2/040, Miscellaneous-conferences, Egypt, proposed congress.

Organization of the Trade

According to the 1926 Cairo City Police Report, of the 1,184 registered prostitutes working in Cairo, 859 were Egyptians and 325 were foreigners.⁷⁴ Brothels would usually house five or six resident prostitutes. Given the high density of the red-light district,⁷⁵ brothels would normally occupy small premises with a ground floor vestibule and a staircase leading to the first floor where bedrooms were located. A fairly detailed description of a brothel was made in a British consular record concerning a murder in a house of ill-fame.⁷⁶ This particular brothel was owned by a European prostitute, Santa Coppola, and it was located in Shari' 'Abd al-Khaliq in the Wajh al-Birkah area. Five girls and the mistress worked there; four of the women were Italian and the other was a Greek woman. The brothel had three steps which led to the street and that is where some of the girls waited for customers while others sat in the hall. A five-meter-long corridor ended at a staircase which led to the first floor, where a large sitting room overlooked the hall with two adjoining rooms. In the sitting room, customers waited for the girls to receive them, spent time in conversation with their mistresses, drank alcohol, and gambled. The rooms were quite simple, consisting of "a bedstead, a table with marble top and some other things." Brothels in the poorer area of the Wass'ah were certainly more destitute and shabbier. Prostitutes received clients in rooms directly overlooking the street. British Cairo Police Chief Russell Pasha described the Wass'ah at the turn of the twentieth century as a place where sex workers were so miserable that they lived "in one-room shacks. [...] Here in the Wass'ah, Egyptian, Nubian and Sudanese women plied their one shilling trade in conditions of abject squalor, though under medical control."⁷⁷

New forms of prostitution developed due to the increasing expansion of international tourism and business in the Azbakiyyah district, which, as we saw previously, had always been where entertainment venues and large hotels were concentrated. In addition, the emergence of new patterns of middle-class nocturnal sociability which were made possible by technological changes including gas lighting and electrified public transportation impacted the ways

74 *Ibid.*

75 Azbakiyyah had the second highest population density in Cairo after the nearby area of Bab-al-Sha'riyyah with 36,323 inhabitants per sq. kilometre in 1926. See Abu Bakr, *Mu-jtama' al-Qahirah*, p. 28.

76 See National Archives, Kew [hereafter NA], FO/841/62, Consular Police Reports, Cairo (29 August 1899). Report on a murder in a brothel.

77 Russell Pasha, *Egyptian Service*, p. 178.

in which urban space was utilized. Increasing levels of consumption drove the spread of leisure spaces where it was possible for people of all social and economic backgrounds to find forms of amusement suitable for their budgets. Imperial troops constituted a permanent source of demand, especially during World War I and World War II when the presence of soldiers on Egyptian soil dramatically increased. Soldiers regularly patronized brothels and this resulted in heated debates about the standards of morality among troops, leading to the imposition of a harsh, albeit short-lived, measure of "social purification" in Cairo during World War I. Up until 1916, the military authorities allowed troops to frequent the brothels. After World War I, however, their approach changed. In 1916, brothels with native sex workers were declared out of bounds for imperial troops, and in 1921 patronizing both native and European brothels was forbidden. The spread of venereal diseases among colonial troops brought about the emergence of prohibitionism. In practice though, toleration went unabated; while soldiers were formally barred from frequenting brothels, they were given anti-venereal prophylaxis and the addresses of establishments considered to be medically safe were posted in the barracks.

From that time on, the number of large brothels declined. Instead, unregulated prostitution, both disguised and clandestine, thrived. In the nightlife district of Azbakiyyah, disguised prostitution was practised by women employed as barmaids, waitresses, and performers. Freed from police supervision on the one hand and the protection of pimps on the other, these women became the rank and file of "a new form of procuring that [...] formed networks whose sheer size helps to explain the currency of the theme of the 'White Slave Trade' during the early years of the twentieth century."⁷⁸

Even during the economic depression of the 1930s, nightlife in Cairo flourished despite the growing dissent of local conservative groups and foreign moralist associations. Concerns over vice and moral degradation were increasingly framed within anti-colonial sentiment. Subordination to western cultural influences and political encroachment was often considered to be at the core of ethical moral degradation. Moreover, the proliferation of vice and crime in discourses articulated by Islamic political movements such as the Muslim Brethren, which was founded in 1928, played an ever-increasing role in Egyptian politics in the 1930s and '40s. It is within this context that a wave of purity laws targeting nightclubs and entertainment emerged. Clubs and nightclubs were to be patrolled and monitored by the local police. Since police officers were relatively easy targets for bribes, however, the enforcement of restrictive regulations was quite uneven. During World War II, Cairene nightlife boomed

78 Corbain, *Women for Hire*, p. 168.

and the sex market readily expanded mainly due to the massive military presence in the city. Artemis Cooper, author of a brilliant account of Cairo's military and social history from 1939 to 1945, states that there were from 80,000 to 100,000 British soldiers on Egyptian soil at the beginning of the war. In 1941, however, 140,000 men were stationed in Cairo. Venturing into the city, the soldiers would get on a tram and head to the nightlife district in order to spend the money they had acquired during their time spent in action in the desert.⁷⁹

Life in the Brothel

Life in the brothel was marked by stiff competition between the women's overseer and her employers. In these establishments, women normally had to rely on a pimp in order to be protected from greedy keepers and their relentless physical and economic exploitation, as well as from violent and rowdy customers. Getting a lover/pimp meant more protection for the women, but that often added to their subordinate position as an element of exploitation.

As for the social profiles of pimps, the vast majority were young working-class men, both locals and foreigners, and they were generally unskilled casual labourers. Most of the men had spent much time in the Azbakiyyah district temporarily working in bars and taverns where they made the acquaintance of the prostitutes as they plied their trade in the area. Among the cases discovered during the course of our research, there were at least four pimps who had previously served in the British Army, two of whom had been members of the Cairo City Police under the command of Russell Pasha. Others were part of loose networks of international recruiters and lived constantly on the run, crossing the Mediterranean to procure women for Cairene establishments and deliver them to their workplaces. Foreign brothel keepers always profited from the virtual immunity bestowed upon them by the Capitulations.

The earnings of prostitutes were favourable compared to current wages but they varied depending on the areas in which they worked. Prostitutes charged ten piastres per customer in the Wass'ah and double that in the European Wajh-al-Birkah. A woman could earn from eighty piastres to around one and a half Egyptian pounds a day depending on the number of clients they had.⁸⁰ While prostitution was quite lucrative in terms of wages, many of the women

79 Artemis Cooper, *Cairo in the War, 1939–1945* (London, 1989), p. 112.

80 WL, 4/IBS/6/037, Egypt. Worker sent by AAB and Association for Social and Moral Hygiene, 1928–32. By way of comparison, it will suffice to say that a local mason earned 6–12 piastres per day, while a rail worker's family of six lived in a three-room flat on a daily

had to share out their earning with their *padronas* or *souteneurs*. Brothel inmates kept half of their earnings and paid the keeper for board plus various extras, usually at very high prices. In some cases, women could retain their earnings but paid a monthly fee for the rooms they used. Other expenses included medical fees and annual registration fees. In many instances the prostitutes had children and relatives who were dependent on them and part of their earnings often went to pimps and bullies. Many women became indebted to their *padronas* or found it very difficult to save up money to reinvest in a trade or exit strategy.

Prostitutes were thus in a weak and subordinate position, but this does not mean they did not try to resist or renegotiate the terms of their exploitation. When sex workers attempted to subvert the power relations they had with their exploiters (their pimps), they did not hesitate to make use of the law system as plaintiffs in courts. Among the consular minutes we researched there are cases which provide interesting insights into the relationship between prostitutes and their pimps, and these show how women were able to sue their exploiters and haul them before a court for mistreatment.⁸¹

Abolitionism

In the 1920s, abolitionism became a prominent issue in public discourses and a number of civil society organizations actively campaigned for it. Nationalists, religious authorities, local feminists, British purity movement advocates, and colonial administrators all joined forces in supporting the cause of the abolition of licensed prostitution. While liberal-bourgeois groups such as the feminists led by Hudà Sha'arawi rejected licensed prostitution on the basis of universalist humanist discourses, religious leaders were concerned with moral regeneration of correct Muslim practices as a form of resistance to westernization and degeneration of the believers' community. Shaykh Mahmud

income of 6 piastres. See Marcel Clerget, *Le Caire: Étude de géographie urbaine et d'histoire économique* (Paris, 1934), p. 156.

81 It is not possible to elaborate on this point here because of space constraints. Primary sources include NA, FO 841/146- Rex versus Giuseppe Vassallo for living wholly or in part on the proceedings of prostitution; NA, FO 841/164- Rex versus Pasquale Magri for wholly or in part living on the proceedings of prostitution; NA, FO 841/186- Rex Versus James Kelly alias James Hughes for living partially or in part of the proceeds of prostitution; Archivi di Stato del Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Rome [hereafter ASMAE], Casi Penali Regio Tribunale Consolare Italiano del Cairo, 1932, folder 2, cases 41–95; ASMAE, Casi Penali Regio Tribunale Consolare Italiano, 1926, cases 1–65.

Abu-al-'Uyun, a prominent social reformist from al-Azhar, the Cairo-based centre for Islamic learning in the Muslim world and the most important of its kind, fulminated against the danger of public vice in the pages of *al-Ahram* while the state authorities decidedly put abolitionism on the political agenda and started to study proposals for the suppression of licensed prostitution.

After the First World War and increasingly after formal independence in 1922, the realms of sexuality and morality were tackled by nationalists as discursive areas to be conquered in order to define archetypical notions of Egyptian community and family. Licensed prostitution involving native women increasingly came to be seen as intolerable in terms of race and, of course, its blatant incompatibility with Islamic laws. In April of 1926, a memorandum was published containing the views of the local authorities on licensed prostitution.⁸² It reported that no justification could be found for the preservation of such legislation when countless studies had demonstrated that, due to a lack of adequate sanitary structures and juridical barriers, legalization of sex work had not succeeded in curbing venereal diseases. The authors recommended the repeal rather than the modification of the existing law on prostitutes: "The Egyptian government should follow in the steps of those Nations who led the struggle against licensed prostitution and in defence of public health."⁸³ In 1932, a mixed Anglo-Egyptian commission was formed and charged with the task of investigating all the circumstances relevant to licensed prostitution in the country and its impact on public health and security; the aim of this was to establish once and for all whether the system was desirable or not. The commission worked for three years and the final report was published in 1935.⁸⁴

In the report a draft law was proposed. It called for the arrest and detention of all third parties involved in the sexual exploitation of minors, both in legal brothels and clandestine houses, and punishment of up to fifteen years or a fine of 500 Egyptian pounds. Those aiding prostitution by knowingly renting out rooms or flats for debauchery and those earning their living by prostituting themselves would be subject to detention for up to two years and a fine of up to fifty Egyptian pounds. On 26 March 1938, the Ministry of Health issued a decree forbidding the licensing of new prostitutes and the opening of new brothels. One year later, a new commission of enquiry was appointed under the auspices of the Ministry of Health and it reasserted the conclusion reached by the previous one. The topic of the fate of sex workers was also tackled by the

82 "Ta'adil La'ihat- al-'ahirat", in *al-Ahram*, 13 April 1926, n.p.

83 *Ibid.*

84 Commission of Enquiry into the Problem of Licensed Prostitution, *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Problem of Licensed Prostitution in Egypt* (Cairo, 1935).

commission; it recommended the opening of four refuges for “fallen women” in Cairo, Alexandria, Tanta, and Asyut, and they were to provide the women with marketable skills such as cooking and sewing. As a last measure to stop “social derangement”, abolitionism was eventually implemented in 1949 when Ibrahim ‘Abd-al-Hadi Basha, the Prime Minister and Commander in Chief, promulgated Military Decree 76 on the closure of brothels. Article 1 called for the closure of all bordellos in the country where more than one woman worked as a prostitute, and they were to be closed within two months of the decree’s issuance. As is evident from this article, prostitution per se constituted no criminal offence, while third-party exploitation was prosecuted by law, unlike the situation under regulationism. Two months after the issuance of the decree, anyone who was found to be managing houses of ill fame or living on the proceedings of women’s prostitution was to be subject to arrest and detention for one to three years, and two to four years if the *souteneur* was a relative of the exploited woman. Article 5 of the decree stated that if a woman suffering from a venereal disease was found to be practicing prostitution in a house of ill fame, she was to be arrested and detained for three to five years and fined 100 Egyptian pounds.

The complete criminalization of sex work was legally established in 1951 when Law 68, a regulation against debauchery, was passed. This law, which is still force today, calls for the prosecution of third parties as well as women working as prostitutes. Any woman found engaging in paid sex was and is subject to at least three months imprisonment and a fine of 250 to 300 Egyptian pounds. Egyptian lawmakers went further and supported the outright restriction of sexual freedom outside wedlock. Law 68 on Combating Prostitution, which was promulgated in 1951, decidedly criminalized sex workers and defined prostitution as “the practice of vice with others with no distinction.” The transactional or monetary nature of sex work was not recognized, thus equating prostitution with consensual extra-marital sexual activity.

Postcolonial Prostitution: When Sex Workers Became Criminals

Sex workers in the 1950s were the first generation to work against the legal system and consequently were treated as criminals. After all of the licensed brothels were shut down in 1949, Law 68 criminalized sex work. This occurred on the eve of the Revolution of 1952 which resulted in the end of British Occupation, the abolishment of the monarchy, and the establishment of the republic. During the short-lived period of unification with Syria (1958–1961), Law 10 of 1961 extended the criminalization of prostitution to Syria. All activities

related to sex work such as facilitating sold sex, pimping, soliciting, recruiting sex workers, and managing or providing places for commercial sex became punishable crimes. Clients were the only party not to be criminalized and they were treated as witnesses.⁸⁵ In this process, scholars joined the state authorities in criminalizing sex work.

Interestingly, the label “registered prostitute” was kept in use but it did not refer to a licensed sex worker anymore. It now applied, and still does, to a woman who, having been arrested at least once for a commercial sex-related activity, is still considered to be suspicious and is subject to being arrested. Egyptian sociologists, anthropologists, criminologists, and legal scholars have studied prostitutes, pimps, and madams as criminals, social deviants, and psychopaths. Thus, most of the information available is based on surveys of prostitutes who have been arrested and/or imprisoned.⁸⁶ The major goal of scholars has been to make suggestions to policy makers about how to eliminate everything related to prostitution. Despite their different disciplines and approaches, most Egyptian scholars hold to the idea that sex work is a dangerous evil and threat to society that requires harsh legal treatment. At least one of those scholars went so far as to recommend curtailing female sexuality and denying women's right to fall in love and choose their partners.⁸⁷ Notably, scholarship on prostitution in postcolonial Egypt has been based on the narratives of prostitutes themselves while their voices were mostly absent in previous studies. Clients are always absent from research because they are never treated as partners in violations of the law. Thus, they are never arrested and the state does not keep records of them.

Sex work in postcolonial Cairo became structurally adjusted so that it could manoeuvre within the strict legal boundaries that came into existence. According to a study carried out in 1961, most sex workers (78.7 per cent) were under 30 years old. The largest age group was between 20 and 24 years old

85 For the laws and legal procedures concerning sex work since 1951, see As'ad, Ahmad Sabri, *Qanun al-uqubat al-misri mu'allaqan 'ala nususihi wa mudhayyalan biahkam mahkamat al-naqd* (Cairo, 1964); 'Izzat Muhammad Nimr, *Jara'im al-'ird fi qanun al-'uqubat al-misri* (Cairo, 1984); Muhammad 'Izzat 'Ajwah, *Jara'im al-'ird wa ifsad al-akhlaq fi qanun mukafahat al-da'arah raqm 10 li-sanat 1961 wa-qanun al-'uqubat: Dirasah tahliliyyah muzawwadah bi-ahkam mahkamat al-Naqd wa-muqaranah fi bad tashriat al-duwal al-'arabiyyah* (Cairo, 1972).

86 A notable exception is an ethnographical study in which a scholar with the permission of the police pretended to be a client and surveyed sex workers and pimps in their work places. See 'Abd Allah 'Abd al-Ghani Ghanim, *al-Baghaya wa al-bagha': Dirasah susiyyu-anthrubulujyyah* (Alexandria, 1990).

87 Ghanim, *al-Baghaya wa-al-bagha'*, p. 317.

(33.8 per cent), followed by those who were between 15 and 19 years old (24 per cent). There were also prostitutes under 15 years old and over 45 years of age.⁸⁸ Madams, the women who facilitated the sale of sex through various activities such as recruiting sex workers and clients and arranging places for sexual encounters, were all ages. In addition to being sex workers themselves, younger madams exploited other women while the older ones (over 40) focused more on facilitating prostitution since their services were no longer in demand. Major differences can be identified in commercial sex since the mid-1970s. Most of the sex workers in the 1950s were illiterate and came from poor families, and for them selling sex was a way to make ends meet.⁸⁹ They lacked the skills to integrate into the formal job market. Half of them worked solely in prostitution while the other half could not generate enough income to support themselves and their dependants by working low-paying jobs such as street vending and domestic services. Only 3.5 per cent of their families were indifferent about their involvement in the sex trade, while the vast majority of women had to conceal it out of fear and a sense of shame. In contrast to stereotypes, very few of those sex workers drank alcohol and/or smoked hashish or used any other drugs. The few who did were merely trying to please their clients and only two women admitted that they enjoyed alcohol and hashish. Their clients were mostly Egyptian and a few were from other Arab states.

Throughout the 1950s, Azbakiyyah continued to be an important residential area for sex workers and 33 per cent of those who were arrested in association with prostitution lived there. None of them managed brothels or received clients at their homes in Azbakiyyah. Women could be accused of soliciting in the street, or according to the legal terms, “urging men to commit adultery, *wa fujur*, and committing shameful acts in public”, and they didn’t have to just be caught providing services or managing secret brothels. This was because sex workers took it upon themselves to find clients rather than waiting for them in their professional places and very few of them were willing to use their own homes. Most of the time their clients arranged the places where sexual encounters took place. Sex workers usually took the risk of going with a group of clients, mostly a group of friends who shared the cost. This meant that women had to work more, serve more men for less money, and agree to go with groups of strangers to unfamiliar places where they would not be able to get help if

88 Hassan al-Sa’ati, *al-Bigha’ fi al-Qahirah* (Cairo, 1961), p. 15.

89 The information on sex workers in the 1950s is based on a contemporary survey conducted by a team of the Egyptian National Center for Social and Criminal Research. See al-Markaz al-Qawmi lil-Buhuth al-Ijtima’iyyah wa al-Jina’iyyah, *al-Bigha’ fi al-Qahirah: Mash ijtimai’i wa dirasah ikliniikiyyah* (Cairo, 1961).

they needed it. Prostitutes also provided sexual services in cars and boats. This is a reflection of the fact that prostitutes had to work beyond the boundaries of law but also reveals that they were free from pimps and mediators in the early phase of criminalization. Three quarters of the women worked autonomously, which was a short-lived radical departure from licensed prostitution. The few mediators involved in commercial sex in the 1950s were mostly men whose businesses set up prostitutes with clients and they were often hairdressers, waiters, and cab drivers. Although there were a few male pimps, women dominated pimping and they were mostly older retired prostitutes.⁹⁰

The changes in the structure and dynamics of sex trade throughout the second half of twentieth century not only reflect the state's treatment of commercial sex but also the rapid course of socio-economic and political changes in Egypt and its Arab environment as a whole. After the Arab-Israeli war in 1973, wealth flooded into Arab oil-producing countries. Egypt emerged as an attractive hub for wealthy Arab tourists, particularly in the summer. Coincidentally, Egyptian society was going through socio-economic changes associated with reintegration in the open market and the global economy, which is known as the *Infitah*, the Open Door Policy. Many observed how these sudden changes widened the gap between the rich and the poor, unleashed consumerism, increased unemployment even among the educated, and undermined moral values; at the same time, observers noted the importance of wealth regardless of its source. These developments brought about changes in the structure of sex work. The sex trade witnessed a geographical shift from downtown Cairo to Pyramids Street and the Mohandiseen and Doqqi areas in Giza, which is the twin city of Cairo. These newly developed areas became home to international restaurants, nightclubs, discotheques, dance halls cabarets, and cafés. The modern appeal of these areas and their proximity to the pyramids made them a hub for tourists, particularly those from the Arab states of the Persian Gulf. A substantial number of residences are rented out fully furnished to those tourists who flood to the country during the summer and around New Year's Eve.

Since the late 1970s, Arab tourists, backed by their financial wealth, have represented an important segment of the sex market and pimps have regained their importance in a complex network structure. The importance of pimps and mediators since the mid-1970s cannot be overestimated. In that illegal trade, male and female pimps provide prostitutes with protection, expertise, and guaranteed work throughout the year. About 70 per cent of pimps are

90 See al-Markaz al-Qawmi lil-Buhuth al-Ijtimia'iyyah wa al-Jina'iyyah, *al-Bigha' fi al-Qahirah: Mash Ijtimia'i Ikliniyyah*, pp. 58–60; al-Sa'ati, *Al-Bigha' fi al-Qahirah*, pp. 82–83.

women and are currently or former sex workers.⁹¹ By connecting sex workers with clients and arranging places for them to operate, they save sex workers from soliciting in the streets and consequently protect them from the police and clients. Some sex workers get daily wages from their pimps regardless of how many customers they serve. Although this system guarantees a regular income, it is not favoured by women as pimps can exploit them to serve a high number of clients for a fixed wage. Thus, only unexperienced prostitutes agree to work with that system.⁹² Although many prostitutes resent the exploitation of pimps who take up to 50 per cent of the income, they prefer to work with pimps and even do their best to protect their pimps if they are arrested.⁹³ This is because pimps are usually committed to paying legal fees for lawyers and supporting the women when they get arrested and they also take care of their dependants while the women are in prison. Pimps pay visits and/or ask other sex workers to visit their imprisoned colleagues, which gives them much moral support, particularly if they do not have a family or their family has abandoned them.

Prostitution networks geared toward the tourism market are not restricted to providing sex; they also offer a wide variety of services including picking up tourists at the airport. A sex worker who has also pimped other women narrated the nature of her tasks and daily route: "I pick them up from the airport, show them furnished apartments to rent, arrange a domestic servant, do shopping, bring other prostitutes and let them choose [one], I take them to night clubs, dance with them, and then go to their apartment to sleep with them while I'm totally drunk."⁹⁴ She stated that she makes a lot of money through fees, gifts, tips, and commissions, and also by being involved in the apartment rental process and the prices of commodities and services. On the other hand, women who have the dual task of pimping and providing sex have to be generous in paying other sex workers and domestic servants well so they can secure their loyalty and facilitate the work. They also spend a great deal of their income on rental cars, fancy clothing, and lavish residences with phone lines, a luxury that was rare in Cairo until the last decade of the twentieth century.

Male and female pimps are very receptive to particular demands such as providing young girls and virgins for high prices. When a pimp fails to recruit a

91 Wazarat al-Dakhiliyyah, *Bayan ihṣā'i bi-majhudat qism mukafahat jara'im al-adab* (Cairo, 1990).

92 Ghanim, *al-Baghaya wa-al-bagha'*, p. 181.

93 *Ibid.*, p. 183.

94 Muhammad 'Arif, *Tariq al-inhiraf: bahth maydani 'an ihtiraf al-Bigha'* (Cairo, 1986), pp. 120–121.

virgin, an experienced sex worker will undergo minor surgery to get a fake hymen and is thus able to meet the demand. When tourists patronize young girls, the clients sign a civil marriage contract known as '*urfi* marriage, which is legal but does not have to be registered in the state records.⁹⁵ The interaction between male Arab tourists and female Egyptian sex workers has triggered focal polemics and stereotyping on both sides in the last few decades. Some Egyptian films have dealt with the theme of Arab men only seeking sexual pleasure and dragging destitute Egyptian women into prostitution or prostitution-like marriages.⁹⁶ One sex worker who often dealt with tourists said she was deeply offended and angered when a tourist-client suggested that all Egyptian women were like her.⁹⁷ She said she slapped him and terminated her two-week service agreement after only one week because he insulted her country, Egypt. This narrative is notable in that it both implies that this particular sex worker has a low view of herself and also that sex work is perceived negatively in Egypt and the Arab World.

Another structural change associated with developments in Egypt and the Arab region after the boom of oil wealth and *Infitah* has been an increase in trafficking networks. The police arrested three people involved in a case of the smuggling of a woman in 1984. That number jumped to twenty-six people involved in three cases in 1988, not to mention those whose activities went unnoticed or to whom the authorities turned a blind eye. These networks bring foreign women to work as prostitutes in Egypt and export Egyptian women to the prostitution market in other countries such as Lebanon and the states of the Arab Gulf. Very often women are granted real or fake employment contracts as domestic servants. Networks incorporate those who have access to fake visas, passports, and other documents, since most such women were blacklisted and unable to leave the country.⁹⁸ Unsurprisingly, 15 per cent of those who were arrested in 1990 were students in middle and high school and even university students.⁹⁹ One of the dramatic aspects of the illegal but flourishing sex business in Cairo is that it has been used to generate politically-motivated sensational media coverage.¹⁰⁰ By exploiting public interest, the former ruling

95 Ghanim, *Baghaya wa-al-bagha'*, p. 276.

96 Among many examples, Egyptian films such as *Ayam al-Ghadab* (*Days of Anger*) by Munir Radi, (1989) and *Lahm Rakhis* (*Cheap Meat*) by Iynas al-Dighidi (1995) are good representatives of this kind of polemic.

97 'Arif, *Tariq al-Inhiraf*, p. 114.

98 Ghanim, *Baghaya wa-al-bagha'*, pp. 293–300.

99 *Ibid.*, p. 106.

100 For examples of press coverage of issues concerning sex work, see app. 1 in Ghanim, *Baghaya wa-al-bagha'*, pp. 321–328.

regime frequently waged arrest campaigns against celebrities in association with sex work networks.¹⁰¹ These cases captured the public attention for weeks and were skilfully used by the Mubarak government to steer public opinion away from its failing economic policies and political repression. The ways that the Egyptian regime has employed sex work to conceal its shortcomings is a matter which certainly deserves further investigation.

Conclusion

This paper has tried to provide a rather extensive overview of sex work in the city of Cairo from roughly 1600 to the present day. By drawing upon a diverse array of sources including mediaeval chronicles, police files, court cases, abolitionist societies' papers, the press, travelogues, socio-criminal reports, and ethnographies, we have tried to give a detailed account of the ways in which sex work was carried out and how it changed in the rapidly transforming urban environment in precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial times. In particular we focused on the early modern and modern state regulations of commercial sex and the political economy of prostitution, taking into consideration the characteristics of the sex trade and how working conditions changed at particular junctures of time.

The process of the consolidation of state authority and colonial control resulted in the increasing marginalization of women marketing their sexual services as a separate professional category endowed with a sexualized social persona, that of the prostitute. By shunning a legalistic and social approach that separates prostitutes from the broader class of Egyptians, we tried to highlight the links between prostitution and the political economy of the labouring class since the nineteenth century. In this introductory overview, we focused on the relationship between prostitution and society, not just prostitutes' sub-culture. Far from being the "oldest trade" as is often maintained in traditional, essentializing understandings of this phenomenon, prostitution underwent a shifting trajectory from regulation to abolitionism in colonial Egypt, and criminalization in the postcolonial state has been closely intertwined with the articulations of an indigenous nationalist discourse and the process of nation-building in Egypt.

101 The most sensational case was that of cinema stars Hanan Turk and Wafa' Amir. For more on the sensational coverage of prostitution and sexual matters in the Egyptian press, see Muhammad al-Baz, *Sahafat al-itharah: al-siyasah wa al-din wa al-jins fi al-suhuf al-misriyya* (Cairo, 2010).

Colonial and Post-Colonial Casablanca

Liat Kozma

Introduction

Casablanca is the largest city in Morocco and its largest port. Before the 1912 French occupation of Morocco, Casablanca had been a town of 20,000. In the 1910s, the city started attracting migrants because of French colonial policies and the city's subsequent growing importance for Morocco's economy. French urban policies in Casablanca, the construction of its new port and its designation as a commercial and administrative centre attracted both European and rural migrants to the city, which transformed its demographic composition. By 1936, it was a city of over 250,000 inhabitants; by 1951, it was a metropolis of 700,000 people. Part of its growth was a result of European immigration; as the capital of French-occupied Morocco, the city attracted European administrators, businessmen, and settlers. The larger share of immigrants, however, came from the Moroccan countryside. Both Europeans and Jews left Morocco shortly after it achieved independence in 1956. The city, however, continued to grow and now has a population of more than 3.5 million.¹

Casablanca is an interesting case study of regulated prostitution. Like other French-colonized cities, it instituted regulated prostitution. In addition, however, for about three decades, from 1922 to 1953, state-regulated prostitution was carried out in a walled-off brothel district called Bousbir, which is located a few kilometres to the southeast of the city. In this “urbanist and hygienic utopia”² regular police and medical inspections were used to ostensibly protect women from exploitation and their clients from venereal diseases. French administrators in Hanoi, Tunis, and Beirut saw it as a model for emulation, in part or in full. Medical doctors and abolitionists in the *metropole* debated the pros and cons of regulation based on what they heard about Bousbir.³

1 André Adam, *Casablanca: Essai sur la transformation de la société marocaine au contact de l'Occident*, 2 vols, (Paris, 1972), II, p. 149.

2 Christelle Taraud, “Urbanisme, hygiénisme et prostitution à Casablanca dans les années 1920”, *French Colonial History*, 7 (2006), pp. 97–108.

3 Julia Christine Scriven Miller, “The Romance of Regulation: The Movement against State-Regulated Prostitution in France, 1871–1946” (Unpublished Ph.D., New York University, 2000), pp. 387–388.

For that reason we know much more about prostitution in protectorate Casablanca than in later periods. In this laboratory of social hygiene, French officials and medical doctors conducted frequent studies, mapping the quarter's demographics and collecting information about prostitutes' personal histories and health as well as data about their clientele. The overview of prostitution in the protectorate period presented below is based mostly on a report dating from 1935 which was prepared for the French authorities in Tunisia, as they had considered constructing a similar quarter in Tunis; it is also based on a report that two medical doctors wrote in 1951 in preparation for Bousbir's subsequent closure in 1953. After that point in time, such detailed data on prostitution in Casablanca is less available. At the moment, virtually no academic research has been carried out about the first decades of Morocco's independence from the late 1950s to the early 1990s.

For more recent periods, this survey relies on sociological studies which were generally based on interviews with a few dozen sex workers. Sara Carmen Benito's research in this regard has been criticized for a lack of historical depth, and historian Frédéric Abécassis has raised valid questions about the representativeness of such a sample in a city whose prostitute population is estimated to be 2,000 women.⁴ These critiques are valid, but nonetheless such sociological research does provide us with a preliminary understanding of some of the challenges that Casablanca's prostitutes face in the new legal and social realities of independent Morocco.

The Protectorate Period

Prostitution existed in historical Islamic societies, but mostly as a social rather than a legal category. In Islamic law, *zina*, or non-marital sex, was defined as sexual relations between a man and a woman who was neither his wife nor his slave; prostitution thus constituted an offense within this category.⁵ Little is known, however, about social attitudes regarding prostitution in precolonial Morocco. During the French protectorate (1912–56), prostitution was regulated and prostitutes were divided into two categories: registered and non-registered

4 Sara Carmen Benito, *La prostitution dans les rues de Casablanca* (Casablanca, 2008); Frédéric Abécassis, "Sara Carmen Benito, La prostitution dans les rues de Casablanca", *Lectures: Les comptes rendus*, 2009, available at: <http://lectures.revues.org/718>; last accessed 26 June 2017.

5 Colin Imber, "Zina in Ottoman Law", *Studies in Ottoman History and Law* (Istanbul, 1996), pp. 187–219.

(*filles soumises* [literally: submissive girls, or supervised girls] and *clandestines*, respectively).

Immediately after the 1912 occupation of Morocco, prostitutes began to be supervised by military doctors and the gendarmerie in order to protect French troops from venereal diseases. At the time of the French occupation, Casablanca's rather modest brothel district consisted of three or four brothels located on a central street that had been leased from a Frenchman named Prosper Ferrieu who held several diplomatic positions in the local French consulate early in the twentieth century. The local pronunciation of his Christian name resulted in the small quarter being referred to as *Bousbir*.

In 1914, civil administration replaced the military one and as a consequence prostitutes were placed under police supervision, but their residential choices were not yet restricted. In 1921, the colonial administration decided to relocate the Bousbir brothels a few kilometres away from the city in a dedicated enclosed quarter, and all indigenous prostitutes were required to move there in a transfer that was completed in 1923. The municipality rented the 24,000m² quarter to a private concessionaire for an annual fee of 43,200 francs, while he received from ten to twenty times that amount from the prostitutes alone, not counting the profits made from café and shop owners.⁶

Bousbir and French Colonial Casablanca

Historians of French colonialism in Morocco have presented Casablanca as a social laboratory, particularly with regards to the regulation of urban space. The creation of walled-off quarters was part of an urban experiment involving policies and practices that would have been impossible to implement or even be inconceivable in the *metropole*.⁷ French urban policy was based on the calculated ideas of Morocco's governor, Hubert Lyautey; his approach was premised on notions about modernization and development on the one hand and the preservation of Morocco's perceived cultural character on the other. Accordingly, particularly in the early years of the protectorate, the French administration promoted the accelerated development of the commercial,

6 Driss Maghraoui, "Knowledge, Gender and Spatial Configuration in Colonial Casablanca", in Driss Maghraoui (ed.), *Revisiting the Colonial Past in Morocco* (London, 2013), pp. 64–86; Taraud, "Urbanisme, hygienisme et prostitution à Casablanca dans les années 1920", pp. 97–108.

7 Christelle Taraud, *La prostitution coloniale: Algérie, Tunisie, Maroc, 1830–1962* (Paris, 2003), p. 22.

industrial, and European sections of the city while struggling to preserve the separate “traditional” Arab quarters.⁸

Segregating respectability from vice, colonizer and colonized was part of this design, as was dividing the wealthy from the poor. The modernization of urban space was marked by anxiety and tension regarding the city’s rationality on the one hand and the irrationality of desire and the constant threat of venereal diseases on the other. In this specific colonial context, such anxieties were focused on rural immigrants, who were now much less supervised than they had been in their former social environment, and they were considered to be more vulnerable to the temptations of city life.⁹

Bousbir as a Rational Utopian Urban Design

In its design, Bousbir embodied an orientalist fantasy, mimicking and adapting oriental architectural styles. Its public spaces included a cinema, a *hamam*, a few shops, cafés, dance halls, gardens, and decorative fountains. Buses to the district left the city centre every ten minutes, and a bicycle shed, taxi station, and parking lot were constructed. The only gate leading to Bousbir was closed for three hours each night, from 3 A.M. to 6 A.M., and it was constantly guarded by both the police and the military.¹⁰ A dispensary was located in front of the police station, an example of the conflation of police intervention and medical inspections.¹¹

In 1935, Bousbir had 179 houses of prostitution with 497 rooms, as well as forty-eight boutiques. Rooms were rented for 5 francs per day. The rooms had electricity, but no running water. Most houses had one floor with two or three rooms, and a small kitchen and patio. Some prostitutes lived alone, while others worked for a brothel keeper in exchange for room and board.¹² Official designs notwithstanding, visitors to Bousbir described fly-infected garbage cans, women emptying filthy buckets onto the streets, a lack of running water, and dirty bathrooms.¹³

8 Gwendolyn Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Chicago, 1991), pp. 85–159; Maghraoui, “Knowledge, Gender and Spatial Configuration”, p. 65.

9 Taraud, *La prostitution coloniale*, pp. 101–105; Mathieu and Maury, *Bousbir*, p. 41.

10 Taraud, *La prostitution coloniale*, pp. 105–109; Mathieu and Maury, *Bousbir*, p. 41; “La Prostitution et le contrôle sanitaire des mœurs à Tunis, à Alger et à Casablanca”, Centre des Archives diplomatiques de Nantes [Hereafter CADN], Tunisie- Fonds de la résidence, TU-V-1888, 1.1.1935, pp. 45–51, 57.

11 Maghraoui, “Knowledge, Gender and Spatial Configuration”, p. 78.

12 “La Prostitution et le contrôle sanitaire”, pp. 54–55.

13 Taraud, *La prostitution coloniale*, pp. 108–112; Mathieu and Maury, *Bousbir*, pp. 41–44.

In 1949, Bousbir's *filles soumises* charged 45 to 500 francs for a single sexual encounter and 250 to 2,000 francs for an entire night. Women normally had three to six sexual encounters per day (each lasting no more than five to fifteen minutes), and one or two full nights a week. Brothel keepers sometimes supplemented their income by having prostitutes sell mint tea and charged the women if they didn't sell enough. Travelers sometimes used Bousbir for an overnight stay instead of staying at a hotel in the city as they could get meals, a bed for the night, and sexual services.¹⁴

According to Jean Mathieu and P.H. Maury, frequent police action against *clandestines* who worked outside of Bousbir resulted in medical examinations. Women found to be healthy were warned and released. A third arrest and conviction resulted in women being forcibly taken to Bousbir, which, as we see below, they were not free to leave. Women found to be infected with venereal diseases were sent to the hospital, and once released were transferred directly to Bousbir. Brothel keepers used the dispensaries as recruitment grounds, or as Mathieu and Maury termed it, as a "slave market".¹⁵

Demographics

We know quite a bit about the social profile of Casablanca's registered prostitutes in the protectorate period. Taking it as a model for French colonial regulation, administrators and medical doctors throughout this period mapped the demographic distribution of the city's prostitutes, keeping track of their weekly routines and health. Most of these reports were biased in that they focused on Bousbir and ignored non-registered prostitutes. Bousbir's *filles soumises* obviously represented only part of the city's prostitute community, however; estimates varied widely from half to as little as 10 per cent of the number of those practicing at least occasional prostitution in Casablanca at the time.¹⁶

The main social groups in Bousbir were Muslims, Jews, and Europeans. The first two were native to Morocco, and were thus classified as *indigène*. The third were part of a European migratory community that came into being in North Africa in the mid-nineteenth century. As in the entire region, Casablanca's European population increased rapidly, growing from a few hundred early in the century to about 35,000 in 1925 and 133,000 in 1952. Most of these migrants were French, with smaller Italian and Spanish communities, which again is representative of the general pattern.¹⁷

14 Mathieu and Maury, *Bousbir*, pp. 105–106.

15 *Ibid.*, pp. 69–70, 125.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

17 Adam, *Casablanca*, p. 162.

Mathieu and Maury found that of the 1,500 prostitutes living in Bousbir in the late 1940s, including both practicing prostitutes and those housed there during the years preceding their investigation, only 265 came from the city and its suburbs. 312 originated from around Marrakesh, 84 from around Rabat, 47 from around Fes, 37 from around Agadir, and 36 from around Meknes, and the rest came from the countryside. Some of them moved there from regulated brothels in other Moroccan cities. A small minority came from Algeria and other North African countries or from Europe.¹⁸ Mathieu and Maury concluded that 83 per cent of the city's prostitutes originated from the same regions as those of the inhabitants of its new slums; they were from the coastal plains of southern Morocco and the High Atlas. By the late 1940s, single women residing in those slums were often employed as workers or maids in the indigenous or European quarters of the city. It was their typically low salaries which drove them to prostitution.¹⁹

Between 1920 and 1950 there were from 400 to 900 registered prostitutes in Bousbir at any given moment. In 1935, for example, in a city of a quarter of a million inhabitants, Bousbir housed 466 women, of which 391 were Muslim, 30 were Jewish, and 35 were European, as well as 20 "entertainers" under police control.²⁰ In 1951, Mathieu and Maury claimed that there were 98 European prostitutes in Casablanca and 657 Moroccan. Most of the European prostitutes, however, were located in the old city, while only a handful worked in Bousbir. Jewish prostitutes usually lived alone, although some worked at Jewish or Muslim brothels in Bousbir. They were better educated than their Muslim counterparts, and charged higher fees. Mathieu and Maury also estimated that during the decade preceding their study the number of clandestine prostitutes in Casablanca had been from 3,000 to 5,000, with as many as 30,000 women engaged in at least occasional prostitution.²¹

Alongside Bousbir, Casablanca also had *maisons de rendezvous*, the residents of which were also supervised and medically examined. The 1935 report estimated that many more dancers and singers supplemented their income with clandestine prostitution and noted that countless indigenous lower-class women occasionally practised prostitution as well.²²

At the time of the 1951 report, the average age of prostitutes in Bousbir was 21, with few over 26 and none over 35. By that age, some became madams,

18 Taraud, *La prostitution coloniale*, p. 76.

19 *Ibid.*, pp. 205–206; Mathieu and Maury, *Bousbir*, pp. 45–50.

20 "La Prostitution et le controle sanitaire", p. 51.

21 Taraud, *La prostitution coloniale*, pp. 68–70; Mathieu and Maury, *Bousbir*, pp. 37, 76, 148–149.

22 "La Prostitution et le controle sanitaire", pp. 70–72.

others worked as maids for younger women, and still others left the quarter to be reintegrated into “respectable” society. Officially, women could only start working as prostitutes if they were 17 years old or older, but this restriction was not enforced. The average age of voluntary onset was 18, but it ranged widely from 12 to 26. Almost two thirds of the women practicing prostitution moved to Bousbir voluntarily, while the rest were brought there by the police at an average age of 16. Those who resided in Bousbir voluntarily were predominantly poor women who turned to prostitution after getting divorced or getting pregnant outside of wedlock, as it offered them a degree of economic stability that the precarious life of a *clandestine* could not.²³

Most residents (64 per cent) had not been engaged in any other kind of employment before they started working in Bousbir. Of those who were employed, about half were domestic servants, and the rest were skilled or unskilled labourers. They resorted to clandestine prostitution to supplement their meagre incomes, taking advantage of the anonymity of the city and distance from family supervision until the police took them to Bousbir. Some were driven into prostitution after having been orphaned or widowed and subsequently had to support their children or siblings.²⁴

In terms of marital status, 78 per cent of the prostitutes interviewed by Mathieu and Maury had been married at an average age of 14 (with a range of 10 to 16 years of age). About a third terminated their marriages on their own initiative due to physical or verbal abuse at the hands of a husband or in-law; the rest were divorced, abandoned, or widowed. Some had their first sexual encounters outside of marriage, and this often occurred in the form of rape; some of the women mentioned that American soldiers were their first sexual partners (following the Anglo-American landings in North Africa in November of 1942).²⁵

Professional and Personal Life

Mathieu and Maury identified three categories of relationships between prostitutes and brothel keepers: 47.6 per cent of women were completely dependent on their madams, who provided them with room and board but no share in profits; 23.8 per cent shared their profits with the brothel keeper; and 28.6 per cent were independent but had to pay high rent.²⁶ The more well-to-do hired a maid, sometimes a former prostitute, who cooked, cleaned, went shopping,

23 Mathieu and Maury, *Bousbir*, p. 55.

24 *Ibid.*; Maghraoui, “Knowledge, Gender and Spatial Configuration”, pp. 75–76.

25 Mathieu and Maury, *Bousbir*, pp. 58–67, 135.

26 *Ibid.*, pp. 106, 124–125.

and prepared tea for the clients. In addition, they made sure the prostitute was not robbed by her clients and that she reported all her clients to her madam.²⁷

As for the clientele, many of prostitutes' clients were sailors and soldiers who came to the city on shore leave. Because the city was an administrative centre for the French occupying army, some of the clients were French, Moroccan, and Senegalese soldiers. In 1935, Bousbir had from 1,000 to 1,500 daily visitors. These were Senegalese and French soldiers on even days and Moroccan soldiers on odd days; such segregation, common in many colonial contexts, was intended to maintain racial hierarchies and the distinction between colonizer and colonized.²⁸

Women were not allowed to leave Bousbir without a permit, which was usually issued once or twice a week; the authorities feared that the prostitutes might get infected by casual or commercial sexual encounters in their free time. Indeed, many prostitutes supplemented their income with unsupervised sexual encounters in Casablanca's hotels while on leave. About 10 per cent never left Bousbir, and 4 per cent left only on Muslim holidays. The rest used their leave for leisure activities such as going to a *hamam*, watching movies, going to the municipal swimming pool, going to holy shrines, and going on picnics.²⁹ On workdays, they spent the mornings at cafés, public baths, beauty salons, and laundry facilities. Most of them consumed alcohol, cannabis, and cigarettes.³⁰ Mathieu and Maury took note of the women's tattoos; some of them were decorative, and some were intended to conjure the evil eye or "enchain" a lover. Most were in French. Some prostitutes had scars which were the result of wounds they inflicted on themselves during their attempts to remove old tattoos.³¹

The pronatalism of Moroccan society made abortions rare and prostitutes' children were either put up for adoption or raised by the women's families. Pregnancies among prostitutes, however, were rare, due to the effects of venereal diseases.³² Although children were not allowed to reside in Bousbir after the age of 4, visitors noted that they encountered older ones. In some cases, prostitutes maintained close contact with their families of origin, mainly their sisters. Some left Bousbir after a few years and started families.³³

27 *Ibid.*, pp. 120–121.

28 "La Prostitution et le controle sanitaire", p. 52.

29 Mathieu and Maury, *Bousbir*, pp. 80–82.

30 Maghraoui, "Knowledge, Gender and Spatial Configuration", pp. 79–80.

31 Mathieu and Maury, *Bousbir*, pp. 99–104.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 152.

33 *Ibid.*, pp. 58–67, 135.

More than two thirds of the women interviewed by Mathieu and Maury were completely cut off from their families; they were either too ashamed or they feared that they would suffer physical violence. The rest visited their families at least once a year on Muslim holidays and often funded the family's festivities.³⁴

Health

During the period of the protectorate, the main health concerns were syphilis and gonorrhoea, the rates of which among non-registered prostitutes were notably high. *Clandestines* were arrested in police raids, medically examined, and then sent either to Bousbir or to a secure hospital. Casablanca's Health Inspector, Eugène Lépinay, insisted that the strict medical inspections in the quarter had managed to completely eradicate syphilis in the 1930s, but other medical professionals disagreed. Sailors moved unrestricted to and from the port and regularly infected the women in Bousbir. At any rate, Casablanca itself could not remain a sterile environment, particularly as most clients preferred the company of *clandestines* over the brief and less romantic experience offered in Bousbir's brothels.³⁵

To protect the health of French troops stationed in Morocco, however, the municipality operated prophylactic dispensaries. Bousbir had two separate clinics: one for Europeans, Jews, and Senegalese, and the other for Moroccan Muslims.³⁶ Mathieu and Murray claimed that most women did little in the way of hygiene aside from washing their genitals with water and only rarely used soap, and they noted that prostitutes used the quarter's dispensary very rarely.³⁷

Independent Morocco

Several significant developments affected prostitution in Casablanca following Morocco's independence. First, regulation was abolished and prostitution was

34 *Ibid.*

35 For the medical debates on Bousbir, see for example, "Etrange progress", *L'Abolitioniste*, 2 (1934), p. 4; Dr Lépinay, "Le traitement volontaire et le traitement obligatoire des maladies vénérienne chez les prostituées: Résultat compte d'après les observation faite à Casablanca", *Union International contre le Peril Vénérien, Assemblée Générale, Le Caire, 1933*, pp. 142–145; Esquier and Chevalider in *La Prophylaxie Antivenerienne*, 5 (1933), p. 429.

36 "La Prostitution et le controle sanitaire", p. 53.

37 Mathieu and Maury, *Bousbir*, p. 141.

criminalized. Article 490 of the Moroccan penal code criminalizes non-marital sex, while articles 491 and 497–503 specifically criminalize prostitution and related offenses such as living off the profits of prostitutes, renting rooms for prostitution, and solicitation.³⁸ Research conducted about a decade after independence to assess the effects of these changes concluded that the conditions of prostitutes worsened while their numbers actually multiplied, especially in Casablanca.³⁹

Second, the demographic composition of Moroccan society changed with the dwindling of the European and Jewish communities after independence.⁴⁰ This made the classification of prostitutes along national/ethnic lines no longer relevant. Third, due to those demographic changes as well as changes in the education system following independence, social norms were undergoing a transformation, particularly in the cities. Benito points in particular to double sexual standards in Moroccan society by which—like in other times and places—women are expected to remain virgins until marriage while men's virility is measured by their sexual conquests.⁴¹ Although somewhat stereotypical, her observation does point to a shift that occurred in the transformation from colonial rule to independence. The ideal of premarital chastity, particularly for women, has been maintained while the average marriage age has been on the rise, making that ideal more difficult to achieve. Non-vaginal sex and hymen reconstruction surgery are some of the individual strategies employed to resolve this tension. Since abortion is illegal in Morocco, women also resort to back-alley abortions. Socially, one recent outcome has been the limited acceptance of premarital sex. Another outcome has been an increase in occasional prostitution among young women, as detailed below.⁴²

38 Benito, *La prostitution dans les rues de Casablanca*, pp. 21–22.

39 Mesdali Bennani, "Quelques considerations sur la prostitution au Maroc", *Revue Tunisienne de Sciences Sociales*, 4 (October 1967), pp. 79–84.

40 On the emigration of Europeans from North Africa see for example, Colette Dubois, "La nation et les Français d'outre-mer: Rapatriés ou sinistrés de la décolonisation?" in Jean-Louis Miège and Colette Dubois (eds), *L'Europe retrouvée: Les migrations de la décolonisation* (Paris, 1994), pp. 75–134. On Jewish emigration, see Michael M. Laskier, "Jewish Migration from Morocco to Israel: Government Policies and the Position of International Jewish Organizations, 1949–56", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 25 (1989), pp. 323–362; and "The Instability of Moroccan Jewry and the Moroccan Press in the First Decade after Independence", *Jewish History*, 1 (1986), pp. 39–54.

41 Benito, *La prostitution dans les rues de Casablanca*, pp. 32, 37–39, 53.

42 *Ibid.*, pp. 19–20. Moroccan scholars have been discussing the complex relationship of Moroccan society with women's sexuality since the 1980s. See Fatima Mernissi, "Virginity and Patriarchy", *Women's Studies International Forum* 5 (1982), pp. 183–191; Soumaya

Demographics

In the 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s, the demography of Casablanca's prostitutes continued to be affected by rural immigration to the city, particularly from the High Atlas. Rural women were employed mainly as maids by middle class families. Geographic, economic, and ethnic distances stripped these women of the protection of their families and communities, exposing them to abuse. Most lived in urban slums and constituted the lower classes of Morocco's prostitution sector.⁴³

As noted above, although most Moroccan women are illiterate, the average age of first marriage has been steadily increasing along with women's education levels. The result is a growing group of educated women who live alone or with a female roommate. Because of the limited job opportunities available and the lower salaries paid to women, some of them substitute dependence on parents with dependence on a lover, sometimes involving occasional prostitution. As in other societies, Moroccan women who exchange sex for monetary compensation do not necessarily consider themselves to be prostitutes. The women whom Meriam Cheikh interviewed in 2007 and 2008 did not consider the exchange of money for sex with a regular partner to be a form of prostitution but rather part of a normative heterosexual relationship.⁴⁴

Several studies were conducted in the last few decades about Casablanca's prostitutes. Between 1985 and 1998, Fatima Zahra Azruwil interviewed sixty prostitutes.⁴⁵ Benito interviewed seventy-three prostitutes in Casablanca in the early 2000s, of whom only 40 per cent were born in the city while the rest had migrated there from the countryside (22 per cent of them with their families).⁴⁶ Cheikh interviewed dozens of single women involved in fulltime or occasional prostitution in Casablanca and Tangiers. Those women worked

Naamane-Guessous, *Au-delà de toute pudeur: la sexualité féminine au Maroc* (Casablanca, 1987); Abdessamad Dialmy, *Sexualité et discours au Maroc* (Casablanca, 1988); Abdessamad Dialmy, *Jeunesse, sida, et islam au Maroc: Les comportements sexuels des marocains* (Casablanca, 2000).

43 Nasima Moujoud and Dolorès Pourette, "'Traite' de femmes migrantes, domesticité et prostitution: À propos de migrations interne et externe", *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 45 (2005), pp. 1093–1121; Benito, *La prostitution dans les rues de Casablanca*, p. 59.

44 Meriam Cheikh, "Échanges sexuels, monétarisés, femmes et féminité au Maroc", *Autrepart*, 49 (2009), pp. 173–188, 178; see also Benito, *La prostitution dans les rues de Casablanca*, pp. 39, 55.

45 Her interviewees were 18 to 38 (mostly 20 to 27) years old. Fatima Zahra Azruwil, *al-Bigha' aw al-jasad al-mustabah* (Casablanca, 2001), p. 23.

46 Age range: 17 to 44; mean: 30. Benito, *La prostitution dans les rues de Casablanca*, pp. 59–60, 93.

simultaneously or successively as prostitutes, waitresses, and domestic workers. All had long-term intimate relations with men who financially supported them and they engaged in occasional prostitution with others.⁴⁷

The family histories collected by Azruwil and Benito suggest that early marriage, early divorce, and pregnancy outside of wedlock were common factors that led women to take up prostitution. Social isolation and limited labour opportunities left these women with few options to support themselves. Azruwil traced a history of domestic violence in the women's families and marriages. The stigma attached to a woman losing her virginity outside of marriage, whether voluntary or as a result of rape, left women with no family protection, and some of them fled their homes due to fears of violence and even death at the hands of family members. According to Azruwil, the lack of communal and legal protection for divorced women often drove women to destitution; 60 per cent of the women in her sample were divorced, with two thirds of them supporting at least one child.⁴⁸

The women Benito interviewed started working as prostitutes from 16 to 20 years of age and normally retired by the age of 40 to 44; 53 per cent were divorced, 40 per cent were single, and 5.5 per cent were married. More than half (55 per cent) had children; many of them left their children alone when they went to work, while others relied on the help of family members, neighbours, or colleagues. Those who had children old enough to go to school sent them to school, but 10 per cent of school-age children lived on the streets.⁴⁹

Both Azruwil and Benito point to women's illiteracy as a contributing factor to their entry into prostitution. According to Azruwil, illiteracy rates among women in Morocco are as high as 75 per cent, leaving them with few alternative employment opportunities if they are widowed or divorced.⁵⁰ Some two thirds of the women Benito interviewed were illiterate. Almost half had previously worked in other trades, mostly as domestic workers.⁵¹

In present-day Morocco, most working women have low-income jobs and work in the services sector, at factories (mainly food and textile factories), and as domestic workers. Many of Azruwil's interviewees stated that sexual

47 Cheikh, "Echanges sexuels, monétarisés", p. 173. A 1967 study concluded that 15 per cent of prostitutes left their families by the age of 12; half of them worked as domestic servants and 10 per cent as barmaids before or in addition to prostitution. K. Mesdali-Bennani, "Quelques considerations sur la prostitution au Maroc", *Revue Tunisienne de Sciences Sociales*, 4 (1967), pp. 79–84.

48 Azruwil, *al-Bigha' aw al-jasad al-mustabah*, pp. 32–33, 41–43.

49 Benito, *La prostitution dans les rues de Casablanca*, pp. 59–60, 92–93.

50 Azruwil, *al-Bigha' aw al-jasad al-mustabah*, pp. 32–33.

51 Benito, *La prostitution dans les rues de Casablanca*, p. 67.

harassment was common in their low-income fields of work, and given the lack of labour protection laws they stated it was difficult to resist such advances. They thus resorted to prostitution as a form of labour which at least compensated them for sexual favours. The lack of social services also means that illiterate widows and divorcees have to support themselves with limited labour skills. Girls whose fathers pass away sometimes have to leave school and help support their families.⁵²

As one of the only unskilled jobs available, domestic work exposes women to sexual and economic exploitation. Masima Moujoud and Dolorès Pourette point out that there is a continuity between the employment of slaves in Moroccan households until as late as the 1930s and the sexual exploitation of maids in present-day Morocco. In the slave system, female slaves were both domestic servants and concubines, and this occurred within the scope of an oppressive set of rules which also included basic legal protections. Such a safety net is not available for maids today, some of whom end up in prostitution.⁵³

The social profile of the women described in Cheikh's research is distinctly different. From 1960 to 1999 the average age of first marriage in Morocco has risen from 17 to 27 for women and from 24 to 31 for men, and this has been accompanied by an increase in the numbers of single mothers.⁵⁴ As a result, more women are able to live alone, sometimes cohabiting with other young women. Away from their families, they can host male friends and clients, but they have to depend on men for their rent and clothing and in some cases the support of other family members.⁵⁵

Homosexuality is illegal in Morocco and socially unacceptable. Journalists, and later academicians, brought the existence of male prostitution in present-day Morocco to the attention of the public. Many male prostitutes resorted to prostitution after being rejected by their families because of their sexual orientation. Others do not necessarily define themselves as gay, and like the women in Cheikh's study, they consider prostitution to be a normative way of making a living via sexual relations with both men and women.⁵⁶

52 Azruwil, *al-Bigha' aw al-jasad al-mustabah*, pp. 60–72; Benito, *La prostitution dans les rues de Casablanca*, pp. 56, 65–67.

53 Moujoud and Pourette, “‘Traite’ de femmes migrantes, domesticité et prostitution”, pp. 1093–1121; Benito, *La prostitution dans les rues de Casablanca*, p. 59.

54 Cheikh, “Echanges sexuels, monétarisés”, p. 176.

55 *Ibid.*, pp. 178–182.

56 Amine Boushaba, Oussama Tawil, Latéfa Imane and Hakima Hammich, “Marginalization and Vulnerability: Male Sex work in Morocco”, in Peter Aggleton (ed.), *Men Who Sell Sex: International Perspectives on Male Prostitution and AIDS* (London, 1999), pp. 263–274.

Professional and Personal Life

The fact that prostitution is illegal affects every aspect of prostitutes' social interactions. Azruwil's interviewees said that they had to bribe or endure sexual harassment by members of the police force in order to avoid imprisonment. Periodical police raids are a constant threat. Benito's interviewees also reported being subjected to arbitrary arrests and demands for bribes by the police.⁵⁷

Prostitutes no longer live in licensed houses and they rarely have a pimp or madam. They are in constant contact with taxi drivers who sometimes spend entire nights driving them around the city and often help them find clients for a fee; women who refuse to pay a taxi driver run the risk of being reported to the police.⁵⁸ Aside from taxi drivers, prostitutes rarely use male pimps, and those that did told Azruwil that they had bad experiences with them. Sometimes older prostitutes find clients for younger ones. Prostitutes also sometimes pay younger men to protect them from violent clients, but those men do not interfere with their choice of clients nor do they manage them or receive a fixed percentage of their earnings but only payment for services rendered.⁵⁹ Prostitutes also reported that they are under the constant threat of violence, theft, and rape. Since prostitution is illegal, they cannot take legal recourse against their assailants.⁶⁰

Most of the prostitutes' clients are Moroccan and the rest are usually tourists from the Gulf area or Europe. The latter can offer, besides monetary compensation or gifts, the possibility of travelling to their countries.⁶¹ Some workers supplement their income with street-based prostitution; they find clients on the street and go with them to a hotel, which receives half of the money they get.⁶² Others find their clients in night clubs.⁶³ Most of the women Benito interviewed met their clients at the client's home, others used hotels, and others had sexual relations in the client's car or on the street. 3 per cent of the interviewees were homeless; others reported that they had gone through periods of homelessness when they could not pay their rent.⁶⁴

57 Azruwil, *al-Bigha' aw al-jasad al-mustabah*, p. 74; Benito, *La prostitution dans les rues de Casablanca*, pp. 74–75.

58 Azruwil, *al-Bigha' aw al-jasad al-mustabah*, pp. 75–76.

59 *Ibid.*, pp. 104, 111–112.

60 *Ibid.*, p. 98; Benito, *La prostitution dans les rues de Casablanca*, pp. 72–75, 78–79.

61 Azruwil, *al-Bigha' aw al-jasad al-mustabah*, p. 106; Benito, *La prostitution dans les rues de Casablanca*, pp. 34, 79.

62 Azruwil, *al-Bigha' aw al-jasad al-mustabah*, p. 86.

63 *Ibid.*, 104.

64 Benito, *La prostitution dans les rues de Casablanca*, pp. 61, 79.

Streetwalking, Benito argues, has been changing in recent years in Casablanca. First, police raids have forced women to move, so they constantly have to seek out new areas in which to work. Second, mobile phones have made it possible for prostitutes to be contacted by clients without having to solicit on the street. Some women find entertainment venues to be more difficult because they require verbal interaction and convincing while approaching clients on the street is much more straightforward and certain.⁶⁵ Streetwalkers usually work independently, but sometimes they pay colleagues or male prostitutes to find clients for them.⁶⁶

High-class prostitutes work at high-end hotels, as they are not subject to police raids. Lower-class hotels also receive a certain percentage of prostitutes' fees and in that way some operate as de facto brothels. Other prostitutes use rented apartments. The cost of a prostitute's services vary according to her looks, level of education, and age, and women in their late twenties are thought to be too old to charge high rates. Protected sex is paid less than unprotected sex.⁶⁷ Lower-class prostitutes often live in the outskirts of the city. Many of them are rural immigrants who wear traditional garb, supplementing their low legal income with prostitution.⁶⁸

In the early 2000s, prostitutes in Casablanca were paid 30 to 250 dirhams (roughly 3 to 25 dollars) per encounter. They work four to six days a week and have between two and ten clients per day. The highest rates are charged by women who are 24 to 29 years old because they are already experienced but still young. Women can thus make an average of 3,000 to 4,000 dirhams per month, much more than the 1,000 dirhams made by domestic or other unskilled workers. A fifth of the women Benito interviewed made less than 2,500 dirham per month, which hardly sufficed for their daily needs and the needs of their dependent children or parents. Only 4 per cent made 10,000 dirham per month.⁶⁹

Health

Since the 1980s, the main health concern has been HIV. Moroccan NGOs disseminate information about HIV to the Moroccan public, since this problem

65 *Ibid.*, p. 47.

66 *Ibid.*, p. 77.

67 Azruwil, *al-Bigha' aw al-jasad al-mustabah*, pp. 77–80, 84–85; Benito, *La prostitution dans les rues de Casablanca*, pp. 47–48.

68 Azruwil, *al-Bigha' aw al-jasad al-mustabah*, pp. 111–113; Benito, *La prostitution dans les rues de Casablanca*, p. 68.

69 Benito, *La prostitution dans les rues de Casablanca*, pp. 77–78.

is not officially recognized by the government.⁷⁰ The estimated number of people in Morocco who have HIV is 30,000, or about 0,1 per cent of the population.⁷¹ Little is known, however, about how much the spread of HIV in Morocco can be ascribed to prostitution.⁷²

Most of the women Benito interviewed rarely consulted medical doctors; about 60 per cent consulted a doctor when they felt sick, and 40 per cent just bought a painkiller from a pharmacist when they felt unwell. Likewise they rarely are examined by a gynaecologist, and they only do so when they get pregnant or suffer from an acute medical problem. In any case, most cannot afford to consult a doctor. Socially isolated and legally marginalized, these women cannot rely on family support when they become ill or ask them to look after their children.⁷³ Most (85 per cent) of the women Benito interviewed smoked at least one packet of cigarettes per day, 25 per cent regularly smoked hashish, and 88 per cent drank alcohol, a quarter of them on a daily basis; 20 per cent abused other drugs on a daily basis.⁷⁴

The women Benito interviewed reported that they mainly use contraceptives, and they stated that condoms deter clients. Some of the Moroccan sex workers Benito interviewed told her that they preferred non-vaginal sex because it kept their hymens intact and hence did not threaten their marital prospects.⁷⁵ Many of them reported that they use birth control pills in atypical ways in order to avoid menstrual bleeding; they take the pill continuously for three to six months, or even permanently, so that they won't get their periods and hence can work four weeks per month. As a result, and due to the lack of regular medical supervision, they suffer from complications such as blood circulation disorders. Moreover, 20 per cent of the women interviewed reported that they had undergone an illegal abortion.

Most of the women interviewed by Benito reported that they do not know much about the symptoms of venereal diseases. As a result, they usually are treated quite late. Some believe, for example, that HIV is a European disease, or a homosexual disease, and thus they think it does not pose a threat to them. Those diagnosed with HIV told Benito that they did not tell anyone about it.⁷⁶

70 *Ibid.*, p. 29.

71 <https://www.aidsalliance.org/about/where-we-work/59-association-marocaine-de-solidarite-et-developpement-amsed>; last accessed 7 July 2017.

72 Benito, *La prostitution dans les rues de Casablanca*, p. 90.

73 *Ibid.*, pp. 82–83.

74 *Ibid.*, p. 90.

75 *Ibid.*, p. 47.

76 *Ibid.*, pp. 83–89.

Conclusion

Prostitution in Casablanca underwent several major transformations in the years discussed in this chapter. The first was legal, as it went from strict regulation to criminalization. Regulation affected the geography of prostitution as prostitutes were required to live in the enclosed quarter of Bousbir, or they worked independently and illegally around the city. Bousbir lost its function as a red-light district in the early 1950s, and in the years following independence, criminalization forced prostitutes to work underground in and around Casablanca. It also affected prostitutes' interactions with clients, the police, and others.

A second significant change is demographic. In the protectorate period, most prostitutes were Muslims and the rest were European and Jewish. Both Jews and European settlers left Morocco en masse in the early and mid-1950s, and the prostitutes in independent Morocco are predominantly Muslim. The demography of prostitutes in Casablanca throughout the twentieth century has been affected by migration from the countryside, and those are the people who populate the city's slums and the ranks of lower-class prostitutes. More recent demographic changes in Morocco have led to the proliferation of a class of educated women who marry later in life, and some of those women resort to prostitution.

Prostitution in Morocco shares several characteristics with sold sex in other Islamic societies as well as with other colonial and postcolonial societies. Like in other Islamic societies, the social taboo and the legal ban on prostitution is related to a wider taboo on non-marital sex. Women sometimes resort to prostitution because the loss of virginity makes them ineligible for marriage, or automatically they are labelled as prostitutes. A taboo on sexuality also means that venereal prophylactics are not openly discussed, which is detrimental to prostitutes' sexual health.

As in other colonial societies, prostitution in Casablanca was regulated in the protectorate period. Like the other urban centres discussed in this volume, the city attracted both rural and European migration, and the demand for prostitution increased especially among administrators, soldiers, and factory workers. As with many other postcolonial societies, Morocco had to devise new ways of dealing with prostitution, and abolition was the ultimate choice as it conformed to the regime's Islamic ideology and was seen as an anti-colonial move. Criminalization, however, does not provide solutions for marginalized women who often resort to prostitution in order to survive.

Selling Sex in Istanbul

Mark David Wyers

Introduction

Historically, prostitution has always existed in Istanbul, which was the capital of the Ottoman Empire and is situated on the Bosphorus Strait between the Black Sea and Marmara Sea, but the most salient feature of sold sex there may well be the silence that often surrounds it. Unlike in many other European countries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the issue of prostitution was never incorporated into vocal and influential feminist movements as a symbol of the oppression of women in Turkey. Of course, while there was a burgeoning women's movement in Istanbul in the late Ottoman Empire and early Republic of Turkey (which was founded in 1923), and while there were isolated calls for the abolition of regulated prostitution, women's lobbying power over state policy did not materialize until quite recently and even now it is limited; and, as sex work in Turkey has long been a taboo issue, an NGO dedicated to the support of sex workers was not founded until the mid-2000s. Consequently, since it is largely such organizations that carry out research on prostitution, there is a relative lack of source material available for the researcher for more recent times regarding sold sex. In academia, there has been a similar silence; only in the past five years or so has the subject begun to receive scholarly attention from historians. Additionally, the state committee responsible for overseeing the system of licensed sex work in Istanbul does not share its data for the most part and there is a lack of governmental transparency, particularly under the current conservative ruling party which is self-avowedly dedicated to promoting "family values" over women's (and workers') rights.

Notably, women's movements in Turkey today, still struggling as they are to acquire large-scale legitimacy in the eyes of the public, have also been reluctant to vocally address such a taboo issue, and even within these movements there is some ambivalence arising from traditions of "virtue" which are intimately bound up with conceptualizations of female sexuality. In recent years, this shroud of silence surrounding sex work has begun to fall away, however, even if slightly, and increasing numbers of women's groups and the transgender community, including sex workers themselves, have begun to raise their voices. This was largely made possible by the efforts of two sex workers, Ayşe

Tükrücü and Saliha Ermez, who attempted to run for parliament in 2007; while their bid was unsuccessful, they did help bring sex work into the open as an issue demanding attention.

Taking into consideration these limitations, this overview has drawn upon the material available in the Ottoman archive in Istanbul for the earlier period of Istanbul, and also the growing number of studies which have been conducted utilizing those sources. The Republican archive in Ankara, which contains far less information, was also consulted, as well as the archive of the League of Nations in Geneva, as the League's Body of Experts carried out studies on Istanbul due to the fact that in the early twentieth century, Istanbul had acquired a global reputation, deservedly or not, as a major centre for prostitution. A survey of Turkish newspapers provided further materials regarding the early years of the republic when the regulated system was adopted from its Ottoman predecessor, and recent studies on sex work in contemporary Istanbul were also consulted.

For the sake of clarity, this overview of prostitution in Istanbul is roughly divided into three time periods: 1600–1880, 1881–1950, and 1951–present. The first time period represents the era prior to the time when the Ottoman authorities instituted a system of regulated prostitution, a period best defined as prohibitionist marked by periods of tolerance and suppression. The next time period bridges the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the founding of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, and represents the era in which sold sex in Istanbul was brought under state control via a system of regulation. In the final time period, large-scale internal migration and the opening up of the Turkish economy to global capital had a large impact on the unfolding of prostitution in Istanbul, and in recent years there has been increased agitation for recognition of the rights of sex workers. This shift has gone hand in hand with government attempts to quietly dismantle the state-regulated system of prostitution that has been in place for over a century. This tri-bloc time frame, while artificial in the sense that changes do not happen so abruptly, nonetheless makes it possible to identify and examine moments of continuity and rupture as regards prostitution in Istanbul over roughly the last 400 years.

Disciplining “Vice” in the City of Sultans

Prostitution in Ottoman Istanbul, which was a bustling multi-ethnic, multi-religious city, underwent periods of suppression and toleration, but it was a regular feature of the urban landscape and was carried out by women from all religious backgrounds. Under the Sultanic Code of Law promulgated in 1530, in

the early years of the Ottoman Empire prostitution was subject to what could be called a “sin tax” which required that the “gypsies of Istanbul, Edirne Plovdiv and Sofia pay a fixed tax of one hundred aqches per month for each of their women who perform acts contrary to Sharia [Islamic law].”¹ Sharia strictly forbade sexual relations outside of marriage, so this tax indicated a tacit recognition that these women, as prostitutes, were regularly engaging in acts that ran contrary to theological doctrine and making money from their clients. This practice would soon be discontinued, however;² a code of law for prostitution was introduced stating that such “undesirable” women could be chastised and then banished from a town if they did not correct their behaviour.³ In this way, even though a prostitute would have been culpable as having committed fornication (*zinā*), which under the Ottoman system of *kanun* law entailed the payment of a fine, she was in fact a separate legal subject bound to regulations that differed from those that applied to “virtuous” women who committed adultery; if a woman who was not a prostitute was found guilty of engaging in sexual relations outside the confines of marriage, she was technically subject to a monetary fine, not banished.⁴ This blurring of the status of prostitutes thus granted them a form of recognition, and exempting prostitutes from pecuniary punishment made it possible for the authorities to avoid being placed in the morally awkward position of “taxing” prostitution. This is not to say, however, that the presence of prostitutes in Istanbul was broadly tolerated. As indicated by court records, throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, prostitutes were regularly banished from Istanbul to the interior of Anatolia or islands in the Mediterranean, and imprisonment was

1 Colin Imber, *Ebu's-su'ud: The Islamic Legal Tradition* (Edinburgh, 1997), p. 45.

2 The suppression of prostitution under Suleiman the Magnificent, also known as the Lawgiver, and Selim II coincided with a trend towards religious conservatism in the Porte. Lesley Pierce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (New York, 1993), p. 272.

3 Uriel Heyd, *Studies in Ottoman Law* (Oxford, 1973), p. 130.

4 During the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent, a new system of laws (known as *kanun*) was drawn up which often paralleled Sharia but differed greatly in terms of punishment. While Sharia prescribed corporal punishment for sexual crimes, *kanun* stipulated that fines would be paid based on the gender, class, and religious background of the offender. This was partly a matter of practicality, as Sharia law made it quite difficult to prove the guilt of a suspected offender, requiring numerous witnesses and strict punishments for the crime of bearing false witness. Dror Ze'evi, *Producing Desire: Changing Sexual Discourse in the Ottoman Middle East, 1500–1900* (Berkeley, 2006), pp. 59–60.

also used as a form of discipline, in addition to capital punishment, although executions were quite rare.⁵

The ownership of domestic slaves, which was common practice among the wealthy and elite in Ottoman society,⁶ was also implicated in practices of prostitution in Istanbul. Under Islamic law, men were entitled to an unlimited number of female slaves, with whom they were entitled to have sexual relations, although religious law encouraged slave owners to eventually free them and treat them well; it should be pointed out, however, that women could own female but not male slaves, while men could own both. On wealthy Ottoman estates, female slaves served as domestic servants, maids, and nurses, and also as concubines,⁷ and while sex between a master and female slave was viewed as legitimate, the procuring of slaves for the purpose of prostitution was expressly forbidden by Islamic law.⁸ One such practice was the purchase of a slave at a certain price for the purpose of sexual gratification; the buyer would then sell that slave back to the owner at a slightly lower price, resulting in a profit for the original seller. The Ottoman authorities were aware that slave traders in Istanbul, and other Ottoman cities as well, were engaging in the prostitution of slaves, and guilds were charged with ensuring that it did not occur.⁹

It was illegal to sell Muslim men or women as slaves, and although Ottoman Istanbul was a multi-ethnic, multi-religious city populated by Christians, Jews, and Muslims, it was forbidden for Muslim women to marry or engage in sexual affairs with non-Muslim men. Contrarily, it was permitted for Muslim

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- 5 Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi/Ottoman Archive of the Office of the Prime Minister [hereafter BOA], IE.DH 15/1384; C.ZB, 28/1355; C.ZB, 25/1236; C.ZB, 60/2995; C.ZB, 11/502; C.ZB, 41/2037; C.ZB, 20/995; MVL, 679/88; DH.EUM.ADL, 12/31; Fariba Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment in Istanbul, 1700–1800* (Berkeley, 2010), p. 108; Fikret Yılmaz, “Zina ve fuhuş arasında kalanlar: Fahişe, subaşıya karşı”, *Toplumsal Tarih*, 220 (2012), pp. 20–29, 23.
 - 6 Ehud Toledano, “Late Ottoman Concepts of Slavery, 1830–1880”, *Poetics Today*, 14 (1993), pp. 477–506, 479.
 - 7 Female slaves could, through marriage, be manumitted, whereupon they could be integrated into society with all the rights of free individuals; male slaves were also often manumitted. In the sixteenth century, most slaves were from Russia and eastern Europe. Yvonne J. Seng, “Fugitives and Factotums: Slaves in Early Sixteenth-Century Istanbul”, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 39 (1996), pp. 136–169, 145–157.
 - 8 Various royal edicts were issued prohibiting this practice, particularly in relation to its pervasiveness in Ottoman caravanserais. Heyd, *Studies in Ottoman Law*, p. 126.
 - 9 Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment*, pp. 96–97. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Ottoman government reluctantly became a signatory to international treaties banning the slave trade, although the trade persisted, albeit on a diminished scale, in Istanbul into the early twentieth century. Toledano, “Late Ottoman Concepts of Slavery”, p. 485.

men to marry non-Muslim women. Nonetheless, it was well-known that Muslim women were involved in prostitution in pre-regulatory Ottoman Istanbul, often working out of their homes and at night in public spaces such as parks and cemeteries,¹⁰ although efforts were made to ensure that confessional lines were not crossed. While local religious (Muslim, Christian and Jewish) and civil authorities were entrusted with overseeing the morality of Istanbul's neighbourhoods, archival evidence indicates that local residents of different religious backgrounds sometimes came together to petition authorities about the presence of prostitutes, particularly when they had crossed confessional lines with their clients.¹¹ It should be pointed out that temporary marriage (*nikah mut'ah*, a temporary contract of marriage which can last from a few minutes to years) was generally not practised in Ottoman territories, as Sunni Muslims believe it was abolished in the early years of Islam. In Shi'a Islamic belief, however, it is permitted, and has been used in sold sex exchanges in Shi'a areas such as Iran, where it is referred to as *sigheh* and can be used to "legitimize" paid sexual encounters within the sanctity of marriage.

Although comprehensive education for girls did not exist until the early twentieth century, at which time it was still accessible only for the elites, some Muslim and non-Muslim women were involved in work and business in early modern Istanbul, but on a rather small scale, so it is likely that selling sex was one of the only options for lower-class women in times of financial duress. The Ottoman craft guilds were closed to women for the most part, but lower- and middle-class women did engage to some extent in cottage industries while wealthier women made investments and were involved in real estate transactions.¹² However, because court records concerning prostitutes in this period often do not provide much personal information about the women themselves, it is difficult to know if and how they were employed prior to taking up sex work. The scant evidence available suggests that widows, perhaps for lack of another source of income, may have turned to prostitution, and archival documentation indicates that the streetwalkers of Istanbul in the eighteenth century were often homeless women, most likely migrants from rural areas.¹³

10 Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment*, pp. 91–92. In Ottoman Istanbul, cemeteries were public spaces where people would go to spend time, as they were (and are) filled with trees; also, unlike in the Christian tradition, cemeteries were not necessarily seen as "spooky" places.

11 *Ibid.*, pp. 90–94.

12 Fariba Zarinebaf-Shahr, "The Role of Women in the Urban Economy of Istanbul", *International Labor and Working-class History*, 60 (2001), pp. 141–152, 142.

13 Ahmet Refik Altınay, *Onuncu asr-ı hicride İstanbul hayatı* (Ankara, 1987), p. 57; Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment*, p. 91.

The early eighteenth century was a tumultuous period in the Ottoman Empire, marked by extensive banditry in Anatolia and tax farming practices which forced peasants off the land, and large numbers of the dispossessed began migrating to cities. The extent of urban migration reached such an alarming rate that imperial orders were issued which forbade men and women, whether married or not, from moving to the capital, and women had to obtain permission to travel to Istanbul for business or to see relatives.¹⁴ In addition, single male labourers and the unemployed were rounded up every few years and banished from the city, but despite these precautions, the population of Istanbul continued to grow throughout the eighteenth century.¹⁵

As the end of the eighteenth century drew to a close, war broke out between the Ottoman Empire and Russia and Austria, resulting in large numbers of Ottoman troops and naval officers being stationed in Istanbul. Aware that this was leading to an increase in prostitution, authorities conducted raids and imprisoned women who were suspected prostitutes. Similarly, houses for single male labourers and sailors located in the district of Üsküdar, on the Anatolian shores of Istanbul, were occasionally raided in 1790, resulting in the imprisonment of women caught engaging in sold sex. It was not only military personnel and workers, however, who were known clients of female prostitutes; archival evidence indicates that students at Islamic theological schools in Istanbul also brought prostitutes to their residences.¹⁶ In the later years of the eighteenth century, authorities began pinning the blame for the repeated Ottoman losses to the Russians on the moral degradation of society, and the spread of prostitution in the capital city was seen as one aspect of this. Efforts were made to eradicate prostitution in Istanbul, and royal edicts were issued which sought to restrict the public presence of women and to strictly regulate the clothing they wore in public.¹⁷ This wariness concerning the presence of women in urban areas coincided with economic strains as well; inflation levels had increased as the result of debasements of the currency, leading to a sharp spike in prices and widespread poverty.¹⁸

14 Zarinebaf-Shahr, "The Role of Women", p. 143.

15 Mehmet Demirtaş, "XVIII. yüzyılda İstanbul'a göçü önlemek için alınan tedbirler ve görülen aksamalar", *Ekev Akademi Dergisi*, 33 (2007), pp. 195–214, 208.

16 Osman Köse, "XVIII. yüzyıl sonları Rus ve Avusturya savaşları esnasında Osmanlı devletinde bir uygulama: İstanbul'da içki ve fuhuş yasağı", *Turkish Studies*, 2 (2007), pp. 104–123, 112–113.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 110. Aydın Yetkin, "11. meşrutiyet dönemi'nde toplumsal ahlâk bunalımı: Fuhuş meselesi", *Tarihin Peşinde*, 6 (2011), pp. 21–54, 24.

18 Süleyman Özmucur and Şevket Pamuk, "Real Wages and the Standard of Living in the Ottoman Empire, 1489–1914", *Journal of Economic History*, 62 (2002), pp. 293–321, 300.

Prostitution in early modern Istanbul took numerous forms. Some Muslim women working alone solicited in public areas at night; women also worked together, bringing clients (often janissaries and sailors) to the rooms they rented.¹⁹ Not all women worked independently, however, and both Muslim and non-Muslim men and women were involved in organizing prostitution. These included women working independently as madams, as well as imams and non-Muslim tavern owners working as pimps. The punishment for procuring often took the form of banishment for both women and Muslim religious figures.²⁰

During periods of moral fervour, persecution of sold sex did result in the occasional execution of prostitutes.²¹ In the tumultuous years of the late eighteenth century, it was decided that merely banishing prostitutes would not put an end to the practice in Istanbul, and the authorities opted to take more drastic measures. Five well-known prostitutes were drowned, and the bodies of three of them were hung up at different locations in the city as a warning. Other known prostitutes were then forced to repent, and many of them were banished from the city. This draconian approach achieved limited results, however, and despite continued raids and banishment, women continued to clandestinely engage in sold sex.²² Occasionally prostitutes were imprisoned, particularly during religious holidays; records indicate that Muslim prostitutes were sometimes arrested and placed under the supervision of local imams.²³

While foundations to support the poor existed in early modern and modern Ottoman Istanbul,²⁴ an organized system of charitable societies providing support for the “rehabilitation” of women who sold sex was never founded, nor does it seem that female prostitutes in Istanbul were ever organized as a guild. It should be noted, however, that not only women engaged in prostitution in early modern Istanbul; the taverns owned by non-Muslim Ottoman citizens, and likely coffee shops as well, were also fronts for the prostitution of young men.²⁵

19 Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment*, pp. 90–91.

20 *Ibid.*, pp. 98–101.

21 In 1602, three prostitutes were caught soliciting; two of them were punished by branding of the genitals and the third was drowned in the Bosphorus. Yetkin, “Rus ve Avusturya savařları”, p. 25.

22 Köse, “Yüzyıl sonları”, pp. 115–116.

23 Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment*, p. 110.

24 Relli Shechter, “Modern Welfare in the Early-modern Ottoman Economy: A Historiographic Overview with Many Questions”, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 48 (2005), pp. 253–276, 263.

25 Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment*, pp. 100–101; Ralph S. Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeehouses: The Origins of a Social Beverage in the Medieval Near East* (Seattle, 1988), p. 109.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Istanbul continued to grow, and so did the city's prostitution "problem". In 1859 the Grand Vizier issued a mandate stipulating prison terms of forty-eight hours to three months or banishment from three to six months for individuals caught engaging in prostitution.²⁶ Despite this effort, prostitution continued to proliferate, and the municipality began considering other options to limit the proliferation of sold sex in the streets of Istanbul.

Regulation and the "Sick Man of Europe"

The Ottoman nineteenth century witnessed pervasive transformations as the state sought to reform its military, centralize state authority, and transform social structures. These reforms were aimed at maintaining the waning integrity of the empire, precipitated by Ottoman military losses in the Balkans and Crimea, coupled with internal disarray and separatist nationalist movements. The rapid expansion of state medical institutions was part of modernizing efforts, leading to the founding of numerous hospitals throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.²⁷ In Istanbul, increased interaction between Ottoman and European physicians fuelled the development of hospitals and medical facilities and the dissemination of medical practices based on western models in Ottoman territories, including the regulated system of prostitution. In 1878 the first move towards initiating regulation in Istanbul took place under the guidance of non-Muslim municipal authorities in a rather Europeanized quarter of the city,²⁸ and in 1880, after an experimental phase, the plan was given full royal approval and the authorities began licensing brothels.²⁹

The law did not provide a clear definition of prostitutes, but when it was re-drafted in 1915, a definition was included: "A prostitute is a woman who offers herself for the pleasure of others and has relations with numerous men for the purpose of monetary profit."³⁰ Until 1914, however, Muslim women could

26 Yetkin, "Rus ve Avusturya savaşları", p. 26.

27 İbrahim Kalkan, "Medicine and Politics in the Late Ottoman Empire (1876–1909)" (Unpublished M.A., Boğaziçi University, 2004), p. 15.

28 Osman Nuri Ergin, Nuri, *Mecelle-i umur-i belediye: birinci cilt, tarih-i teşkilat-ı belediye: ikinci bölüm* (Istanbul, 1995), p. 3300.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 3297.

30 *Emraz-ı zühreviyenin men-i sirayetine dair neşr olunan nizamnameye müteallik talimatname* (Istanbul, 1915), p. 4.

not be registered as prostitutes,³¹ and Muslim authorities took little interest in the issue when Christian and Jewish women took up the practice.³² Investigations carried out during and after World War I indicated that large numbers of Muslim women were in fact clandestinely engaging in prostitution, at times even perhaps to a greater extent than their Christian and Jewish counterparts. The presence of over 50,000 Entente troops in Istanbul during the occupation of the city³³ from 1918 to 1923 contributed to the proliferation of sold sex, and a red-light district was opened on the Anatolian side “to prevent foreign soldiers from harassing virtuous women.”³⁴ The British, French, Italian, and American troops stationed in Istanbul were barred from brothels where Muslim women worked, but there were over fifty bars in which over 200 young women, both registered and unregistered prostitutes, were employed, and these were often frequented by Entente soldiers. It was reported that the young women working in these bars often ended up being registered.³⁵ Although the authorities sought to segregate female Muslim prostitutes from non-Muslim men, it appears that women themselves were blurring confessional lines. An editorial dating from 1923 in an Ottoman daily newspaper noted that some Greek prostitutes in Istanbul were donning the veil and posing as Muslim prostitutes because this allowed them to charge higher prices, purportedly because Muslim women were seen as being more “exotic” due to the taboo on Muslim women entering into sexual relations with men of other religious backgrounds.³⁶

This segregation of prostitutes along religious lines was reflected in the moral geographies of the city; registered Christian and Jewish prostitutes worked on the European side of Istanbul, while Muslim women worked in the licensed brothels of the Anatolian districts of the city, which were closed to non-Muslim men and were opened after 1914, when Muslim prostitutes started being registered. Of course, women working clandestinely transgressed these geographies, frustrating municipal efforts to create clearly delineated “confessional” districts of vice. State records indicate that prior to the outbreak of

31 İnci Hot, “Ülkemizde frengi hastalığı ile mücadele”, *Tıp Etiği, Hukuk, Tarihi Dergisi*, 12 (2004), pp. 36–43, 37.

32 Rifat Bali, *The Jews and Prostitution in Constantinople: 1854–1922* (Istanbul, 2008), p. 78.

33 Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London, 1997), p. 145.

34 Mark D. Wyers, *“Wicked” Istanbul: The Regulation of Prostitution in the Early Turkish Republic* (Istanbul, 2012), p. 113.

35 Charles Riggs, “Adult Delinquency”, in C.R. Johnson (ed.), *Constantinople Today or the Pathfinder Survey of Constantinople: A Study in Oriental Social Life* (Istanbul, 1922), pp. 343–370, 362–363.

36 Sadık Albayrak, *Meşrutiyet İstanbul’unda kadın ve sosyal değişim* (Istanbul, 2002), p. 422.

war, police took Muslim women into custody when they were caught engaging in sold sex alongside non-Muslim women, particularly in the predominantly Christian and Jewish district of Beyoğlu,³⁷ and non-Muslim women were arraigned for employing Muslim women in their brothels.³⁸ During these years, the CUP government had also issued a regulation concerning the operations of hospitals in Istanbul which stipulated that the Beyoğlu Women's Hospital was to be reserved for the medical treatment of non-Muslim prostitutes and Muslim prostitutes were to be taken to the Haseki Women's Hospital.³⁹

At this point, it will be helpful to briefly discuss how the Capitulations impacted the Ottoman government's ability to police prostitution.⁴⁰ Under the Capitulations, foreign citizens were not subject to Ottoman laws on prostitution and the local police were powerless to close down or regulate brothels owned by foreigners; also, they did not have the authority to arrest or prosecute individuals involved in helping women secure work as prostitutes.⁴¹ As an example of this, in 1876 the Ottoman authorities arrested a number of foreign women for prostitution and intended to deport them back to their home countries by ship. The foreign consuls intervened and forced the Ottoman authorities to release the women.⁴² By the early twentieth century, Istanbul had become stigmatized as a centre for the "traffic in women", and only with the outbreak of World War I was the Ottoman government able to abolish the Capitulations and take more stringent measures in the policing of sold sex.

Numerous investigations were carried out by foreign organizations concerning the "international traffic in white women" in Istanbul. These efforts

37 BOA, ZB, 621/78.

38 BOA, DH.EUM.ADL, 74/6.

39 Nuri Ergin, *Mecelle-i umur-i belediye*, pp. 3469–3470. The CUP (Committee of Union and Progress) began as a secret society in the late nineteenth century and later was transformed into a liberal reform movement and political party that called for democratization and reform in the Ottoman Empire; because of their calls for a constitutional form of rule, members were persecuted by the imperial government. By 1913, the CUP had consolidated its power and led the Ottoman Empire into World War I on the side of the Germans.

40 The Capitulations were a series of trade agreements initially instated as a means of encouraging trade in the Empire but which eventually resulted in western governments having the power to limit Ottoman authority on its own territory.

41 Malte Fuhrmann, "'Western Perversions' at the Threshold of Felicity: The European Prostitutes of Galata-Pera, 1870–1915", *History and Anthropology*, 21 (2010), pp. 159–172; Bali, *The Jews and Prostitution*, p. 31; Müge Özbek, "The Regulation of Prostitution in Beyoğlu, 1875–1915", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 46 (2010), pp. 555–568, 567.

42 Fuhrmann, "Western Perversions", p. 160.

were led by leading feminists such as Bertha Pappenheim and Eugene Simon, as well as such organizations as the Association for the Protection of Young Women and the Jewish Hilfsverein and B'nai B'rith societies.⁴³ It was argued that by the early twentieth century “trafficking” to Istanbul served local demand as well as transport to the brothels in Latin America, northern Egypt, and further east. As a major port city linking the Mediterranean and Black Sea, Istanbul was a crucial transit point for ship traffic coming from southern Russia (particularly Odessa), Romania, and Bulgaria onwards to points south and west. The claim was made that it was primarily men who were involved in this transport ring but that women took part as well, German Jews from Galicia and Bukovia, areas from which many Jewish women migrated to Istanbul, along with women from southern Hungary.⁴⁴ While there was a significant number of Ashkenazi Jews, often migrants and refugees from eastern Europe, who ran brothels in Istanbul, they were by no means the majority, and many people involved in prostitution were in fact Ottoman citizens, Muslim or otherwise.⁴⁵

Beginning in 1910, the Ottoman authorities, aware that increasing numbers of Muslim women had begun engaging in prostitution in Istanbul for lack of another source of income, attempted to launch initiatives aimed at providing destitute (Muslim) women with employment.⁴⁶ These efforts, however, sought to prevent Muslim women from taking up prostitution rather than providing assistance for those who had “fallen”, as the common perception was that their “virtue” had already been “corrupted”.⁴⁷ While debates ensued about labour rights for Muslim women, it was actually the fact that Muslim women were engaging in prostitution that sparked initiatives to incorporate (“virtuous”) Muslim women into the workforce. There was not an organized movement to push for labour equality, however, so women’s wages remained far below those of men, often 50 per cent less,⁴⁸ holding back women’s socio-economic

43 Bali, *The Jews and Prostitution*, p. 32.

44 Fuhrmann, “Western Perversions”, p. 160.

45 Bali, *The Jews and Prostitution*, pp. 19–23.

46 Kemal Yakut and Aydın Yetkin, “II. meşrutiyet döneminde toplumsal ahlâk bunalımı: fuhuş meselesi”, *Kebikeç*, 31 (2011), pp. 275–307, 284; Yavuz S. Karakışla, “Arşivden bir belge: Askeri dikimevlerinde çalıştırılan Müslüman fahişeler”, *Toplumsal Tarih*, 112 (2003), pp. 98–101, 99.

47 On 14 August 1916, a Society for the Employment of Ottoman Muslim Women was founded. Yavuz S. Karakışla, *Women, War and Work in the Ottoman Empire: Society for the Employment of Ottoman Muslim Women, 1916–1923* (Istanbul, 2005), pp. 55, 148.

48 Ahmet Makal, “Türkiye’de erken Cumhuriyet döneminde kadın emeği”, *Çalışma ve Toplum*, 2 (2010), pp. 13–39, 20–21.

emancipation. Even by 1920, some occupations were closed to women; to cite an example, it was forbidden for Muslim women to work on stage as actors, as this profession was deemed “unfit” for “honourable” women.⁴⁹ A survey conducted in the same year in Istanbul indicated that widowed Muslims in Istanbul were, in contrast with their non-Muslim (Greek, Armenian, and Jewish) counterparts, less educated, had the lowest earnings, and were the least healthy.⁵⁰

Large numbers of Muslim refugees flooded Istanbul in the wake of Ottoman losses in the Balkans in the early twentieth century, and the government was financially unable to settle all of them elsewhere. As a result, large numbers of Muslim women were left without a means of income; in twelve provinces of the empire, 30 per cent of the female population was comprised of widows.⁵¹ Displacement due to war, as well as migrations, deportations, and the persecution of Greeks and Armenians in Anatolia led to destitution among non-Muslim subjects in the capital as well.⁵² Furthermore, tens of thousands of White Russian refugees also settled in the city in 1920.⁵³ Opportunities for work, however, were few and far between.

Industrialization in Istanbul was minimal compared with other cities in western Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and small-scale workshops run by men tended to dominate.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, newly emergent industries did create opportunities for women to work, but it was primarily non-Muslim women who began to participate in the economy via factory labour⁵⁵ due to the fact that such employment was often seen as being

49 İlbeyi Özer, “Mütareke ve işgal yıllarında Osmanlı devletinde görülen sosyal çöküntü ve toplumsal yaşam”, *Osmanlı Tarih Araştırma ve Uygulama Dergisi*, 14 (2003), pp. 247–271, 255.

50 Mabelle C. Phillips, “Widowhood: A Study of Dependency due to War”, in C.R. Johnson (ed.), *Constantinople Today or the Pathfinder Survey of Constantinople: A Study in Oriental Social Life* (Istanbul, 1922), pp. 343–370, 313.

51 Zürcher, *Turkey*, p. 171.

52 Avigdor Levy, “The Siege of Edirne (1912–1913) as Seen by a Jewish Eyewitness: Social, Political and Cultural Perspectives”, in Avigdor Levy (ed.), *Jews, Turks and Ottomans: A Shared History, Fifteenth through the Twentieth Century* (New York, 2002), pp. 174–181.

53 Özer, “Mütareke ve işgal yıllarında”, p. 251.

54 Cengiz Kirli, “A Profile of the Labor Force in Early Nineteenth Century Istanbul”, *International Labor and Working-class History*, 60 (2001), pp. 125–140, 127–128.

55 Ahmet Makal, “Türkiye’de erken Cumhuriyet döneminde kadın emeği”, pp. 17–18; Donald Quataert, “Labor History and the Ottoman Empire, 1700–1922”, *International Labor and Working-class History*, 60 (2001), pp. 93–109, 104; Edward C. Clark, “The Ottoman Industrial Revolution”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 5 (1974), pp. 65–76, 70.

below the status of Muslim women. During the war, however, a small number of Muslim women did take up employment in the fabric industry and in sewing houses, the internal spaces of which were often segregated by gender,⁵⁶ but large swathes of the female population were left without recourse to avenues of work that offered competitive wages.

The Founding of the Republic and Perpetuation of Licensed Prostitution

Studies carried out in 1919/1920 in Istanbul claimed that there were approximately 2,000 registered prostitutes in the city, 60 per cent of whom were non-Muslim (Greek, Jewish, and Armenian) and 40 per cent Muslim,⁵⁷ out of a total population of around one million.⁵⁸ There was also a small number of non-Ottoman citizens employed in the state-licensed brothels, the majority of whom were Russian (forty-three women in total), and a few German, Italian, Romanian, Bulgarian, French, and Polish women.⁵⁹ Over time, after the founding of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, the number of Muslim women employed as registered prostitutes increased, and there was a corresponding decrease in the number of non-Muslim registered women. This trend towards a “Muslim-Turkification” of sold sex in Istanbul in the 1920s and ‘30s paralleled large-scale efforts undertaken to “Turkify” the nation. In the late Ottoman and early republican eras, the Greek, Armenian, and Jewish populations of Istanbul declined sharply as the result of nationalist policies aiming for the homogenization of Turkish society; the system of registered prostitution remained in place, however, and, over time, Muslim women became the majority in the state-licensed brothels. Under pressure from organizations such as the League of Nations, which was undertaking efforts to curtail the “international traffic” in women, the number of foreign women employed in the licensed brothels in Istanbul also decreased as the government sought to reassure the international community that Turkey was not a haven for “traffickers” and was not employing foreigners in state-sanctioned brothels, which the League had identified as

56 Gülhan Balsoy, “Gendering Ottoman Labor History: The Cibali Régie Factory in the Early Twentieth Century”, *International Review of Social History*, 54 (2009), pp. 45–68, 65.

57 Riggs, “Adult Delinquency”, p. 358; Mustafa Galip, *Fahişeler hayatı ve redaet-i ahlâkiye* (Istanbul, 1920), p. 74.

58 Hatice Bayartan, “Geçmişten günümüze İstanbul’da Nüfus”, *Coğrafya Dergisi*, 11 (2003), p. 5–20, 10.

59 Riggs, “Adult Delinquency”, p. 367.

a “leading culprit” in the “trafficking of women”.⁶⁰ By the 1930s, Turkish state law mandated that non-citizens could not be employed as registered prostitutes in Turkey, and henceforth foreign women caught engaging in sold sex were deported, just as they are today.

While there are no statistics available concerning the education levels of women engaged in prostitution in late Ottoman and early republican Istanbul, it is possible to infer that few had attended school; while education for girls in the Ottoman Empire became increasingly available from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, this was largely reserved for the children of the wealthy elite. Although more women received at least a primary education after the founding of the republic, by 1935 the national average for women’s literacy was still below 10 per cent,⁶¹ and of the nearly 40,000 villages in Turkey, only about 5,000 had schools.⁶²

In 1925, investigators for the League of Nations visited Istanbul and interviewed local officials, prostitutes, and brothel owners as part of a global study on the trafficking in women. It was reported that women were forcibly registered as prostitutes if the police caught them three times in the act of trying to sell sex and that most women working in licensed brothels were overseen by a pimp or madam. It was also noted that many of the women were locked in a debtor system, in which a debtor would “loan” money to prostitutes at extraordinarily high interest rates, making it difficult for the women to pay off their debts. The report stated that although Istanbul was not a major destination for prostitutes, it was a transit point for women travelling from Romania and Poland to colonial Egypt and Syria, as well as South and Central America. In 1925, it was reported that there were 241 licensed houses in Istanbul, the majority of which were owned by Turkish citizens; thirty-seven of the houses were reserved solely for Muslim women (and hence solely for Muslim men).⁶³

60 It should also be noted that in the first half of the twentieth century, it seems that the number of foreigners residing in Turkey decreased steadily, from 0.6 in 1927 to 0.2 per cent in 1945. W.C. Brice, “The Population of Turkey in 1950”, *Geographical Journal*, 120 (1954), pp. 347–352, 350.

61 Bruce Rankin and Işık Aytaç, “Gender Inequality in Schooling: The Case of Turkey”, *Sociology of Education*, 79 (2006), pp. 25–43, 29; Fevziye Sayılan and Ahmet Yıldız, “The Historical and Political Context of Adult Literacy in Turkey”, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 28 (2009), pp. 735–749, 743; Jenny White, “State Feminism, Modernization, and the Turkish Republican Woman”, *NWSA Journal*, 15 (2003), pp. 145–159, 150.

62 Zürcher, *Turkey*, p. 202.

63 League of Nations [hereafter LON], *Report of the Special Body of Experts on the Traffic in Women and Children, Part II* (Geneva, 1927), pp. 166–172. This report contains only

As indicated in a study carried out by a Turkish journalist in 1928, the number of registered houses had decreased to 110, and the segregation of prostitutes by religious affiliation had begun to fall away. Women working in higher-class houses did not solicit on the street, but less privileged women would approach clients outside and bring them to their rented rooms. State law required that owners of brothels be female and stipulated that women could voluntarily apply to be registered or be forcibly registered by the police if repeatedly caught engaging in prostitution. The study noted that aside from becoming the owner of a brothel, the future prospects for prostitutes were bleak, and that most registered women, since they did not have the right to collect retirement, eventually became beggars. It was reported that the majority of women employed in state-licensed houses were from the lower classes, having worked as waitresses or servants, or had been previously convicted of petty crimes. Also, the majority of women in the study were single mothers whose fathers had passed away, and most of them had a male “friend” who lived off her earnings.⁶⁴

In the early years of the republic, violence committed by clients against prostitutes occurred regularly, often taking place in brothels; it should also be noted, however, that there were reports of violence perpetrated by prostitutes against their clients as well.⁶⁵ A report issued by the League of Nations in 1938 provided some details about the personal lives of women employed at state-sanctioned brothels; while most of the data concerned women in Ankara, it is likely that the registered women in Istanbul had similar backgrounds. The report stated that the majority of women had not attended school, had never been employed or had worked as domestic servants, and had begun engaging in prostitution under the age of 23. Also, the report noted that all of the registered women in Istanbul had contracted a venereal disease within six years of working, and that all of the women who had married were divorced.⁶⁶

As in early modern Istanbul, it appears that there were virtually no organizations seeking to “rehabilitate” or provide services for prostitutes in the late Ottoman and early republican eras, and as discussed above, state-led efforts to provide employment for women were almost exclusively off-limits to women

abstracts of the information gathered by the undercover investigators during the course of their research.

64 “İstanbul’da fuhuş meselesi: Mecmuamızın içtimai tetkiki”, *Resimli Ay*, March 1928, p. 22. A first-hand account given in 1931 by a registered sex worker in Istanbul similarly indicated that prostitutes often had such a “male companion.” Wyers, *Wicked Istanbul*, pp. 117–118.

65 Wyers, *Wicked Istanbul*, pp. 163–166.

66 LON, *Prostitutes: Their Early Lives* (Geneva, 1938), pp. 112–114.

who had previously engaged in prostitution.⁶⁷ In 1921, a Prostitution Prevention Society was founded under the guidance of the foreign ambassadors in Istanbul, but it does not appear to have had a lasting existence or impact on sold sex in Istanbul.⁶⁸ A handful of Turkish feminists did protest the state regulation of brothels in newspaper columns,⁶⁹ and the Turkish Women's League, which was created in 1923 after the newly founded Turkish government refused permission for the opening of a women's political party, asserted that one of its founding tenets was the abolition of the regulated system. Under government pressure, however, the League's efforts would remain limited to social aid projects, and in 1935 the Turkish Women's League was shut down by the government following the hosting of the annual conference of the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship, which was held in Istanbul. At the conference, western representatives of the alliance, aware that Turkey maintained a system of licensed prostitution, decried the regulated brothel system, stating that it was the root cause of "trafficking in women."⁷⁰

While legislation concerning women in the early years of the republic promoted their increased public presence by encouraging their participation in the labour force, this did not entail increased personal freedoms for women in Turkey in the sense of sexual liberation; strict Islamic sexual mores, with a focus on women's "sexual purity" have remained strong. Additionally, while there was an active albeit rather small women's movement in Istanbul in the early years of the republic, it did not have the power to lobby the government; although women were granted municipal suffrage in 1930 and parliamentary suffrage in 1934, this was the result of "state feminism" and not agitation on behalf of women themselves. Likewise, government legislation on prostitution was drafted solely by male politicians; the Penal Code implemented in 1926

67 In 1898, a shelter was opened in Istanbul for poor female teachers and servants to prevent them from falling into a life of prostitution. Fuhrmann, "Western Perversions", p. 162. It appears that in 1911, there was a hospice for the homeless which accepted sex workers, but the details of its operations or scale of work are not clear. Bali, *The Jews and Prostitution*, p. 45.

68 *Ibid.*, p. 57.

69 Ada Holland Shissler, "'If You Ask Me': Sabiha Sertel's Advice Column, Gender Equity, and Social Engineering in the Early Turkish Republic", *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 3 (2007), pp. 1–30.; *idem*, "Womanhood is not for Sale: Sabiha Zekeriya Sertel against Prostitution and for Women's Employment", *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 4 (2008), pp. 12–30.

70 Yeşim Zihnioglu, *Kadınsız inkılap: Nezihe Muhiddin, kadınlar halk fırkası, kadın birliği* (Istanbul, 2003), p. 258.

diminished the rights of prostitutes on the basis that they were “dishonourable”, and the crimes of rape and kidnapping could be punished 60 per cent less severely if committed against a prostitute.⁷¹ This article was repealed in 1990 after successful lobbying by women’s groups.

In 1929, the Ministry of the Interior successfully pushed legislation to eventually eliminate the regulated system. After a three-year experiment with abolition, during which time clandestine prostitution in Istanbul had reportedly proliferated and the economy deteriorated as the result of the global economic depression,⁷² the government in Ankara argued that public health was under threat because of the spread of venereal diseases and opted to reinstate the system, which remains in place to the present day.⁷³ In 1950, under pressure from the abolitionist World Health Organization, the government once again considered eliminating the licensed system, but in the end decided that public hygiene took precedence, and it was maintained.⁷⁴

The Other Side of the Turkish “Economic Miracle”

Large-scale internal migration to the urban centres of Turkey, including Istanbul, began in earnest in the 1950s as the result of population growth, the mechanization of agriculture, the development of highways, and industrialization (prompted by an emphasis on ISI policies).⁷⁵ However, migration outpaced job creation, and large numbers of migrants, including women, were forced to take up menial labour positions in cities,⁷⁶ and some turned to prostitution. By the 1980s, liberal economic policies had led to new patterns of mass consumption in Turkish society, despite the fact that economic prosperity had developed in a lopsided manner; while some profited from the liberalized economy and flaunted their wealth in unprecedented ways, others suffered, as real

71 Aslı Zengin, *İktidarın mahremiyeti: İstanbul’da hayat kadınları, seks işçiliği ve şiddet* (Istanbul, 2011), p. 102.

72 Turkey, due to its heavily agricultural economy, was severely impacted by the depression. Zürcher, *Turkey*, p. 205.

73 Wyers, *Wicked Istanbul*, pp. 119–142.

74 “Genelevlerin kapatılması meselesi”, *Milliyet*, 25 August 1950; “Genelevler kapatılıyor”, *Milliyet*, 16 October 1950; “Genelevlerin kapatılması”, *Milliyet*, 19 October 1950; “Beyaz kadın ticaret”, *Milliyet*, 2 February 1954.

75 Burak Gürel, “Agrarian Change and Labour Supply in Turkey, 1950–1980”, *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 11 (2011), pp. 195–219, 204.

76 Zürcher, *Turkey*, p. 284.

purchasing power had dropped between 40–60 per cent from 1979 to 1989.⁷⁷ Reflecting these economic and social trends, reports in Turkish newspapers in the 1980s noted that increasing numbers of Turkish women had begun working as registered and clandestine prostitutes. In 1980 there were roughly 11,000 registered women in Turkey, and by 1985 that number had risen to 15,000.⁷⁸ The number of licensed brothels in Turkey also increased, from 405 in 1980 to 800 in 1988.⁷⁹ The collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1989–91 also contributed to an increase in sold sex in Istanbul as impoverished women took up sex work. By 1990, Ukrainian women represented the largest group of foreign women engaging in prostitution in Istanbul;⁸⁰ in a study conducted in 2005, the claim was made that Turkey was a major transit point and destination for women looking for sex work, in order of frequency from Moldova, Ukraine, Russia, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Uzbekistan, and Romania.⁸¹

Today, sex work is carried out in two ways in Istanbul: on a very small scale, legally in the red-light district, and illegally otherwise. By law, all sex workers employed in the licensed houses must be Turkish citizens and female by birth or by gender reassignment surgery and been issued a pink (female) identity card. The state-licensed brothels are located on a single street in the district of Beyoğlu, the main entertainment hub of the city. The street is accessible by a single gate manned by a police officer, and the houses within are not visible to passers-by. Aside from registered sex workers, women are not allowed to enter the street, and men must show a valid ID indicating that they are over the age of 18 before they can pass through the gate; non-Turkish citizens who don't have a residence permit in Turkey are not allowed to enter. Presently, there are only around 130 women working in the district,⁸² and this number will continue to go down as the police launch occasional raids on the brothels for supposed infractions of the law; women are either forced to leave as their houses are closed down or leave voluntarily as they grow older and can no

77 *Ibid.*, p. 316.

78 “Geçim sıkıntısı kadın tellallarının işini kolaylaştırıyor”, *Milliyet*, 19 September 1985.

79 “‘Vesikalı yar’ bolluğu”, *Milliyet*, 31 August 1988.

80 Donna M. Hughes, “The ‘Natasha’ Trade: The Transnational Shadow Market of Trafficking in Women (1990)”, available at: http://www.prostitutionresearch.com/pdfs/natasha_trade.pdf; last accessed 10 July 2017.

81 Önder Karakuş and Edmund F. McGarrell, “Association between Migrant Prostitution, Trafficking in Women, and Serious Crime in Turkey”, *Uluslararası Güvenlik ve Terörizm Dergisi*, 1 (2010), pp. 79–103, 87.

82 Muhtar Çokar and Habibe Yılmaz Kayar, *Seks işçileri ve yasalar: Türkiye’de yasaların seks işçilerine etkileri ve öneriler* (Istanbul, 2011), pp. 28–29.

longer work. Under the current conservative government, new women are not being registered, despite the fact that there are a reported 6,000 pending applications for registration in the state brothels.⁸³ As with many systems of registration, Istanbul's legal sex workers are required to undergo tests for venereal diseases twice a week.

The period of employment for registered sex workers is fairly level across the board (Table 11.1), with no large differences in the sizes of the groups who have worked varying periods of time. The majority of women are over 30 years of age (Table 11.2). As for reasons for beginning sex work, some stated that they were forced by someone else, such as a "friend" or relative, and others stated that they voluntarily began working out of financial need. The Ankara Chamber of Commerce indicated in a report on sex workers in Turkey that the main

TABLE 11.1 *Length of time of employment as sex workers, Istanbul 2010.*⁸⁴

Number of years	Percentage
1–5	21%
6–10	26%
11–15	19%
16–20	19%
21+	15%

TABLE 11.2 *Age of sex workers, Istanbul 2010.*⁸⁵

Age	Percentage
21–25	2%
26–30	20%
31–35	20%
41–45	20%
46–50	6%
51+	12%

83 Wyers, *Wicked Istanbul*, p. 16.

84 Data from Çokar and Kayar, *Seks işçileri*, pp. 28–29. Interview with 138 sex workers.

85 *Ibid.*

reason women voluntarily engage in sex work is financial necessity, pointing out that women's wages in Turkey are significantly lower than men's.⁸⁶

Although steps to alleviate the situation of women's employment have been taken in recent years albeit with patchy implementation,⁸⁷ women's urban labour market participation in Turkey is quite low at 22 per cent, in contrast to 70 per cent for men. In 2009, the UN ranked Turkey 206 out of 215 countries for women's labour participation.⁸⁸ Studies have noted that one of the primary factors for women's low rates of labour participation in Turkey is the traditional priority placed on their roles as mothers and wives, and even women who do work often do so on a part-time basis so that they can fulfil their domestic responsibilities.⁸⁹ A lack of childcare services also has a prohibitive effect on women's participation, and a large number of women who are employed but have low levels of education do not have access to social security, meaning that they cannot obtain maternity leave or receive retirement benefits.⁹⁰ As a number of female sex workers have pointed out, the reason that they resorted to sex work was because they were single mothers who felt that they could not support their children on the wages available to them or found that they were able to make more money through sex work.⁹¹ A report compiled by an NGO about prostitution in Turkey also indicated that the majority of registered female sex workers are internal migrants to the city living under financial duress.⁹²

A survey of registered sex workers carried out in 2010 indicated that 66 per cent were single, 8 per cent were married, and 26 per cent were divorced. It should be pointed out that the law forbids married women from working in licensed houses, however, so the women who claimed to be married were most likely involved in a common-law marriage.⁹³ Another study found that over 70 per cent of registered women who had married had done so at the age of 20 or younger, with some married as young as 13 years of age. Many were married off while in their teens; unhappy in marriage, they were unable to return home, as local tradition holds that this is "disgraceful" for the family, so they eventually

86 Çokar and Kayar, *Seks işçileri*, pp. 28–29.

87 Nellie Munin, "Female Employment and Turkey's EU Accession Process", *Mediterranean Politics*, 16 (2011), pp. 449–457, 451.

88 İpek İlkaracan, "Why so Few Women in the Labor Market in Turkey?" *Feminist Economics*, 18 (2012), pp. 1–37, 2.

89 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

90 *Ibid.*, pp. 16, 21.

91 Fügen Yıldırım, *Fahişeliğin öbür yüzü* (Istanbul, 2004), pp. 43, 47, 97, 102, 109, 125.

92 Çokar and Kayar, *Seks işçileri*, p. 30.

93 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

took up sex work. A significant number of the women working in the Istanbul licensed brothels have children and spend large amounts of money for childcare.⁹⁴

Education levels among registered sex workers in Istanbul are low, but not entirely. While the numbers vary slightly in different studies, on average about 25 per cent of registered women completed primary school and 10 per cent completed middle school, and although the figures vary from 12 to 23 per cent for high school graduates, at least 7 per cent attended university. Rates of controlled substance and alcohol abuse among registered sex workers are high, as well as use of tobacco.⁹⁵ Although they should have access to state health insurance as workers, the owners of licensed brothels often do not make full payments for the social security benefits of registered sex workers, so they are not covered by health insurance and are generally unable to retire. If forced to undergo treatment for a venereal disease, they are unable to work for that period and hence unable to look after their children's needs.⁹⁶

As of 2011, the rate at the Istanbul licensed brothel for one visit was 35 Turkish lira,⁹⁷ the equivalent of approximately €15. However, since registered women are often required to purchase food, beverages, and cigarettes at inflated rates in the brothel, in addition to paying for electricity, water, and cleaning, they are forced to accept large numbers of clients to make a profit. Additionally, the owner and manager of the house take a large cut of each payment; this situation, however, seems to have improved starting in the early 2000s, possibly because sex workers began lobbying for improvements in their working conditions. Encounters in the licensed houses of Istanbul tend to be short, lasting 5–10 minutes in general, as the owners of licensed houses think that longer encounters mean that the worker is getting more money and hence attempt to extract more money from the workers.⁹⁸ In interviews, registered workers have complained that owners harass them about concealing profits and that they are forced to hide their tips upon leaving the house at the end of the day.⁹⁹

It appears that until recent years, it was fairly common for a woman to be driven to work at a licensed brothel by a husband, relative, or male "friend",

94 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

95 *Ibid.*, p. 36.

96 Yıldırım, *Fahişeliğin öbür yüzü*, p. 46.

97 "Dimming the Red Lights in Turkey", *New York Times*, 8 August 2011.

98 Some registered women reported having up to 30 to 50 clients per day, particularly on holidays and weekends. Yıldırım, *Fahişeliğin öbür yüzü*, pp. 76, 105; Çokar and Kayar, *Seks işçileri*, p. 46.

99 Zengin, *İktidarın Mahremiyeti*, pp. 113–114.

who took a sum of money when she was registered at the brothel, and that she would then be forced to work off her “debt”, a process which, combined with the cut taken by the house, meant that women could be required to work for years before paying back what she supposedly owed. Since the licensed houses do not appear to be accepting new workers, it seems that this trend is on the decline. It has also been reported that the majority of women have a male “friend” to whom they give the majority of their earnings.¹⁰⁰ Prior to beginning work at a licensed house, it has been reported that some women worked in low-level positions as factory labourers, secretaries, dishwashers, hair stylists, and club entertainers.¹⁰¹

Even within the small red-light district in Istanbul, it seems that working conditions differ, and some sex workers claim that they work on their own schedule, choosing to work part time or full time based on their financial needs.¹⁰² Until the early 2000s, when a series of sting operations were conducted, it was reported that women worked part-time illegally (without registering) in the licensed houses of Istanbul to offset their salaries in times of financial difficulty, and that some of these women were teachers, bank workers, and government employees.¹⁰³ For such women, their biggest fear was to be caught and forcibly registered by the police, as once a woman is registered with the police as a sex worker, it is nearly impossible to have it retracted;¹⁰⁴ additionally, the children of registered sex workers are banned from government positions with the military and police force.¹⁰⁵ Some brothel workers who receive a pension in their father or mother’s name do not file their working hours with social security, because once a woman becomes employed, she loses all rights to that pension.¹⁰⁶ In any case, most licensed houses underreport the working hours and wages of sex workers to save on taxes, making it difficult for registered women to retire, as retirement in Turkey is based on years of employment. In recent years, this seems to be changing, and a few legally employed female sex workers have successfully retired.¹⁰⁷

Although registered women in Istanbul are allowed to live outside the brothel complex (unlike in other cities in Turkey), they are required to register

100 Yıldırım, *Fahişeliğin öbür yüzü*, pp. 23, 76, 79, 82, 103; Zengin, *İktidarın mahremiyeti*, p. 59.

101 *Ibid.*, pp. 19, 49, 82, 92, 118–119.

102 *Ibid.*, pp. 75, 84.

103 Zengin, *İktidarın mahremiyeti*, p. 110.

104 Yıldırım, *Fahişeliğin öbür yüzü*, p. 124; Zengin, *İktidarın mahremiyeti*, pp. 117, 121.

105 Zengin, *İktidarın mahremiyeti*, p. 106.

106 Yıldırım, *Fahişeliğin öbür yüzü*, p. 35.

107 *Ibid.*, p. 76.

their home address with the local authorities and the police have the right to raid a registered sex worker's home at any time they please.¹⁰⁸ Due to the strong stigma of sex work in Turkey, most registered sex workers are extremely afraid of being "found out" by their neighbours and the physical/psychological violence they could be subjected to if discovered.¹⁰⁹ This stigma is also why collecting data on sex workers, whether registered or not, is difficult, as they are afraid of being "tipped off" to their neighbours or families;¹¹⁰ one Turkish woman reported that her family had found out that she was a sex worker and had sent her brother to kill her to "save" the family's honour.¹¹¹ Such honour killings occur most often in the southeast of Turkey, and are reflective of embedded cultural beliefs in which the concept of family honour is heavily predicated on women's ("proper") sexual conduct.¹¹²

The paragraphs above outline the situation as regards the legal red-light district of Istanbul; as noted above, outside of the state licensed brothel, sex work is not permitted by law.¹¹³ Turkish nationals who are caught engaging in prostitution are held for a medical examination and may be detained for a number of days, and foreign nationals, if not found to be "victims of trafficking" (and it seems that few are found to be such "victims"), are deported; the most commonly deported sex workers are from Moldova, Ukraine, Russia, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Uzbekistan, and Romania. A study carried out by a team of Turkish researchers claimed that some women are enticed to the city on false promises of employment, while others come to work temporarily to take up sex work; upon arriving in Istanbul, it has been reported that some women are forced to pay off the debt they acquired upon arrival, which can include the costs of visas, plane tickets, passports, bribes, and daily living expenses.¹¹⁴ While Turkey is a signatory to numerous anti-trafficking protocols and procuring is a crime,¹¹⁵ the infrastructure for identifying and providing support for women who have been caught in debt bondage

108 *Ibid.*, p. 81.

109 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

110 Zengin, *İktidarın mahremiyeti*, p. 64.

111 Yıldırım, *Fahişeliğin öbür yüzü*, p. 120.

112 Filiz Kardam, *The Dynamics of Honor Killings in Turkey* (Ankara, 2005), p. 16.

113 A report issued by the Ankara Chamber of Commerce estimated that in 2010 there were approximately 100,000 sex workers in Turkey, only 3,000 of which were registered and work in the fifty-six state-licensed brothels located around the country. Çokar and Kayar, *Seks işçileri*, p. 26.

114 *Ibid.*, pp. 22–23, 51.

115 *Ibid.*, p. 53.

is underdeveloped.¹¹⁶ As studies on contemporary sold sex in Istanbul have indicated, however, it is difficult to gather data about non-registered sex workers for the reason that the workers themselves, for fear of being tipped off to the police, are reluctant to divulge information about themselves to outsiders.¹¹⁷

The most salient feature of non-registered prostitution in Istanbul is the violence with which it is policed; bribery or sexual favours also appear to be a common occurrence.¹¹⁸ In recent years, it appears that the police have been increasingly issuing fines to non-registered prostitutes and utilizing tactics of intimidation, increasing sex workers' isolation as they are forced to go further underground.¹¹⁹ There have also been reports of foreign women being taken into custody as "prostitutes" simply because they were "too scantily" dressed.¹²⁰

The physical health of sex workers has been reported to be low, and some have been identified as being at high risk for illness due to poor living conditions and lack of access to healthcare. Sleeplessness, malnutrition, respiratory infections, skin diseases, venereal diseases, and mental illness are common ailments, often brought about by stressful working conditions.¹²¹ Violence, including rape and shootings, has been reported in interviews; of fifty non-registered sex workers, forty-three reported that they had been victims of violence including rape, battery, abduction, and extortion.¹²² But as sex workers have pointed out, they cannot apply to the police for help or bring the perpetrator to justice because they themselves could also then be subject to legal action, such as arrest or deportation.¹²³

Through the use of the internet and telephones to set up appointments, non-registered prostitution has become less visible, and some sex workers have used this as a means to develop a small but steady group of clients to minimize the risk of violence and police harassment.¹²⁴ Other venues for finding and meeting clients exist as well, including massage parlours and hotels

116 "2011 Trafficking in Persons Report", available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4e12ee3dc.html>; last accessed 3 June 2012.

117 Zengin, *İktidarın mahremiyeti*, p. 64; Çokar and Kayar, *Seks işçileri*, p. 27.

118 Zengin, *İktidarın mahremiyeti*, pp. 74, 86, 123–125; Yıldırım, *Fahişeliğin öbür yüzü*, p. 98; Çokar and Kayar, *Seks işçileri*, p. 80.

119 Çokar and Kayar, *Seks işçileri*, p. 80.

120 Zengin, *İktidarın mahremiyeti*, p. 74.

121 Çokar and Kayar, *Seks işçileri*, pp. 38–39.

122 *Ibid.*, p. 44.

123 Zengin, *İktidarın mahremiyeti*, p. 131.

124 Çokar and Kayar, *Seks işçileri*, p. 18.

which have made arrangements with sex workers,¹²⁵ but it appears that increasing numbers of sex workers are turning to the internet as a “safer” means of drawing clients, even though some continue to work on the streets. Escort websites for sold sex can be divided into two groups: those for foreign women, and those for Turkish women. The websites for both groups include detailed information about physical characteristics and sexual services. There is a clear division in terms of cost, with foreign women charging up to double the price of what Turkish sex workers charge. It is not clear whether the sex workers who advertise online work for a pimp or madam, but the fact that a large number of Turkish sex workers use their own rented homes to meet clients suggests that they may work independently. Also, the websites provide dates for availability, suggesting that some sex workers, including university students, may be using it for part-time income rather than full-time employment.

Research has indicated that approximately 20 per cent of men in Turkey have their first sexual encounters with sex workers, and this has been attributed to the conservative sexual climate of the country which is based on cultural values promoting female virginity before marriage and the belief that women’s sexuality must be concealed and controlled.¹²⁶ Also, studies indicate that a large number of the clients of sex workers are married men who claim that they are unable to achieve sexual satisfaction at home because of their wives’ sexual conservatism.¹²⁷ While Istanbul, as a large metropolitan city, has in recent years witnessed an increase to a certain degree in sexual liberation, this is limited to a relatively small segment of the population and sexual conservatism remains the norm. This has also been accompanied by the increasing popularity of conservative Islam praising traditional family values, as reflected in the rise to power of the current conservative regime which advocates the family unit as the cornerstone of a “strong” society.

Currently, there is one organization, *Kadınkapısı* (Women’s door), which is solely dedicated to supporting the sexual health of sex workers and providing counselling as well as education regarding venereal diseases. It was founded in 1996 by sex workers and social workers and has since participated in numerous

125 *Ibid.*, p. 61.

126 *Ibid.*, p. 47; Zengin, *İktidarın mahremiyeti*, p. 100. See also Nuray Sakalil-Ugurlu and Peter Glick, “Ambivalent Sexism and Attitudes toward Women who Engage in Premarital Sex in Turkey”, *The Journal of Sex Research*, 40 (2003), pp. 294–303. Just to cite one example, this has been reflected in the debates that have arisen over forced virginity examinations for young women in schools. Ayşe Parla, “The ‘Honor’ of the State: Virginity Examinations in Turkey”, *Feminist Studies*, 27 (2001), pp. 65–88.

127 Sakalil-Ugurlu and Glick, “Ambivalent Sexism and Attitudes towards Women”, p. 47.

events and activities to promote the well-being and fair treatment of sex workers in Istanbul.¹²⁸ Developing connections with non-registered sex workers have proven problematic, however, because either their pimps do not allow it or the sex workers themselves are wary of being tipped off.¹²⁹ Although state law concerning the regulation of sex work dictates that a state-run support centre for sex workers should be located in the vicinity of the brothel district and be open at all hours to provide support and treatment, this has never been implemented. Likewise, the law stipulates that there should be organizations providing support for women who would like to quit sex work, but these also have not materialized.

In an attempt to provide haven for the large number of women in Turkey who are victims of domestic violence, a small number of shelters have been opened in recent years as the result of lobbying by women's groups. However, under the current regulation, it is not permitted for sex workers or HIV-positive women to stay in shelters,¹³⁰ although revisions currently underway may lift the restriction for sex workers. Significantly, the issue of sex work has largely been excluded from discussions among women's groups in Turkey, and the voices of female sex workers have not been incorporated into feminist movements, perhaps out of fear that in the eyes of society, as a "shameful" issue, it would "de-legitimize" them.¹³¹

There is also a notable silence regarding the issue of child prostitution; while it has been acknowledged to exist, to date a sound investigation into the matter has not been carried out. Studies have highlighted the fact, however, that the majority of sex workers began working before the age of eighteen and that there is a severe lack of preventative and protective infrastructure regarding child prostitution.¹³² As with female sex work, male and homosexual sex work in Istanbul has taken on a prominent web presence as an anonymous way to contact clients; however, a distinction should be made, as many men who are the active partner in a male-male sexual encounter report that they do not perceive themselves as being homosexual.¹³³

128 <http://www.kadinkapisi.org/>.

129 Çokar and Kayar, *Seks işçileri*, pp. 72–74; Zengin, *İktidarın mahremiyeti*, pp. 60–61.

130 Şule Toktaş and Çağla Diner, "Feminists' Dilemma: With or without the State? Violence against Women and Women's Shelters in Turkey", *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, 17 (2011), pp. 49–75, 59.

131 Zengin, *İktidarın mahremiyeti*, pp. 139–140.

132 Çokar and Kayar, *Seks işçileri*, pp. 32–33, 92.

133 *Ibid.*, p. 36.

It has been estimated that there are 5,000 transgender people in Istanbul, 4,000 of whom are engaged in sex work, which is nearly 15 per cent of the estimated non-registered 30,000 sex workers in the city. Due to the strong discrimination against transgender people in Turkey, it is nearly impossible for them to find employment, and hence many turn to sex work as a source of income. In contrast to twenty years ago, when they resided and worked in a central location in Istanbul and had a sense of group solidarity, transgender sex workers have become more and more isolated as a result of increasing levels of violence and police intimidation.¹³⁴ In 2009, the Istanbul police initiated a “bonus system” in which police officers can fine transgender persons who are in public on the grounds of “disturbing the peace” and are rewarded for the number of tickets they issue; as a result, transgender individuals have been forced to relocate and have a reduced public presence,¹³⁵ and while some continue to work on the streets, many advertise on the internet to reach clients. It has been noted that male clients seeking transgender encounters often prefer individuals who have not undergone gender reassignment surgery as the clients wish to be anally penetrated.¹³⁶

Conclusion

Sold sex in Istanbul over the past 400 years has undergone significant shifts, but certain continuities are prominent as well. Some of the shifts include changes in the way that prostitution is monitored and changes in the demographics of the women (and men) who sell sex. Prior to the introduction of a regulated system of prostitution, while royal Ottoman edicts may have been issued against sold sex, local dignitaries and religious figures, whether Christian, Jewish, or Muslim, were in charge of overseeing the sexual morality of Istanbul’s districts; residents also filed petitions complaining about the existence of prostitution as well. With the adoption of licensed prostitution, this power was transferred to the secular authorities—that is, police, local health officials, and municipal officers.

One point of shift is the demographics of prostitution; from the sixteenth century until the 1930s, prostitutes were from all religious and ethnic backgrounds, but as the result of vigorous efforts to “Turkify” the nation under

134 *Ibid.*, p. 35. Between 2007 and 2009 alone, thirty transgender persons were murdered. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

135 Zengin, *İktidarın mahremiyeti*, p. 72.

136 “Bu işi yapmak ruhumda var”, *Radikal*, 16 June 2007.

both the Ottoman and republican governments, the non-Muslim segments of society shrank drastically, and this is reflected in the fact that the registered women in the state-regulated brothels of Istanbul are predominantly Muslim (and Turkish citizens, as state law requires). Control over prostitution through regulation was seen by state and municipal authorities as necessary to prevent further “damage” to the body of the nation through the spread of disease, even if this entailed populating the state brothels with Muslim women who, once placed on the records, could never rescind registration. In this way, these (irrevocably) “fallen women”, sealed in behind the walls of the legal brothel, could serve the state by ensuring that men’s sexual desires were, in theory, bolstered against infections and shunted away from the “virtuous” remainder of the female population. However, as in the early twentieth century when Istanbul was internationally condemned for its role in “trafficking”, with the fall of the Soviet Union and the economic boom in Turkey in the 1980s, clandestine prostitution increased, as women from eastern Europe and ex-Soviet bloc countries began engaging in illegal sex work in the city. Another point of continuity is that today there seems to be a repetition of the abolitionist trend that occurred in the 1930s; new sex workers are not being licensed, and whether female, transgender, or male, they are primarily outside the legal system of state-recognized brothels, working on the streets but also taking advantage of technologies such as the internet.

At this point, the future of sex work in Istanbul is unclear. The staunchly “pro-family” government, a strong supporter of traditional values (including virtue as a reflection of “properly expressed” female sexuality), which at present has little opposition in parliament and has made slow steps to implement the gender equity laws and labour legislation required for EU accession, has been quietly closing down the few remaining brothels where sex workers can legally work. At the same time, sex workers, a few female activists, and the transgender community have been pressing for an expansion of laws to provide protection for individuals who engage in sold sex and for equitable labour practices; to date, such laws have not been enacted. To further complicate the narrative, some female sex workers themselves have rallied for the elimination of licensed brothels, claiming that they represent the patriarchal oppression of women. Nonetheless, regardless of the approach that is ultimately taken, as Istanbul continues to grow (with a population fast approaching 14,000,000), the number of sex workers will also likely increase from the estimated 30,000 already in existence.

Sexualizing the City: Female Prostitution in Nigeria's Urban Centres in a Historical Perspective

Mfon Umoren Ekpootu

The work of prostitutes cannot be understood separate from the particular historical and socio-cultural context in which it is carried out, all of which shape the sexual agency of the women involved. In studying commercial sexual relations in urban Nigeria, this paper problematizes prostitution, examining shifts in meanings, perceptions, and the organization of prostitution. How was a prostitute defined in different epochs in Nigeria's history? How did society organize sex and sexuality and how did these shape commercial sex relations? The discourses on prostitution in Nigeria have focused mainly on human trafficking and migrant prostitution. On the other hand, attempts to document domestic prostitution, as well as its development and mutations over time, in addition to operational and regulatory mechanisms have so far been the preoccupation of but a few scholars.¹ In this literature, the colonial antecedent of commercial sex trade is underscored.

Lagos presents a viable site for an overview of prostitution because of its cosmopolitan landscape and socio-economic and cultural heterogeneity which allow for a mapping of the forms and patterns of prostitution that emerged over time. In the fifteenth century it grew from a fishing settlement engaged in local trading with neighbouring communities² into a locale of commercial importance trading with Europe thanks to its strategic location. As a port city, Lagos attracted people of diverse origins, from European traders to freed slaves

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- 1 Benedict B.B. Naanen, "Itinerant Gold Mines': Prostitution in the Cross River Basin of Nigeria, 1930–1950", *African Studies Review*, 34 (1991), pp. 57–79; Saheed Aderinto, "The Girls in Moral Danger': Child Prostitution and Sexuality in Colonial Lagos, Nigeria 1930 to 1950", *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1 (2007), pp. 1–22; Mfon Ekpootu, "Interrogating Policies on Human Trafficking in Nigeria", in Toyin Falola and Bridget Teboh (eds), *The Power of Gender, the Gender of Power: Women's Labor, Rights and Responsibility in Africa* (Trenton, 2013), pp. 551–566.
 - 2 Quoted in Oluwole Ajala Alagbe, "Combating the Challenges of the Rise of Urban Slums in Cities of the Developing World: A Case Study of Lagos" (Unpublished Paper, International Conference on the Built Environment: Innovation Policy and Sustainable Development, Covent University, Otta, Ogun State, 2003), p. 3.

from Brazil as well as migrants from the interior. In 1861 Lagos was annexed by the British, and with the amalgamation of the northern and southern Nigerian protectorates with the Colony of Lagos in 1914, Lagos became the headquarters of the Federation of Nigeria.³ Colonial capitalist development stimulated more migratory flows in response to perceived opportunities in Lagos. It has grown to become the most populous city in modern Nigeria and is its commercial capital. In 1967, Lagos became a state with an area of 3,577 square kilometres. As a wetland on the coastal plains of the Atlantic, much of the state is covered with water.

For this study, colonial records were used, including police records and administrative correspondences. The private letters of prostitutes and petitions written by ethnic associations as well as the letters of abandoned husbands found in the colonial archives were utilized to allow a glimpse into the ways the prostitutes and family members made sense of the sexual spaces of the city. Interviews with sex workers were also conducted to bring to light the details of contemporary forms of prostitution.

Defining Prostitution

Previous studies have pointed to the definitional problems implicit in attempts to neatly categorize prostitution.⁴ As Forster has rightly argued, in western societies the definitional space of prostitution is muddled but this becomes even more complicated when attempting to draw up a cross-cultural perspective. The sexual terrain of precolonial Nigeria has been subjected to varied readings in local and colonial imaginaries. Prostitution as the commoditization of sexual services didn't exist in the local lexicon but there existed several sexual activities that fell outside conjugal relations. For instance, the engagement of women in extra-marital sexual liaisons was permissible and conducted within culturally sanctioned parameters. In Lagos and other Yoruba communities wives could take a lover, who secured her husband's approval through payment of a fine for encroaching on "his property" and the performance of culturally

3 See Robin Law, "Trade and Politics behind the Slave Coast: The Lagoon Traffic and the Rise of Lagos", *The Journal of African History*, 24 (1983), pp. 321–348.

4 Peter G. Forster, "Prostitution in Malawi and the HIV/AIDS Risk", *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 9 (2000), pp. 1–9; Marjolein van der Veen, "Rethinking Commodification and Prostitution: An Effort at Peacemaking in the Battles over Prostitution" *Rethinking Marxism*, 13 (Summer 2001), pp. 30–51.

approved rites. The husband remained the rightful spouse and the children born of such illicit relations belonged to the husband.

Polygamy and concubinage were also widely practised and they increased after 1850.⁵ From the fifteenth to the nineteenth century the number of male slaves transported across the Atlantic outstripped the number of females who were more in demand domestically.⁶ By 1800 Lagos had become the principal slave port in West Africa. Its supply of slaves was further increased by Yoruba warfare.⁷ Given the fact that most young men couldn't marry because of high bride prices, female slaves acquired great importance for their reproductive and economic roles. Military expeditions took on increased significance as well in the acquisition of slave wives, and this was one avenue for young men who lacked the financial ability to marry freeborn women as marrying a slave wife exempted one from the obligation to pay a bride price. The price of a bride increased from two shillings in the 1890s to about £2 in 1903, and in many cases young men found themselves deeply in debt. Historical accounts illustrate the preponderance of female slaves in the harems of military men. These slaves were often taken as spoils of war, or they were given as gifts or in some cases purchased. It is difficult to determine the difference in price between a slave wife and a bride because of the paucity of data in Yoruba lands. However, its prevalence among the various communities in the area suggests that it did have certain advantages. Aside from their reproductive and economic functions, female slaves also played a role in forging alliances between communities and individuals, and they facilitated the "control of state mechanisms".⁸ They were valued objects of exchange and their sexual services were traded by their owners for political and economic power. The servility of female slaves and the control of their masters makes it difficult to define their sexual services as prostitution.

Precolonial sexual practices in Lagos and the local geographical landscape which is now Nigeria suggest that women exercised sexual freedom in terms of non-marital sex. Such sexual liberty was incomprehensible to early European travellers and merchants because it was at odds with Victorian ideals so colonial powers sought to control it. Labelling and representation was one

5 Olatunji Ojo, "Reviewed Beyond Diversity: Women, Scarification, and Yoruba Identity", *History in Africa*, 35 (2008), pp. 347–374.

6 *Ibid.*; Claire Robertson and Martin Klein (eds), *Women and Slavery in Africa* (Portsmouth, 1997).

7 For a detailed analysis of the rise of Lagos and its commerce in slaves, see Robin Law, "Trade and Politics behind the Slave Coast", pp. 321–348.

8 Ojo, "Reviewed Beyond Diversity", p. 354.

approach to achieving a neat form of categorization for administrative purposes in this regard as well as controlling those who were colonized through knowledge and possession.

It would be erroneous to equate the sexual practices of married women in precolonial Lagos with some form of prostitution. Rather it should stimulate questions about the meanings of such behaviour for the people who engaged in such practices. An important factor here is the dynamics through which such acts occurred and this is related to the traditional Nigerian context, not western notions. In their study of polygamy in South Africa, Delius and Glaser⁹ argue that marriage in precolonial Africa was less about control of sexuality and more about fertility and labour productivity, and historical accounts of Yoruba society in Nigeria attest to this.¹⁰ The practice of women marrying other women into the family was one avenue for those who were infertile or had few children. In this way, they could secure a place in the family by having their husbands get married and acquiring the children that were subsequently born.

In their negative readings of the sexual intimacy of the local population, European writers and the colonial state eroticized what was non-erotic and represented as socially deviant what was culturally legitimate. A good example of this can be seen in the way the colonial imaginary saw the baring of women's breasts as sexual vulgarity and evidence of female lasciviousness. This inappropriate reading and labelling of non-conjugal sexual liaisons in Africa as prostitution has drawn criticism.¹¹ It has been argued that the agrarian setting in precolonial Africa precluded the independent capital accumulation of women. More importantly, certain salient features of prostitution such as the indiscriminate sale of sexual services were lacking in the precolonial environment. The relevance of these factors should not be overlooked in the creation of definitions of prostitution for that era, and the origins of prostitution in Nigeria are still unclear. Also, data for the precolonial era is lacking and hence historical explorations of the issue of prostitution remain highly problematic. What is clear is that it was in the colonial period that the prostitute became imprinted in the social imaginary and was subjected to codes of control.¹²

9 Peter Delius and Clive Glaser, "The Myths of Polygamy: A History of Extra-marital and Multi-Partnership Sex in South Africa", *South African History Journal*, 50 (2004), pp. 84–114.

10 Ojo, "Reviewed Beyond Diversity", pp. 347–374.

11 See for example Suzette Heald, "The Power of Sex: Some Reflections on the Caldwells 'African Sexuality' Thesis", *Africa*, 65 (1995), pp. 489–505; Hilary Standing "AIDS: Conceptual and Methodological Issues in Researching Sexual Behaviour in Sub-Saharan Africa", *Social Science and Medicine*, 34 (1992), pp. 475–483.

12 Naanen, "Itinerant Gold Mines", pp. 57–79; Aderinto, "The Girls in Moral Danger", pp. 1–22; Ekpootu, "Interrogating Policies", pp. 551–566.

Prostitution became criminalized and the women who earned their livelihood by selling sex were identified and made visible. Colonial narratives discursively produced the prostitute as the female “other” through a motif of degeneracy and a threat to moral order.

State Regulation/Prohibition/Tolerance

With the sustained presence of Europeans in the colonies, sexual prescriptions based on class, race, and gender became increasingly central to the politics of the empire and they were subject to varying degrees of scrutiny by colonial powers. Media publications directed the public’s attention to the rising criminality in Lagos, and this included the “dangers” brought about by young women who engaged in hawking because it was argued that this not only led to prostitution but resulted in them being harassed; in turn, this was linked to prostitution and the spread of venereal diseases amongst European and African military personnel in Nigeria and the Gold Coast,¹³ which led the colonial government to criminalize prostitution.

The policing of illicit sexuality was subsumed under the Undesirable Advertisement Ordinance of 1932, the Unlicensed Guide (Prohibition) Ordinance of 1941, and the Venereal Disease Ordinance of 1943.¹⁴ These interjections into female sexual spaces were narratively produced as a state concern for public health and morality by eliminating the sources of such “moral decay” and physical disease. Underlying these concerns were more complex issues concerning modernity and the British role in how that unfolded. The relevant legal documents for stamping out prostitution were mainly enshrined in the Criminal Code of Nigeria of 1916, later amended in 1944, and the Child and Young Person’s Ordinance (CYPO) of 1943. The CYPO criminalized child prostitution and after being reviewed in 1958, it remained the legal framework relating to child prostitution and other forms of child labour until the promulgation of the Child Rights Acts in 2003.

Sections 222A–222B of the Criminal Code dealt with the procurement, abduction, or encouragement of girls under the age of 16 for the purposes of sold sex; Sections 225 focused on young persons under 18 while Sections 225A

13 Carina Ray, “The Sex Trade in Colonial West Africa” (Part 2), *New African*, 458 (2007), pp. 66–68.

14 Saheed Aderinto, “Sexualized Nationalism: Lagos and the Politics of Illicit Sexuality in Colonial Nigeria, 1918–1958” (Unpublished Ph.D., University of Texas at Austin, 2010), p. 61.

criminalized third parties. The definition of prostitution as “the offering by the female of her body commonly for acts of lewdness for payment” created a broad ambiguous space of sexuality that extended beyond women engaged in the sale of sexual services to varying degrees of sexual relations, and it was evidence of a colonial imaginary of local women as sexually gluttonous. Attempts by the colonial state to criminalize prostitution did not go uncontested. Indeed local realities often forced administrators to retrace and reformulate policies. The laws and legislation that were enacted were shaped by these contestations.¹⁵ State policies and social views about prostitution in the colonial era have strongly influenced postcolonial policies on prostitution. These laws are codified in the Trafficking in Persons Law Enforcement and Administration Act (TIP) dating from 2003 and the Child's Right Act of 2003. The TIP, as its name implies, focuses on the elimination of human trafficking. Migrant prostitutes discursively tagged as “victims” are therefore targeted for rescue and rehabilitation while all third parties involved in the “trafficking” process face punitive measures.

Push and Pull Factors

Determining factors for prostitution cannot realistically be said to constitute either/or factors but in most cases involve a complex mix of diverse factors. For many young women in rural areas, prostitution has represented more than a means of livelihood or a survival strategy. As commonly depicted in the literature, it has been seen as a viable means of participating in global consumer culture, in other words “modern urban culture”. This plays an important, albeit unrecognized, part in the mix of push/pull factors. Lagos for female rural migrants has been perceived as a haven of opportunities not just in terms of wage employment (which has been difficult because of inadequate schooling) or marital aspirations but with regards to a loosening of sexual constraints imposed by traditional censors. The multi-cultural landscape of Lagos has led to an increase in the sense of freedom. The only entry requirement into the sex market has been the female body, and this has facilitated the ease of entry for a heterogeneous mix of women. While lived experiences in the city reflect deprivation, social dispossession, and disillusionment with the romanticized image of city life, shame of failure prevents a return home.

15 Richard Roberts and Kristen Mann, “Introduction”, in Kristen Mann and Richard Roberts (eds), *Law in Colonial Africa* (London, 1991), pp. 15–23.

In the urban landscape of Lagos in the early twentieth century, reflections of colonial power were visible in colonialist capitalist structures. As the most industrialized city in the area and the biggest employer of wage labour, Lagos attracted many migrants from rural areas and processes of urbanization intensified; the population grew from 38,387 in 1901 to 73,766 in 1911. By 1921, it had increased to 99,700 and ten years later it was 126,000. From 1951 to 1953, there was significant growth and the population surged to 230,250 and when Nigeria proclaimed independence the population of Lagos was 665,246.¹⁶ The phenomenon of male immigration has been widely noted in the literature as contributing to the growth of prostitution.¹⁷ The urban landscapes of Lagos have shared the characteristics of mining camps, military settlements, and port cities, common sites of commercial sex. Aderinto has demonstrated how the influx of soldiers and sailors into Lagos spurred on the trade in sex. It was noted that a flourishing sex market existed in those parts of the city that had military encampments such as Ikoyi, Ijora, Surulere, Cumberland, and Yaba.¹⁸ Prostitutes who catered to the military were known as “ammunition wives”.

World War II accelerated the selling of sex, particularly among young women in Lagos. The influx of soldiers and European sailors into Lagos during this period sexualized the city, creating a demand for sex that was filled by prostitutes. The incidence of venereal diseases recorded among the troops of the West African Frontier Force (WAFF) in 1942 was 43.2%, which was higher than cases of malaria.¹⁹ The war and soldiers’ sexual proclivities caused concerns about the impact of venereal diseases on colonial security forces and the implications that could have for Britain’s racial and moral superiority. This has been explored by Levine in her examination of how colonial policing of prostitution in British colonies, ostensibly to protect the Empire’s troops, was implicated in European imperial designs.²⁰ From 1967 to 1970, Nigeria was engulfed in a civil war that plunged the country into poverty. For many women, their bodies became weapons of survival, a tool that could be used to negate the effects of war. Women took up the selling of sex for diverse reasons, including access to food and security.

16 Laurent Fourchard, “Lagos and the Invention of Juvenile Delinquency in Nigeria 1920–60”, *Journal of African History*, 47 (2006), pp. 115–137, 117.

17 See for example Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago, 1990); Philippa Levine, “A Multitude of Unchaste Women: Prostitution in the British Empire”, *Journal of Women’s History*, 15 (2004), pp. 159–163.

18 Aderinto, “The Girls in Moral Danger”, pp. 18–19.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 19.

20 Philippa Levine, *Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (New York, 2003).

Entry into the sex industry in Lagos was not always voluntary but involved forms of coercion and trafficking, especially in cases of underage girls. Evidence from the 1920s shows that a large number of young girls from rural areas engaged in prostitution in Lagos.²¹ The sex trade was in many cases mediated by third parties, sometimes with kinship affiliation, and they exploited traditional fostering practices of placing children in the homes of extended family members or reputable households for a moral upbringing. The practice of child marriage meant that child trafficking could be disguised as such. As a resident of Ogoja Providence acknowledged, "the traffic in girls is most popular and more generally admitted to than the traffic in boys for which no legal colour can be found."²²

The romanticization of Lagos as a haven of opportunity and the desire to escape the drudgery of agricultural life made girls vulnerable to "traffickers", but I use the term "traffickers" with caution. While it is true that trafficking did exist, the need for an ordered sexual landscape in the enhancement of European control and the erasure of "tainted femininity" to facilitate the acceptance of local elite women into European spaces likely brought about an overgeneralization of the term. Colonial data does address the coercive nature of child prostitution, which appeared frequently in administrative correspondences, especially from the 1930s onwards. The public imaginary, reflected in newspaper reports and the statements of women's organizations, condemned the effects of trafficking on children and society's morality.

There were large numbers of migrant Nigerian prostitutes across the border in the Gold Coast and Equatorial Guinea. The increased visibility of migrant sex workers from Nigeria in the 1930s led Nigerians living in the Gold Coast to feel that their national identity was under threat, and the Nigerian Youth Movement sent a petition to the colonial government protesting the "shame" brought to the country by Nigerian sex workers. Under Gold Coast law, West African prostitutes were allowed to operate in the country and this facilitated the Nigeria-Gold Coast sex trade (Gold Coast Criminal Code Section 435 applied only to non-West African prostitutes).²³

Attempts made by the colonial state to control prostitutes and their mobility included medical regulation, strengthening immigration controls, and repatriation. Criminalization as a state policy was deployed as a means of tackling

21 Aderinto, "Girls in Moral Danger"; Mfon Ekpootu, "Prostitution and Child Labor in the Cross River Region of Southern Nigeria from 1900" (Unpublished Ph.D., University of Port Harcourt, 2008).

22 Ekpootu, "Prostitution and Child Labour", p. 133.

23 Carina Ray, "The Sex Trade in Colonial West Africa", pp. 66–68.

the problem of migrant prostitutes. The imaging and imagining of the prostitute were means by which her identity as the “other” was produced. The eroticizing of migrant prostitutes in trafficking narratives as sexually rapacious and morally corrupt was bound up with western cultural imperialism in which the differentiation and hierarchical placement of cultures enabled political and economic dominance. Criminalization continues to be the premise on which legal policies on prostitution in postcolonial Nigeria are based.

Prostitution in Relation to the Labour Market

The sale of sex is not necessarily an exclusive activity and over the years in different parts of the world it has often been engaged in alongside other income-generating activities. In colonial Lagos, these alternate forms of earning an income mostly existed in the informal sector. Studies have shown that most runaway wives, divorcees, and widows combined sex peddling with alternate forms of economic activities, mostly petty trading and hawking.²⁴ By 1932, the colonial authorities were agitating against the widespread practice of street trading, and it was noted, “There is no street in Lagos or Ebute Metta where hawking or selling outside the houses does not take place.”²⁵ For younger women, prostitution was a supplement to employment in both the formal and informal sectors. Little reports that there were young women who worked during the day as “seamstresses and in shops and offices [...] and dress smartly in European clothes” but they also engaged in prostitution at night by soliciting for clients in bars, clubs, and restaurants visited by members of the upper class, in the process acquiring Europeans and wealthy Africans as patrons.²⁶ As was the case in other colonial cities,²⁷ prostitution was closely linked to beer brewing and bar girls traversed the fluid space between catering to male customers in bars and prostitution. As mentioned above, a major concern in colonial times that surfaced in colonial narratives and the popular imaginary was the close link between street hawking by girls and prostitution. The former

24 Kenneth Little, “West African Urbanization as a Social Process”, *Cahiers D’Etudes Africaines*, 1 (1960), pp. 90–102, 96.

25 Laurent Fourchard, “Lagos”, in Simon Bekker and Göran Therborn (eds), *Capital Cities in Africa: Power and Powerlessness* (Dakar [etc.], 2011), pp. 66–82, 69.

26 Little, “West African Urbanization”, p. 96.

27 Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago, 1990).

was seen as facilitating entry into the sex market and indeed police reports and court cases do give credence to the blurred boundaries between the two.²⁸

It can't be said that engaging in the commercial sex trade as a full time activity was the norm, and in postcolonial times as well women have continued to combine the sale of sex with other forms of income. In some cases, the income derived from sex work is invested in entrepreneurial activities. The studies of Ngambouk Vitalis Pemunta²⁹ and Margaret Niger-Thomas³⁰ indicate that in the 1980s prostitutes from Mamfe in Cameroon were engaged in smuggling and cross-border trading in various parts of Nigeria including Lagos, Kaduna, and Calabar. Prostitution as a sole activity does exist, however, among women from lower income groups who sell sex in the slums. In most cases, prostitution is thus a means of survival and the income derived from it is used for daily needs. This group of prostitutes usually lack educational training which further inhibits access to other forms of employment as a supplement to sex work. In contemporary Nigeria, however, the widespread prevalence of cross-border migrant prostitution as well as new globally compliant forms of the sex trade have resulted in a flurry of literature on sex trafficking from a variety of perspectives.³¹ Low income sex peddlers in Nigerian urban centres on the other hand have continued to receive little attention. One of the few studies in this regard is a socio-medical study of prostitutes in Lagos by Oleru.³²

Universities and other institutions of higher learning in Nigeria have acquired a reputation as breeding grounds for prostitutes. Termed "runs" in Nigerian parlance, the practice of commercial sex by college girls has become for many of them a means of accessing societal resources and meeting family obligations. The income they earn is often used to set up businesses, in most cases hair salons, bars, and boutiques. Thus for these girls the "runs" trade is carried on alongside their schooling and a benevolent patron establishes some

28 Ekpootu "Prostitution and Child Labour in the Cross River Region", pp. 149–150; George Abosede "Within Salvation: Girl Hawkers and the Colonial State in Development Era Lagos", *Journal of Social History*, 44 (2011), pp. 837–859.

29 Ngambouk Vitalis Pemunta, "Challenging Patriarchy: Trade, Outward Migration and the Internationalization of Commercial Sex among Bayang and Ejagham Women in South-west Cameroon", *Health, Culture and Society*, 1 (2011), pp. 167–192.

30 Margaret Niger-Thomas, "Women and the Arts of Smuggling" *African Studies Review*, 44 (2001), pp. 43–70.

31 Tim S. Braimah, "Sex Trafficking in Edo State Nigeria: Causes and Solutions", *Global Journal of Human Social Science Research*, 13 (2013), pp. 17–29; Rasheed Olaniyi, "Global Sex Trade and Women Trafficking in Nigeria", *Journal of Global Initiatives*, 6 (2011), pp. 111–131.

32 U.G. Oleru, "Prostitution in Lagos: A Sociomedical Study", *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 34 (1980), pp. 312–315.

form of capital venture for them, or they use remunerations to take up entrepreneurial activities or “business” in popular terms becomes the second alternate activity to prostitution or “runs”. Media reports have bemoaned the transformation of female dorms and rental residences at the University of Lagos and other such spaces into brothels.

Prostitution as part of the sex industry in Lagos has been linked to an extensive range of activities that integrate lap dancing, striptease, nude dancing, and in recent times internet and live cam sex. Revolutions in technology and communication have impacted the organization of the sex trade, enabling a diversity of indoor sex work. Independent escorts are able to market themselves and solicit for clients on the internet and beyond it.

In Lagos today, strip clubs and nude bars can be found in different parts of the city including Ikeja on the mainland. While live sex acts are not explicitly allowed at the clubs, the dancers are allowed to go an extra mile with VIP clients. It is also here that other sexual activities short of penetration are allowed such as oral sex and masturbation. Girls can leave with patrons they like after work hours. Such commercialized sex spaces tend to normalize prostitution.³³ It is difficult to conclusively pin down popular perceptions about such practices due to a lack of research but fragmentary evidence suggests that lap dancers are less stigmatized than women and girls engaged in selling sex on the streets. The intertwining of such spaces with the corporate industry neutralizes the stigma involved. This was demonstrated with the closure of four strip clubs including Ocean Blue by the Lagos State Environmental Task Force on November 2009. The raids on the clubs elicited mixed reactions but largely criticism for infringement of the rights of the women involved. Going to such clubs was seen as a private affair because it was indoors and consensual. The state legislative body toed the line and the following year the clubs were reopened.

Prostitutes' Social Profiles

In the colonial period, Lagos had an eclectic mix of prostitutes from different parts of the country. Colonial accounts, however, stated that the majority of women involved were from southern Nigeria, primarily the Cross River region (present day Akwa Ibom Cross River, and some parts of Ebonyi, and Abia

33 Maddy Coy, Joseph Wakeling, and Maria Garner, “Selling Sex Sells: Representations of Prostitution and the Sex Industry in Sexualised Popular Culture as Symbolic Violence”, *Women's Studies International Forum*, 34 (2011), pp. 441–448.

States), as well as Owerri Province.³⁴ Hausa prostitutes were also prominent in the field of commercial sex, but as Aderinto has rightly argued, their geographical confinement to Hausa enclaves in the Sabon Gari and foreigners' areas such as Agege gave them an invisibility that was not the case with other prostitutes and barred the policing of Hausa prostitutes by the colonial state.³⁵ Aside from Nigerian prostitutes, there is evidence to suggest that West African prostitutes from the Gold Coast (present-day Ghana) and Dahomey (present-day Republic of Benin) were present in Lagos, but it does not seem that European women were involved in prostitution.³⁶ By the 1990s, there were prostitutes from other African countries and Asia. The large numbers of wealthy Nigerians and foreigners in the city have created a niche for non-Nigerian prostitutes, mostly from China and African countries. A perusal of the services offered by escort services in Lagos such as Valentine Creamy Escorts shows that there is a diverse mix of women including some from other parts of Africa like South Africa, Ghana, and Benin, as well as Asian and European countries.

The ages of prostitutes constituted a problem for the colonial administration. Undoubtedly the problem of underage girls selling sex had become a social issue by the 1940s and a broad categorization of "child prostitutes" as codified by the colonial government was deemed to be problematic.³⁷ As Isuigo-Abanike has noted,³⁸ girls of similar ages were getting married; within the socio-cultural milieu, girls from the age group labelled "underage" were actually of marriageable age and indeed a 15-year-old, according to the Children and Young Person Ordinance, was not a child. The incidence of "child prostitution" was nonetheless fuelled by the demand for young prostitutes by soldiers and sailors, and several brothels on Lagos Island and other places were noted for having young prostitutes, and they were frequented by European sailors.³⁹ In contemporary Nigeria, there is a discernible trend in the sex industry that demonstrates that there is a higher percentage of sex workers in their twenties;

34 Aderinto, "The Girls in Moral Danger", pp. 9–11; Ekpootu, "Prostitution and Child Labour", p. 152; Ekpootu "Interrogating Policies", p. 545.

35 Aderinto, "The Girls in Moral Danger", p. 22.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

37 In 1943, via the Children and Young Person's Ordinance an attempt was made to distinguish between a child and a young person. A child thus came to be a person under 14 years old and a young person was anyone between the ages of 14 and 17. These policies provided the means by which the sexual activities of persons labelled as children came to be criminalized by the colonial government.

38 Uche Isiugo-Agbanike, "Nuptiality and Fertility Patterns among Adolescent and Young Adults", in CHESTRAD *Status of Adolescents and Young Adults in Nigeria* (1997), pp. 17–36.

39 Laurent Fourchard, "Lagos and the Invention of Juvenile Delinquency", p. 126.

this is the result of several factors including the growing number of women who are marrying later, the sexual emancipation of Nigerian women, and the growing influence of prostitutes' organizations and activism.

The available data on the age structure of prostitutes in postcolonial Nigeria shows that there is a preponderance of women between the ages of 20 and 30 involved in the sex trade.⁴⁰ John Lekan Oyefara's study showed that 89.1 per cent of those surveyed were below 30 years of age while 16.3 per cent were younger than 20.⁴¹ However, the age of entry, as indicated in studies and media reports, falls within a range of 13 to 15 years of age. The Nigerian anti-trafficking agency (NAPTIP) has reportedly evacuated girls as young as 12 from brothels in the course of sporadic raids.⁴² Engaging in prostitution is perceived as a transient stage before marriage. This is particularly true for sex workers in Lagos who command a more affluent clientele and are in the 20 to 30 age range. Interviews conducted at the University of Port Harcourt with female students engaged in "runs" show that they do not perceive themselves as prostitutes. That label seems to be reserved for brothel-based and street prostitutes. For them "runs" are part of living the "modern life", which in their terms incorporates a high life style, adventure, and being financially solvent. As they see it, it is a transitory stage leading towards a sedentary life of marriage. In the course of the fieldwork I conducted for my dissertation, I found that for girls whose preferred clientele are foreigners they hit a goldmine if they get one of their "oyigbo" (white) patrons to marry them. Such a position ensures financial stability for them as well as their families.

In general, kinship networks have been an important part of sex workers' ability to negotiate the often difficult spaces of commercial sex. Writing in 1972, Kenneth Little demonstrated the importance of ethnic associations in the migration strategies of women in West Africa.⁴³ These relationships formed the social nexus through which new migrants were able to make sense of the city's resources. Prostitutes from the Upper Cross River region employed boys of the same ethnic affiliation to act as intermediaries and facilitate access to clients. This reflects the complex relationship between pimps and prostitutes in which the former moved freely between the status of employer/employee. Ethnic

40 John Lekan Oyefara, "Food Insecurity, HIV/AIDS Pandemic and Sexual Behaviour of Female Commercial Sex Workers in Lagos Metropolis, Nigeria", *Journal of Social Aspects of HIV/AIDS*, 4 (2007), pp. 626–635, 630; Oleru, "Prostitution in Lagos", pp. 312–335.

41 Oyefara, "Food Insecurity, HIV/AIDS Pandemic", p. 630.

42 Available at: www.naptip.org; last accessed 15 April 2012.

43 Kenneth Little, "Voluntary Associations and Social Mobility among West African Women", *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 6 (1972), pp. 275–288.

associations for the welfare of prostitutes were also formed. As migrants, prostitutes usually stayed with family members or people of the same ethnic group in Lagos.

There is a paucity of data for the colonial period on the children of sex workers in Lagos and whether or not they stayed with their mothers. However, evidence from the Calabar and Ogoja provinces of the Cross River region in southern Nigeria suggests that migrant prostitutes from these communities left their children behind with their families and remittances were sent for their maintenance.⁴⁴ This trend continued in post-independent Lagos and seemed to be a preferred way for sex migrants at least in the initial stages of migration. It is possible that after obtaining stability in Lagos, children and other dependants may have emigrated as well.

From the late 1980s onwards, the HIV/AIDS scare has brought the attention of the commercial sex trade to the scholarly community and studies have provided a glimpse into the household strategies of sex workers. Oleru's study of 150 hotel prostitutes in Lagos shows that 40.7 per cent were married in the 1990s, 70 per cent had previously been married, and 57.8 per cent had their children staying with them.⁴⁵ In Caldwell's work, which was premised on a field study conducted in 1990, more than half of the prostitute population under study had children who were being looked after by the sex workers' mothers in rural areas.⁴⁶ While about 60 per cent were determined to be single, she points out the likelihood of previously married women self-identifying as single. About a decade later, Oyefara's research in the Ikeja and Surulere areas of Lagos showed a higher percentage: 73.1 per cent of the women in the sex trade were single while 20.3 per cent were either divorced or separated.⁴⁷

As regards education, the colonial state and popular narratives suggested that migrant prostitutes were from rural areas, particularly the endemic southern region, and that they were uneducated runaway wives who added to the population of "undesirables" in Lagos. By the 1970s, few prostitutes had secondary educations because such an education would have ensured that they obtained some form of employment. Structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s and the exacerbated economic situation increased unemployment rates and pushed many women, some with secondary school educations, into the sex market. By the late 1980s, migration for prostitution had become a growing

44 Ekpootu, "Prostitution and Child Labour", p. 145.

45 Oleru, "Prostitution in Lagos", p. 313.

46 Pat Caldwell, "Prostitution and the Risk of STDs and AIDS in Nigeria and Thailand", *Health Transition Review*, supplement to vol 5 (1995), pp. 167–172, 170.

47 Oyefara "Food Insecurity", p. 630.

trend. Nigerian women began migrating to European countries, particularly Italy, to work as prostitutes. The “success” stories, and the prospect of earning foreign currencies at a time when university professors earned less than N2000, (US\$333) pushed educated women into prostitution. Lagos was seen as a training ground for the European sex market. In a 1980 survey of hotel-based prostitutes in Lagos, Oleru found a correlation between prostitutes’ levels of education and health risk and resource management. For example, 60 per cent of those who were selective of the types of clients they accepted had some form of education beyond primary school. Choice of clients was a factor that impacted the women’s financial and health status.⁴⁸

In the twenty-first century, the Lagos sex industry has become highly diversified with different typologies of sex work and practitioners who are heterogeneous not only in terms of working conditions and economic status, but also with regards to education levels. “High-class” prostitutes or sex workers are mostly young women with more than secondary schooling, and they often are attending university or other tertiary institutions like polytechnic schools. The forms of prostitution that exist include escort services, clubbing (soliciting for clients at clubs, bars, and hotels), and in a few cases brothel prostitution. Low education levels would seem to correlate with low incomes and high-risk commercial sexual services. A 2003 survey of “house” (brothel- and hotel-based) prostitutes by Oyefara in Ikeja, the capital city of Lagos, showed that a significant number of prostitutes (39.7 per cent) had a minimum of secondary school education, 12.2 per cent had some form of post-secondary schooling and 12.5 per cent were illiterate.⁴⁹

Changes in Working Conditions throughout Time and Space

Outdoor prostitution is usually equated with street soliciting and is usually targeted for criminalization because of its high visibility.⁵⁰ Though a large number of practitioners of outdoor soliciting are either very young or old and have low levels of education, it would be wrong to imagine that there are clear-cut categorizations. University students engage in street soliciting at places that are geographically distant from their places of residence; for example, young women from Port Harcourt engage in street prostitution on the street corners

48 Oleru “Prostitution in Lagos”, p. 312.

49 Oyefara, “Food Insecurity”, p. 630.

50 See Ronald Weitzer (ed.), *Sex for Sale: Prostitution, Pornography, and the Sex Industry* (New York, 2009).

of affluent neighbourhoods in Lagos to avoid stigmatization. Several places in Lagos have gained notoriety for street prostitution. In the 1990s, Ayilara in Ojuelegba on the mainland was discursively produced in the media and popular imaginary as the "hotspot" of prostitutes in Lagos. In the twenty-first century, it has been overtaken by places like Obalende on Lagos Island.

Like other forms of prostitution, indoor prostitution is varied and hierarchical. In Lagos there are women who work with escort services as independent call girls, at strip clubs, and in brothels. Technological developments and the internet have brought about online sex and soliciting. It is common to find younger and more educated women involved in this form of prostitution. University students with their "runs" make up a significant number of this group of sex workers. Closely tied to campus prostitution rings are cults and fraternity groups. Brothels differ in class and type of clientele, ranging from shanty rooms in poor neighbourhoods like Ajegunle and Kango in Alagba Rago market on the Badagry highway; semi-classy brothels are located in places like Ogba, Ikeja and Surulere, and high-end brothels are located on Victoria Island, in Ikoyi, and on Lekki Peninsula. The spatial and socio-economic differentiation of brothels and resident prostitutes is not neatly defined, and as the result of overpopulation in Lagos and the encroachment of slum quarters there are makeshift low-class brothels alongside more affluent ones. A typical example of this are the run-down brothels in Obalende in close proximity to the affluent Ikoyi neighbourhood.

Up until the 1980s, brothels generally housed older prostitutes engaging in survival sex. However, in the late 1980s the increasing number of sex workers who are more educated and the interest of the corporate sector have changed the face of the industry. Not only are education levels increasing but prostitutes have come to include a rather high number of young single women and girls.⁵¹ Not only are there high-class brothels on the affluent Lekki Peninsula, but young educated women, as well as some working class women, are renting rooms in five-star hotels like the Sheraton Lagos Hotel and Towers and The Federal Palace Hotel to do sex work.

The sex market in Lagos and Nigeria is variegated and complex, involving differences in working conditions, price, and organizational structure that result in hierarchies. At the top of the pyramid are the high-class call girls and escorts whose clientele include the rich and powerful. They are usually young, attractive, and educated, and they solicit at expensive bars, highbrow hotels, parties, public functions, and weddings. In bars the normal practice is to lounge

51 Chimaraoke O. Izugbara, "Constituting the Unsafe: Nigerian Sex Workers' Notions of Unsafe Sexual Conduct", *African Studies Review*, 50 (2007), pp. 29–49, 33.

around nursing a drink and when they see a wealthy-looking man or a foreigner they walk up to them and ask, "Do you want company?" In some cases, they give tips to hotel staff members in exchange for information about potential clients. By virtue of the income they earn, their levels of education, and the power of social networking, this category of sex workers feel that they are socially and economically superior to other groups of prostitutes. They perceive themselves as businesswomen rather than prostitutes. This class distinction, enhanced by the cultural acceptance of transactional sex and the cloaking of commoditized sex with semblances of romance and domesticity, ascribes to escorts and call girls a status and acceptability that is denied to others and creates a hierarchy of demand in which they are privileged. Societal perceptions and criminalization/non-criminalization have further impacts on spatial differentiation as high-end sex workers are able to access safer and more comfortable work sites and vice versa.

Occupying the middle category are brothel prostitutes, but they are not an undifferentiated mass group. Some of them belong to the lowest rung of the prostitution hierarchy. At the base of this group are brothels in places like Obalende, a commercial district on Lagos Island next to Ikoyi, and Ayilara in Ojuelegba, a commercial district on the mainland. Ayilara in the 1990s was the most widely known red-light district and clients were drawn from all parts of Lagos. In a report published in 2009, the *Vanguard* noted that the growth of the trade in Ayilara led some property owners to turn their homes into brothels. The cost of sex in such brothels ranged from N500 to N1000 (about \$3 to \$6).⁵² According to the *Vanguard* the brothels in Obalende were being rented out per hour at a cost of N100, less than a dollar. In brothels located in middle-class neighbourhoods, the residents are more diverse and have varied educational backgrounds including college education. Another Lagos newspaper, *PM News*, reported that there was a brothel in Iju-Ishaga, one of the middle-class neighbourhoods in the suburbs of Lagos where many of the tenants are girls studying at institutions of higher education.⁵³ It was reported that rooms were rented for N3000 to N5000 (\$18 to \$31) for a week and clients were charged from N1000 to N2000 for quick sex, and without a condom the price went up to N2000. All-night sex or what is called TDB (till day break) cost from N3000 to N5000. Prices could go up to N8000 (\$49) for a night at brothels where rent was higher.

52 Newsnigeria, "Ayilara Still Mother of Lagos Sex Trade", available at: http://www.nigeria70.com/nigerian_news_paper/ayilara_still_mother_street_of_lagos_sex_trade/106474; last accessed 11 July 2017.

53 *PM News*, "Varsity Students Besiege Lagos for Prostitution", available at: <http://news1.onlinenigeria.com/templates/?a=1708&t=Varsity%20Students%20Besiege%20Lagos%20For%20Prostitution>; last accessed 11 July 2017.

At the lowest end of the hierarchy are brothels located in slums, and they are usually ramshackle structures with poor ventilation; sold sex at such places is mostly for survival. Examples include dingy brothels located on Empire, a side street near Ojuelegba, an area known for its drug users and miscreants otherwise called "area boys". Sexual services can be bought for N200, less than \$2. Sexual services vary and this impacts the form of remuneration. In one of the strip clubs in Ikeja, formerly known as Ocean Blue, a session of lap dancing (three sound tracks) cost N1000 (\$6) and the girls could make up to N20,000 (\$122) on a good night. In the VIP section which is privately enclosed, the prices are higher, and a session costs N3000 (\$18). In most cases sex is sold for monetary payment but in other cases where the woman is engaged in part-time sex work, payment may also include sexual bartering for material goods. From its inscription in Lagos' urban spaces, prostitution has from the 1990s onwards come to incorporate women and girls who engage in sex work periodically for diverse reasons that extend beyond poverty. There has been a proliferation of new sites of leisure and entertainment imbued with a sense of romance frequented by clandestine prostitutes who, though not subjected to discriminatory laws and policies, exemplify the discourses of prostitution even while not specifically labelled as such. These women offer variegated sexual services that encompass inter-personal elements lacking in brothel and street prostitution. By extending the interactive space beyond the narrow confines of the "sale of sex" to include companionship and hostess activities, it allows for a broadening of the form of payment. In spite of the media outcry about the moral degeneration of college students in Nigeria, there remains a tacit tolerance of such forms of commercial sex, mostly because of its social invisibility and its pervasiveness in society; it extends to the political class on the one hand and on the other derivable income benefitting and thus silencing family and kinsmen.

The social imaginary of prostitutes' bodies as carriers of disease that was propagated by colonial narratives still resonates in postcolonial Nigeria. The health of prostitutes and the wider implications of health on the politics of the empire have been discussed in various scholarly works.⁵⁴ In Nigeria the high incidence of venereal diseases among members of the colonial army at the turn of the twentieth century resulted in the criminalization of prostitutes for being carriers of disease. Interestingly, Aderinto's study indicates that colonial efforts to tackle the menace of venereal diseases were exclusive of prostitutes

54 Levine "Venereal Disease, Prostitution, and the Politics of Empire", pp. 579–602; Ray, "The Sex Trade in Colonial West Africa", pp. 66–68; Aderinto "Sexualized Nationalism".

and rather targeted the Nigerian colonial army. Efforts were centred on curative measures including punitive actions that were deterrent in nature, from “cock-pulling or public displays of genitals” for contracting venereal diseases to fines of 6d per day for concealing a disease.⁵⁵ In spite of the high incidence of venereal diseases in the 1940s during World War II and the increase in the size of the Nigerian contingent of the colonial army as well as an influx of European seamen, no state efforts were made to carry out medical interventions with prostitutes.⁵⁶

In postcolonial Nigeria, the HIV/AIDS epidemic has resulted in the focusing of the state and public gaze on sex workers as a high-risk group and drawn increased scrutiny from health organizations for the purposes of intervention. Statistics from UNAIDS/WHO indicate that the estimated HIV prevalence rate for adults (15–49 age group) in 2001 was from 2.5 to 5.7 per cent, and this had decreased by 2007 to a range of 2.3 to 3.8 per cent. Aside from HIV/AIDS, other venereal diseases like syphilis and gonorrhoea are common. There is a correlation between a sex worker’s level of education and her ability to negotiate safe sexual relations. A prostitute’s socio-economic status also plays a part as those engaged in survival sex are less able to assert some form of agency in terms of the health risks they take. Physical violence, unwanted pregnancies, gynaecological complications arising from improper abortions, and to a lesser extent ritual deaths (killing for occult sacrifices) are some of the physical health issues faced by sex workers. Infertility was particularly rife in the early twentieth century among prostitutes, and the procurement of children from rural provinces by prostitutes in urban centres such as Lagos and across the border in Sekondi-Takoradi and Accra in Ghana were means by which disease-ridden, infertile prostitutes could assuage their maternal urges.⁵⁷ In the twenty-first century, medical technology and its greater accessibility for a wider group of people, especially in cosmopolitan areas like Lagos, have mitigated the problem of infertility though it is still major issue especially among prostitutes practicing in the slums of Lagos.

Prostitute/Employer/Client Relationships

Prostitutes in Lagos in the early twentieth century worked independently for the most part. There was, however, a blurring of the operational spaces of

55 Aderinto, “Sexualized Nationalism”, p. 32.

56 *Ibid.*, pp. 33–37.

57 Ekpootu, “Prostitution and Child Labour”, pp. 99–100.

women selling sex and “*boma*” and “*jaguda*” boys (street boys) who engaged in theft and criminal activities.⁵⁸ Referring to them as pimps, Fourchard notes that the boys directed clients to prostitutes and provided security in the red-light district when needed.⁵⁹ It would be erroneous however to label the young boys who assisted in procuring clients for prostitutes as “pimps” as we use the term today. In the contemporary era, pimping is popularly perceived as the management of sex work which involves more than periodic guidance and the providing of information. In its legal sense, pimping means living off the earnings of a prostitute. Inasmuch as the *jaguda* boys were remunerated for their services, they could in a broad and simplistic way be said to have lived off the earnings of a prostitute. An important element in pimping, however, is control which is sometimes coercive in nature, representing power over a prostitute and her income, and that did not exist. The prostitutes in colonial Lagos controlled their income and the way they worked. An exception to this rule was underage girls whose entry into the trade was often brokered by a third party. In this case, their services and working hours were controlled by their broker, mostly older or retired prostitutes.⁶⁰

From the 1980s onwards, there has been an increasing diversification of the sex industry and this is evident in the increase in migration for prostitution, linkages between sold sex and corporate culture, and what Coy, Wakeling, and Garner term the “pornification of popular culture”.⁶¹ This has turned the sex industry into a multi-dollar business managed by organized crime syndicates. A flourishing form of prostitution in which pimps and madams are commonly utilized is the abovementioned “runs” of educated women, most of whom are students at universities or other institutions of higher learning. At the University of Lagos, girls’ dorms and their environs have become sexualized spaces where sex is bartered and sold. While some of the girls work independently, many others employ the services of a pimp or madam (who may also be a student).

Interviews conducted with young women at the University of Lagos and Port Harcourt indicate that madams are often used in prostitution rings which are part of female gangs or fraternities at these institutions. The leader automatically assumes the position of madam, while pimps on the other hand

58 Aderinto, “Girls in Moral Danger” (2007); Fourchard, “Lagos and the Invention of Juvenile Delinquency” (2006); Simon Heap “Their Days are Spent in Gambling and Loafing, Pimping for Prostitutes, and Picking Pockets: Male Juvenile Delinquents on Lagos Island, 1920s–1960s”, *Journal of Family History*, 35 (2010), pp. 48–70.

59 Fourchard, “Lagos and the Invention of Juvenile Delinquency”, p. 124.

60 Ekpootu, “Prostitution and Child Labour”, pp. 99–100.

61 Coy, Wakeling, and Garner, “Selling Sex Sells”, p. 442.

can be male students or the personal assistants of politicians. They arrange for girls from the university campus to be taken to meeting points, usually a party. Prices may be set before the girls meet the clients or decided upon at the meeting point. Costs vary according to the economic status of the clients and range from N25,000 (\$160) to N250,000 (\$1,600). The role of pimps is gradually decreasing as more and more girls work independently as they solicit for clients through social networking and the use of internet sites like online dating.

Escort services are more likely to be used by more educated women such as those enrolled at institutions of higher education and those employed in the formal sector. Escorts perceive themselves as being superior to lower-end prostitutes and often enjoy a lavish lifestyle. They tend to exercise more control in terms of the clients they take and their working conditions. However, the ability to self-advertise has expanded the population of escort girls. The Lagos escort and strip club directory offers a list of escort girls, strip clubs, and escort agencies.⁶²

Conditions of Compliance and Traces of Defiance

Prostitution is a heterogeneous space involving a diversity of forms, working conditions, status, and self-perceptions. The question of choice is closely interwoven with this and forms part of the dynamics of the trade. The extent to which coercion or choice determines a prostitute's sexual activities is dependent on the position she occupies in the hierarchy in sex work. It is easy to discern coercion in cases of trafficked girls and women. Forced prostitution is more commonly experienced in such cases, as earlier noted among under-age rural girls trafficked into prostitution in Lagos. For other women such as runaway wives, working girls, and other young women, entry into the sex trade occurred without coercion. Indeed commercialized sex has been utilized in many cases as a way for women to circumvent male control. Ssewakriyanga⁶³ posits that in the sale of sexual services, the prostitute could be said to be resisting patriarchy and one-man control, thus defying stereotypical ideas of power.

Prostitution can be seen as an act of defiance and resistance directed against the social spaces to which women are traditionally confined, a countering of prescribed notions of womanhood and thus a threat to patriarchy. Relegated

62 Available at: www.cityoflove.com.

63 Richard Ssewakriyanga, "Interrogating Sexual Identities and Sex Work: A Study on Constructed Identities among Female Sex Workers in Kampala", in *Gender, Economics and Entitlements in Africa: CODESRIA Gender Series* (Dakar [etc.], 2004), p. 115.

to the fringes of society, prostitutes continuously engage in ways to assert their individuality and rights with clients, pimps, and madams, as well as with society. The ability to do this and the extent to which this is done is dependent on several factors, one of which is socio-economic status. The more educated a sex worker is, the more she is able to negotiate the type of clients she takes and exert more control over her working conditions to mitigate occupational hazards. Meeting clients at neutral places, usually hotel rooms, is one such approach. Those who solicit for clients at bars and clubs often do it in groups, and they tell each other if anyone is going with a client. More importantly, many of the educated clandestine prostitutes have more access to the police.

The question of forced or free prostitution becomes problematic when considered in light of the number of people in the sex industry who are able to exercise choice. In other words, the freedom of "choice" is not so free but can only be exercised by a select few. Poverty can be read as a state of being that robs a prostitute of the right to make an informed choice because of a lack of other choices. This is particularly evident among poor prostitutes practicing in the slums of Lagos. It can also be applied to women who are forced to sell their sexual services to maintain their households, and students who sell sex to pay for their education. Free choice thus remains more elusive for low-ranking prostitutes in Lagos.

Conclusion

With the expanded field of permissible sexual expression and the loosening of societal constraints, young Nigerian women are increasingly employing their bodies as economic tools to gain access to societal resources. This choice has been further enhanced by increased knowledge about reproduction and the use of contraceptives. The Nigerian Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) carried out in 2008 showed that over 50 per cent of women aged 25 to 49 had their first sexual encounters by the age of 18, and about 20 per cent by the age of 15. Knowledge about family planning methods has increased and 70 per cent of women are knowledgeable about family planning.

The female body has become demystified and female agency has been highlighted. However, as I have argued elsewhere,⁶⁴ a woman's choice to trade her body as a marketable product cannot be analysed outside the value society places on female sexuality. It could be argued therefore that prostitution among

64 Mfon Ekpootu, "The Body as a Tool: Negotiating the New Global Order by Female Youths in Nigeria", *National Development Studies*, 5 (2012), pp. 1–17.

women in Nigeria develops out of the symbolic meaning that Nigerian culture assigns to the female being. In tandem with societal conceptions of their sexuality, young women place their sexual demands within these boundaries to elicit male responses. This sexual objectification of the female is discursively produced as the norm and sustained by the sexual domination implicit in media representations of women. Visible in many newsstands across the country are sexually graphic magazines and pornographic videos that can be accessed by young and old alike, and media adverts are projected through sexually coded language. This representation of women as objects of desire goes hand-in-hand with images of the sexy chic woman. Prostitution, whether cloaked as “clubbing” or “campus runs”, thus becomes a means of attaining the “ideal” look. The body therefore becomes an economic tool and a source of capital.⁶⁵

65 Ekpootu, “The Body as a Tool”, p. 1.

Sex Work and Migration: The Case of Tel Aviv and Jaffa, 1918–2010

Deborah Bernstein, Hila Shamir, Nomi Levenkron and Dlila Amir

Introduction

This chapter will examine sex work as it developed and changed in Jaffa and Tel Aviv during the twentieth century. Jaffa and Tel Aviv are located on the Mediterranean coast of what is now the State of Israel. Jaffa is an ancient port town. Tel Aviv was established in 1909 by Jewish residents of Jaffa, as a suburb to the north of Jaffa. By 1921 new Jewish neighborhoods emerged which were granted the status of an autonomous township by the new British colonial rule (the British mandate granted by the League of Nations). Jaffa was a predominantly Arab town with a Jewish minority, while Tel Aviv was an almost exclusively Jewish town which became an independent municipality in 1934. Both Tel Aviv and Jaffa were important urban centres for the national Jewish and national Palestinian communities, respectively. During the war of 1948 and the establishment of the State of Israel, the majority of the Arab population of Jaffa left, fled, or were expelled. Jaffa was then populated mainly by new Jewish immigrants, with a minority of Palestinian Arabs. In 1949 the two towns were united as Tel Aviv/Jaffa.

We argue in this chapter that the case of Israel, as represented by the urban centres of Tel Aviv and Jaffa, is a prime example of the centrality of migration for the formation and shaping of society, and of the link between migration and sex work. We shall attempt to show that sex work has been linked to migration through different associations shaped by the particular features of migration and the state's responses to such movements of people. Indeed that was the case under British colonial rule in Palestine and after the establishment of a sovereign Jewish state in 1948. We begin by briefly presenting the theoretical links between sex work and migration, after which, in the following section, we discuss the different periods and waves of migration to Israel (to Palestine prior to 1948) and their particularities. In the chapter's subsequent sections we elaborate on the connection between these waves of migration and the forms and characteristics of sex work/prostitution.

The close link between migration and sex work has been noted in the sociological and historical literature for several decades. Migration, which has

assumed numerous forms, can result in sex work, and conversely sex work can initiate migration. Three types of associations between migration and sex work are relevant for this chapter. The first is women who migrate, often as part of a large migration wave, and opt for sex work owing to difficulties in making a living in the destination country. An inability to speak the local language, lack of knowledge concerning the formal and informal rules in the destination country, and a lack of skills suitable for the given labour market can lead to short-term involvement in sex work. In some cases, if difficulties are aggravated by various personal and familial conditions, or if individual women find this work to be a preferred option, such involvement has the potential to become long term. The second form is women who move from one place to another specifically to engage in sex work at their new destination. Some of them search independently for new markets and new clients. This can result in women migrating from one country to another, or moving around in their original country from small outlying towns to larger cities, where greater anonymity can be assured. Some women have experienced severe economic hardships which propelled them into sex work in search of real or promised improved economic options, while still others were coerced physically by people on whom they depended. Thirdly, the link between migration/migrants and prostitution is also one of stigmatization. Migrant women are generally prone to stereotyping. As foreigners who can be ethnically different, they are often perceived by the host society as immoral, sexually loose, and/or vulnerable to exploitation. As a result they may be more frequently labelled as sex workers, regardless of the actual circumstances of their lives and occupations. Such stigmatization can have a dual effect: it might create a false impression of the over-representation of specific groups of migrant women among sex workers, and on the other hand it might draw the attention of the police, social workers, and judges, thereby reinforcing both the stigma and women's vulnerability.

Israeli Society, Migration and Sex Work

Israeli society is predominantly Jewish, and since the late nineteenth century it has consisted of immigrants from the large concentrations of Jewish communities in eastern and central Europe, North African and Middle Eastern countries, and later once again from eastern Europe, especially the former Soviet Union (FSU). Over time, second and third generations of earlier immigrants have become an important component of the Jewish population. Prior to 1948 under the British Mandate, the majority of the population was Palestinian Arab, a point to which we shall return. The circumstances surrounding the

recurrent waves of Jewish migration were related to both push and pull factors, predominantly global and local, respectively.

In the first half of the twentieth century (1918–1948) Palestine was under British colonial rule as stipulated by the mandate granted to Britain by the League of Nations following World War I. The country witnessed rapid demographic growth among both the Arab and Jewish populations, with Tel Aviv and Jaffa on the Mediterranean coast being the foci of this development. The main factor affecting Jewish migration to Palestine was worsening conditions for Jewish communities in eastern and central Europe and the closure of the major previous destination, the United States, to Jewish immigration. There were also pull factors, above all the emergence of a well-organized and highly ideological national collective.

Under British colonial rule Tel Aviv was the fastest growing urban centre in the region; it was very much a Europe-style town-cum-city, which eventually developed its own core and periphery.¹ Jaffa was a rapidly growing urban hub of Palestinian Arab society, one of the country's two major ports, and the heart of the Palestinian national movement.²

The development of these two related yet separate urban centres changed drastically with the establishment of the State of Israel and the ensuing war of 1948. The Arab population in much of Palestine dispersed as the result of eviction and/or flight immediately prior to the formal creation of the state and during the ensuing war. Jaffa quickly fell into ruin. From being the urban heart of Arab Palestine ("The Bride of the Sea") it became a run-down appendage of Tel Aviv, inhabited by a small Arab population and a majority of Jews, arrivals who were part of the new large-scale post-state migration. As we shall see, these dramatic developments led to both continuity and change concerning sex work.

The establishment of the State of Israel changed patterns of migration. The state planned and controlled migration, as it was no longer dependent on the colonial government. The state legislated the Law of Return, which granted immigration rights and citizenship to all Jews worldwide. This led to mass Jewish migration, doubling the size of the Jewish population in less than a decade and transforming the balance of Jews and Arabs. While the earlier migration consisted predominantly of Jews from Europe, the new wave of migration in the 1950s and early '60s was composed predominantly of Jews from North Africa and the Middle East. In those early years of statehood, this huge influx

1 Ilan Troen and Maoz Azaryahu (eds), *Tel Aviv, The First Century: Vision, Designs, Actualities* (Indiana, 2011).

2 Mark LeVine, *Overthrowing Geography: Jaffa, Tel Aviv, and the Struggle for Palestine, 1880–1948* (Berkeley, 2005).

created severe hardship for immigrants and for the state, which had to ensure that their basic needs were met. The magnitude of migration, the new arrivals' lack of adequate cultural, educational, and economic resources, and a dearth of accommodation and employment drove many immigrants to the periphery of the existing veteran Israeli Jewish society. This was clearly evident in the case of Tel Aviv. The city remained the social, cultural, and political core of Israeli society, with new peripheries developing on its boundaries, both near and far.

Jewish migration to Israel declined greatly in the 1970s and '80s, decades which were mainly a time of consolidation. By the mid-1960s mass migration had become integrated into a hierarchical structure, often referred to as the "first Israel"—mainly the veteran population of European origin, and the "second Israel"—mainly new immigrants from North Africa and the Middle East. In the 1970s a small wave of migration from the Soviet Union took place, and these migrants were principally Jews who fought to leave the Soviet Union, driven by their ideological Zionist commitment.

A much larger wave arrived two decades later in the 1990s after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and changes in its policy on emigration. This massive influx from the FSU was made up primarily of Jews taking advantage of the Law of Return, but also non-Jews as well. This influx significantly changed the composition of Israeli society, bringing in over one million people predominantly Jewish and of Russian, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, and central Asian origin; it also changed many of the features of sex work, as will be discussed later.

Four main phases of migration can be identified here: pre-state Jewish migration (mostly from Europe and to a lesser extent from the Middle East) during the British mandate; mass migration in the decade and a half after statehood (1948); a steep fall in migration in the 1970s and '80s; and the large-scale migration of the 1990s from the FSU, which included Jewish and non-Jewish migrants. Each of these resulted in sex work and sex workers with varying characteristics.

Before turning to the impact of migration on sex work, we shall briefly note several other factors which were also significant. The first of these is the inequality of women in the Israeli labour market. Despite an image of equality, relatively high rates of labour market participation of women, and progressive anti-discrimination legislation and policies, women generally remain a disadvantaged group in the Israeli labour market. Low wages are especially characteristic of unskilled jobs frequently held by women, and of casual labour which is often the lot of immigrant women regardless of their previous status in their countries of origin. Secondly, as with most wars, Israel's wars impacted the demand for sexual services. While these conflicts did not have major impacts, at least not after the end of World War II and colonial rule, some demand was created by soldiers coming home on leave. Thirdly, state policy, especially in

the early statehood years and later at the beginning of the twenty-first century, was affected by Israel's desire to establish itself globally and win respect in the international arena.

Before discussing each of these four periods and the characteristics of sex work, we would like to draw attention to several features common to all. Throughout the period under study, except partially in the 1990s, we have little concrete, detailed, and substantiated information. It is necessary to carefully piece together newspaper articles, state and NGO reports, court cases, and archival material to be able to note some major trends and shifts. We know even less about the Arab women in the State of Israel.³ Also, in all periods, despite changes in the labour market and women's position within it, the earnings of sex workers have been higher than those of unskilled and often semi-skilled women workers. In the case of upper-class sex work, the pay may be higher than that of most working women of the middle class, perhaps even of the upper middle class.

Finally, a number of methodological points should be raised regarding both our definitions and sources. We can distinguish legal definitions of prostitution from the popular definitions of this occupation that exist in the Jewish and the Arab/Muslim communities. Initially the penal code contained no clear legal definition of prostitution. By implication, the legal understanding of prostitution was the provision of sexual intercourse in return for monetary pay, an act which in itself was in most cases not criminalized. Under the abolitionist approach introduced by the British and later adopted by the Israeli penal code, those who benefitted from a sex worker's income were to be criminalized rather than the sex worker herself. Likewise public soliciting was criminalized as a public disturbance.

Within both Jewish and Muslim (and probably more generally Arab) society there were other definitions which did not cancel out the definition given above.⁴ In the Jewish community, a woman who associated with a man who was foreign to the Jewish collective was often referred to as a "whore" (Hebrew: *zona*), and she did not necessarily have any connections with commercial sex. In the Arab-Muslim community, in our case in Jaffa, the terms prostitute/whore were used even more broadly to refer to women who had sex outside marriage, regardless of monetary returns or any other commercial aspects. Note that "sex

3 The one survey which referred explicitly to Arab sex workers (compiled in 1960) claimed that they comprised only 1 per cent of all sex workers, much below their percentage of the population. Yehuda Rimmerman and Shlomo Shoham, *Seker HaZnut* [*Survey of Prostitution*] (Jerusalem, Ministry of Welfare, Probation Services, 1962), p. 69.

4 Deborah Bernstein, "Gender, Nationalism and Colonial Policy: Prostitution in the Jewish Settlement of Mandate Palestine, 1918–1948", *Women's History Review*, 21 (2012), pp. 81–100.

work” and “sex workers” are not prevalent terms in Israeli discourse whether official, popular, or academic.⁵

Sex Work during the British Mandate Period

In the first half of the twentieth century, sex work in Tel Aviv and Jaffa was affected by the political and social changes taking place. The change from Ottoman to British colonial rule affected the legislation on prostitution. Large-scale Jewish migration resulted in large numbers of immigrants seeking employment and income, and newcomers were finding it difficult to find a place in the existing labour market. The urbanization of Palestinian society resulted in internal migration from rural areas, as well as the development of an urban centre on the seacoast which offered some of the same attractions as Beirut and Alexandria, albeit in a far more humble form. Colonial rule and the national clash between Jews and Arabs in Palestine created recurrent unrest and at times violent confrontation. This in turn brought in a concentration of British imperial forces, which greatly enlarged sex workers' clientele. The demand for commercial sex services was further reinforced by the five years of World War II when Palestine served as the location of numerous military camps and was a destination for troops all across the Middle East when they went on leave.

Jewish sex workers (according to the only comprehensive report for the Tel Aviv area) were mainly new female immigrants⁶ in their twenties or older. They were primarily from eastern and central Europe and had arrived in Palestine in the 1920s and in larger numbers in the '30s. There was a much smaller number of teenage Jewish girls, most of whom were from Middle Eastern and North African immigrant families. Jewish migration to Palestine was strictly controlled. Migration permits were allocated to applicants from European countries. One of the regulations stipulated that people considered to be a danger to the public good, among them those who pursued “radical” (i.e., communist) politics

5 There are few secondary sources, academic or otherwise. Reports about prostitution have been written for and submitted to international organizations, and recently also to the United States. Other reports were initiated by the Knesset or by government ministries. Numerous reports have been written since the 1990s by local and international NGOs. We also made use of the daily press, especially after 1948. Archival sources, mainly the Israel State Archive, include criminal legislation and related debates, court cases, Knesset debates, policy-oriented committees, ministerial correspondences and policy, and attorney-general directives.

6 Report submitted to the Rabbinical Authority in Tel Aviv, 18 April 1945, Tel Aviv Municipal Archive [henceforth TAMA], 8–887.

and prostitutes, were not to be admitted.⁷ Furthermore, the Jewish settlement, with its recurring economic downturns and political unrest, was hardly an attractive place for sex workers (or procurers) seeking out a profitable destination. On the other hand, studies have shown that there were high levels of unemployment among women and they struggled to enter the organized labour market. Neither the colonial state nor the Jewish community could provide adequate social services for families, single parents, or single adults in need, despite some elementary aid provided by Jewish municipal, national, and private institutions.⁸ Jews from Middle Eastern and North African countries were in the lowest socio-economic strata, and girls (as well as boys) often dropped out of school after two or three elementary grades because they were expected to contribute to the family income through domestic service or forms of apprenticeship.⁹ Sex workers were mainly somewhat older women who had difficulty securing an income for themselves and their children, and younger women who preferred to leave highly exploitative domestic work. At the same time, the presence of soldiers and officers who went to Tel Aviv with the money they had saved up for their leave was attractive, offering the “promise” of luxuries in the form of money and gifts.

The Arab women involved in commercial sex, mainly in Jaffa, appear to have had a different history. The reports sent by the colonial administration to the League of Nations indicate that most of the prostitutes were from Lebanon and Syria, where commercial sex was regulated and licensed.¹⁰ The workers in the registered brothels were in some cases local Arab women, and in others they were women from mainly southern Mediterranean countries. The reports from Palestine noted that women who had worked for some time in the registered brothels in countries to the north of Palestine but were no longer considered sufficiently attractive made their way south on their own initiative, usually illegally, to Palestine to continue working in Jaffa (and in Haifa and Jerusalem).¹¹ Other sex workers were women who had left their homes in rural settlements in Palestine or in neighbouring countries owing to domestic strife. There was

7 Henrietta Szold to the National Executive (*Va'ad leumi*), 24 October 1934, Central Zionist Archive, J1/4013.

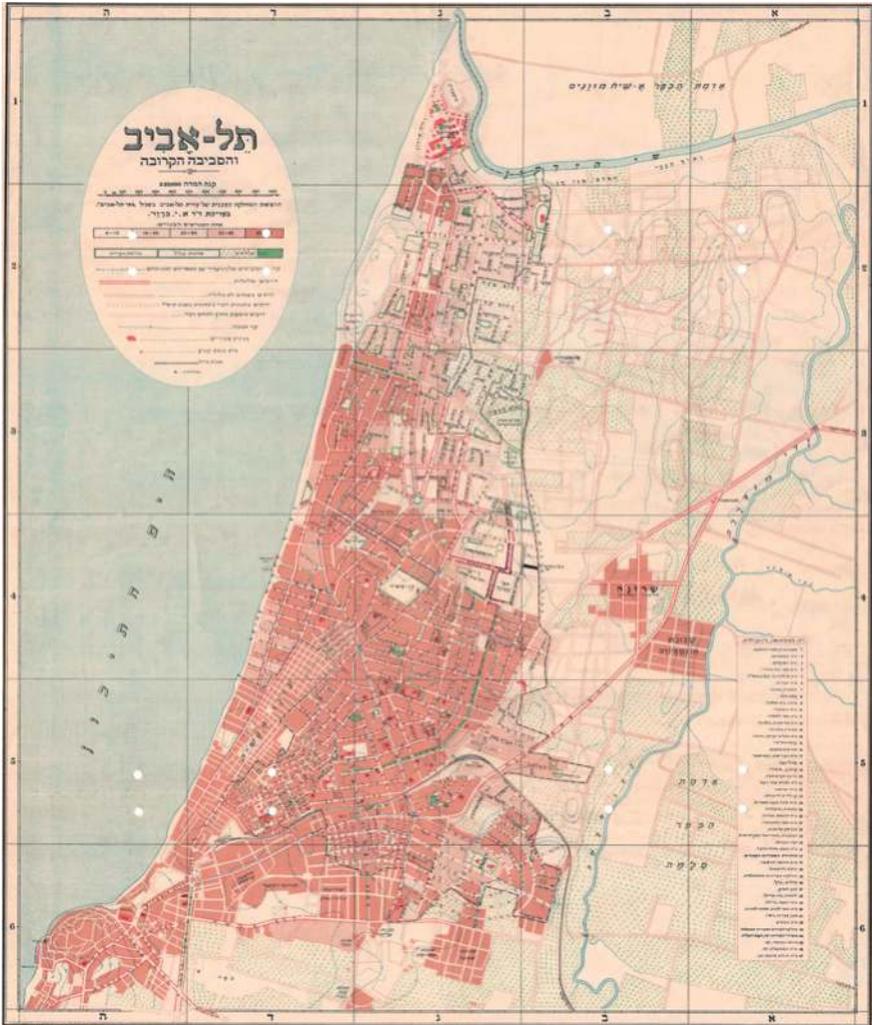
8 Deborah Bernstein, *Nashim BaShula'yim (Women on the Margins)* (Jerusalem, 2008), pp. 115–128.

9 Tammy Razi, *Yaldei HaHefker (Forsaken Children: The Backyard of Mandate Tel Aviv)* (Tel Aviv, 2009), pp. 116–122.

10 Samir Khalaf, *Prostitution in a Changing Society* (Beirut, 1965).

11 Government of Palestine, Chief Secretary's Office, *Report on Traffic in Women and Children for the Calendar Year of 1937* and *Report on Traffic in Women and Children for the Calendar Year of 1942*, Israel State Archive [henceforth ISA], CT/1299/41.

little opportunity for single Arab women to live on their own and provide for themselves, and those with no familial support would turn to commercial sex work (or would be suspected of doing so). Commercial sex was concentrated in a number of areas in the Tel Aviv-Jaffa urban complex, as seen in Map 13.1. Sexual services were sold along the seafront, as is often the case in coastal towns. That was the case in Jaffa at the turn of the century and continued to



MAP 13.1 *Areas of sexual commerce in the Tel Aviv-Jaffa urban complex in the early twentieth century.*

be so according to the reports to the League of Nations.¹² Prostitution was also carried out on the beach of Tel Aviv, which is the northern continuation of the Jaffa coast. Other locales of sold sex were the Herbert Samuel Promenade and nearby alleys, both outdoors and indoors. Yet another location was the boundary between Jewish Tel Aviv and Arab Jaffa, on the margins of both towns.¹³

Sex work was done in a wide range of settings, especially in Tel Aviv. In Jaffa commercial sex was available mainly in brothels, some of which were situated in hotels and cafés. In Tel Aviv, due to women's far greater presence in the public sphere, commercial sex was provided outdoors along the seafront, in brothels (though there appear not to have been many, and those few were closed down owing to community and neighbourhood pressure), in the back rooms of cafés, in women's rented rooms and jointly-rented apartments, and in taxis roaming the streets; prostitutes at this time were mainly in search of soldiers on leave.

It is difficult to determine how independent the sex workers were or if they were part of a hierarchical network that controlled their conditions of work and income. The piecemeal evidence points to both situations. Most Jewish sex workers, especially adult women, seem to have been able to determine their own conditions of work and were not restricted to establishments that kept them against their will. As for monetary arrangements, when work was done in an apartment or a house run or rented by someone else, sex workers received about half the clients' payment. As noted above, wages for sex work were much higher than the wages for other forms of women's work.

Legislation changed with the transition from Ottoman to British rule. Under the former there was no legislation on prostitution or the management of brothels. The British, upon their takeover of Palestine in 1917–18 and the granting of the mandate by the League of Nations in 1923, introduced legislation on sold sex, at first in line with the directives of the League. Later, however, legislation and overall policies on prostitution implemented in the British metropolis were applied in Palestine. In most colonial countries the administration tended to accept the army's demands for regulation and medical supervision of prostitution.¹⁴ In contrast, the Palestine government,

12 *Report on Traffic in Women and Children for the Calendar Year of 1937 and Report on Traffic in Women and Children for the Calendar Year of 1942.*

13 Deborah Bernstein, "Contested Contact: Proximity and Social Control in pre-1948 Jaffa and Tel-Aviv", in Daniel Monterescu and Dan Rabinowitz (eds), *Mixed Cities, Trapped Communities* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 215–242.

14 Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race and Politics* (London, 2003).

following public opinion in Britain, which had rejected previous forms of the state regulation of prostitution for being immoral and contributing to the trafficking of women,¹⁵ rejected registration, compulsory medical examinations, and hospitalization, which would have controlled, but also legitimated, prostitution. Accordingly, in the early years of civil government two ordinances regarding prostitution were passed, the first in 1925 (under High Commissioner Herbert Samuel) and the second in 1927 (under H.C. Herbert Onslow Plumer). Together they amounted to the wholesale introduction of British legislation. Hence the amendments, later included in the new Palestine Penal Code of 1936, contained a range of prohibitions, among them keeping or managing a brothel, living off the earnings of a prostitute, and soliciting in public.¹⁶ In this way, prostitution, if carried out in private by a woman living on her own, was not considered an offence. There are also some indications that during World War II the British army in Palestine was able to regulate and medically supervise a number of brothels for soldiers in Jaffa, while Tel Aviv remained unregulated, and all forms of brothel management and soliciting were illegal.

The communal attitude to prostitution in the nationally-oriented Jewish society in Palestine reflected a broad definition and understanding of the occupation, unlike the more restricted and focused perspective of the penal legislation. In Jewish tradition women were considered the embodiment of personal and social purity. They were the guardians of the family, the basic building block of society, and by extension, at least metaphorically, the guardians of the larger collective. This view was incorporated into the national ideology. The concept of a prostitute, of a woman who sold sex for money, was absorbed into a wider perception of the “promiscuous” woman. Thus, all “boundary-crossing” behaviours were associated with prostitution; women who “crossed boundaries” were thus seen as “whores” whether they were engaged in commercial sex or not. We don’t have adequate information, however, concerning attitudes regarding prostitution in the Palestinian Arab community. Considering the very strong condemnation of Arab women suspected of extra-marital sex, it is quite likely that female prostitutes were likewise condemned. In this context we eschew the term “sex workers” as it is too remote from the discourse of the time and place. The consumption of commercial sex by Arab men was accepted as part of urban leisure.

15 Trevor Fisher, *Prostitution and the Victorians* (New York, 1997), pp. 133–136.

16 Supplement No. 1 to the Palestine Gazette Extraordinary No. 625 of 14 December, 1936, Ch. XVII, “Offences against Morality”.

Sex Work in the Early Years of Israeli Statehood: The 1950s and '60s

The massive waves of Jewish migration that followed the establishment of the sovereign state of Israel brought about changes which affected sex work and workers. The new state experienced severe difficulties in providing employment and accommodation for the newcomers. Most of them lived in transit camps, in temporary accommodations usually erected on the outskirts of veteran Jewish cities and small towns. Many of the men from North African and Middle Eastern countries had worked as craftsmen and traders, while most of the women had not been previously employed. The inability of many men to continue in their role as family providers imposed extra responsibilities on women and caused them great hardship; many of them became the sole or the chief provider. Their distress was exacerbated by the large number of children per family, which was much higher than in Jewish families from European countries. Immigrant women who entered the labour market took on casual, informal work, temporary jobs with low pay and little financial security. They tackled these difficulties in various ways, sex work being one of them. In other words, among sex workers a relatively high proportion of women immigrants could presumably be found who had to fend for themselves, had lost their earlier support systems, and found it very difficult to obtain sufficient employment in the formal or informal labour market in their new location. Thus we conclude that Jewish women immigrated to Israel as part of the large waves of migration of Jewish communities, not in order to work in prostitution. They did so because of the hardship and difficulties faced by female immigrants, and they took advantage of this option either as a preference or because of economic hardship.

The scarcity of information available from that period prevents us from making any assessments regarding the women who turned to sex work in comparison with women who did not. The main source for these years is the Inter-Ministerial report submitted in 1955 to the Ministry of Justice, complemented by articles in the daily press.¹⁷ While the report was not meant for publication, which may add to its credibility, it might well have been affected by the stereotyping of immigrants in general and those from North Africa and the Middle East in particular, who were at times labelled immoral and primitive.¹⁸ The greater visibility of immigrants, concentrated as they were in temporary accommodation and new urban slums, most probably attracted greater attention in the press and among social workers than did veteran sex workers. There are

17 See Ministry of Justice, *Din VeHeshbon Pnimi BeBe'ayat HaZnut (Internal Report Concerning the Problem of Prostitution)* (Jerusalem, 1955).

18 Shlomo Shoham and Giora Rahav, "Social Stigma and Prostitution", *International Annals of Criminology*, 6 (1967), pp. 479–513.

also initial indications that many sex workers in the 1940s abandoned such work, leaving most of it to the new immigrants.

According to the Inter-Ministerial report, the change in the demographic composition of Jewish society in Palestine was reflected, and even highlighted, in sex work. Before 1948 about 90 per cent of the Jewish population was from eastern and central Europe; among Jewish sex workers the proportion was only slightly lower, a point discussed in the previous section. By the mid-1950s, and still more by the early '60s, the composition of the Jewish population had fallen to about 60 per cent from Europe and 40 per cent from North Africa and the Middle East. Among sex workers (as claimed in the Inter-Ministerial report as well as the press), the majority were immigrant women from North Africa and the Middle East, and only a minority were from European countries.¹⁹ The migration of young teenagers, mainly from North Africa without their families, was another route to sex work. The youngsters, both boys and girls, were directed by the state authorities to collective agricultural settlements (*kibbutzim*) where they both studied and worked. Those who found the discipline too strict and missed their home communities left the secure setting of the kibbutz and went to the cities, hoping to fend for themselves. Some of these youngsters became underaged sex workers, sometimes only until their families immigrated to Israel but in other cases for longer periods as well. According to the Inter-Ministerial report, many of the younger sex workers, aged approximately 15 to 17, were from broken families. This may well have been a result of the process of migration, or the difficulty young girls experienced reuniting with their families after having been independent for some time.

The sex workers were from a wide range of family circumstances: married, divorced, widowed, and single, with or without children. Higher-class prostitutes sometimes worked in other professions as well, or went in and out of sex work according to the availability of other options. Those who engaged in lower-class prostitution often had no other sources of income or occupational alternatives. This was the case especially among younger and somewhat older women addicted to drugs. Some of the women and teenagers working in the Tel Aviv/Jaffa area had migrated there from outlying small towns. This again was especially the case with immigrants who had been directed by the state to reside in peripheral settlements and who preferred to move of their own accord to the urban centres in the hope of finding more affluent clientele.

Prostitution in the Tel Aviv and Jaffa area continued to operate as before, along the seafront of both towns and in the adjacent back alleys, but also in some new places (Map 13.2.). While sex work took place both in the open and

19 A similar conclusion was reached by a survey conducted in 1960 (Rimmerman and Shoham, *Seker HaZnut*) even before the end of the large-scale immigration from North Africa.



MAP 13.2 *Other areas where prostitution began to be carried out in Tel Aviv-Jaffa.*

indoors, according to the 1960 survey mentioned above most of it was conducted outside, with brothels accounting for only a small share.²⁰ Soliciting also took place in cafés, as it had under the British mandate, but now cafés and clubs provided various forms of commercial sex, far more than before

20 *Survey of Prostitution*, p. 71.

statehood. Two significant changes impacted Jaffa and the immigrant transit camps. During the 1948 war, which led to the eviction of most of the Palestinian Arabs from the subsequent territory of the State of Israel, Jaffa was left almost in ruins. The town centre became a “no man’s land” where the underworld, both Jewish and Arab, thrived, and there were night clubs and brothels, as well as various other kinds of commercial sex. Only a small Arab population remained in Jaffa, which was now populated by new Jewish immigrants, and we have no data on the relative composition of Arab and Jewish sex work in the town. Newspaper items do indicate that there was some cooperation between Arab men sometimes serving as the pimps of Jewish women and Arab women managing brothels where both Jewish and Arab women were employed.²¹ Furthermore, the immigrant transit camps were a location for the provision and consumption of sex services. There were large camps on the periphery of Tel Aviv, and male procurers brought clients from the nearby city to the sex workers in the camp. Regrettably we do not know whether the women who worked in the transit camps had special characteristics, or whether they continued with this work after moving out of the camps to their permanent settlements.

Many of the women seem to have had pimps rather than working independently. It is impossible to document this point, but from the piecemeal evidence we would make the claim that in the pre-state British mandate period a majority of the women, especially Jewish women, worked on their own. They kept all their income or shared it with the owner of the apartment or brothel. During early statehood the impression we get is that many more women had pimps. When a pimp operated with only one sex worker, he and she were often married.²² At times pimps were a means of protection for the women, especially those working outdoors. Yet they could also be physically coercive, preventing women from leaving sex work or appropriating their income.

State legislation and policy also exhibited continuity together with change. The new state continued with the penal legislation of the former British law. Changes were introduced only in 1962, as will be discussed later on. Yet the new state also had its own specific priorities, one of which was to establish its position in the international arena as a liberal and socially progressive state. Motivated by this goal, the new State of Israel took its most significant step regarding prostitution by signing the 1949 UN Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others. Debates took place mainly in the Knesset and the government ministries

21 *Internal Report Concerning the Problem of Prostitution.*

22 *Survey of Prostitution*, p. 75.

concerning the legislation that should be passed to implement the convention. But there were internal considerations as well.

The veteran leaders of the new state and its Members of Knesset (MKs) hoped to establish what they considered a just society. The exploitation of sex workers—or to keep to their perspective and terminology, the exploitation of prostitutes—was considered the epitome of injustice, especially in the case of young girls. As a left-wing MK said in a debate concerning changes in the penal code in 1961, “Members of Knesset: The soliciting of a woman, especially a young girl of 16 or 17, and then forcing her to prostitute herself and live off the income of her deeds, is, to my mind, the murder of a human’s soul, and I cannot understand why the murder of a soul is any less significant than the murder of the body.”²³ As a result of the international convention of 1949 and a desire to restrict prostitution as much as possible, an amendment was introduced in 1962. Its foremost purpose was to introduce changes to the penal code which would provide for far more severe punishments for anyone, mainly pimps and brothel managers, living off the earnings of sex workers. One clause of the amendment stated: “Holding or managing a place for the purpose of prostitution will be punished by five years’ imprisonment.”²⁴ This clause, probably unintentionally, affected the status of independent sex workers operating alone in their own homes or other places they rented out. According to the Palestine Criminal Code of 1936, still in effect in the State of Israel at the time of the amendment, “managing a place for the purpose of prostitution” referred only to a place where two or more women were engaged in sex work. Omitting this specification made it possible for both the police and courts to treat independent women working on their own as if they were managing a brothel.

Between Migrations: Consolidation in the 1970s and ‘80s

The large waves of migration to the State of Israel after its declaration of sovereignty and independence came to a halt by the middle of the 1960s, only to be renewed on a large scale in the early 1990s. Most of the transit camps had been dismantled, and new settlements, urban and rural, had been established in peripheral areas. These served to accommodate immigrants from North Africa and the Middle East and to a lesser extent from Europe, and to thicken Jewish

23 Nahum Nir Reflex, Knesset assembly, no. 273, 16 May 1961.

24 Quoted in the Report of the Committee for the Study of Prostitution, headed by Judge Hadassa Ben-Ito, in Carmel Shalev (ed.), *Ma'amad HaIsha BaHevra VeBaMishpat (The Status of Women in Society and Law)* (Tel Aviv, 1995), p. 179.

settlements on the long borders of the state. This transition from a large wave of migration in need of immediate provisions to a society with a more stable socio-economic ethnically-based system of stratification characterized the 1970s. It also characterized some of the main features of sex work. According to the Committee for the Study of Prostitution headed by the judge Hadassa Ben-Ito, most sex workers were from the immigrant families of previous decades. These were mainly women in their twenties, although according to the reports of social work and police authorities, there seemed to be an increase in the proportion of teenage girls. While most of the women came from families suffering from economic hardship, which was their lot as immigrants, they seem to have entered sex work voluntarily and not by force. Some lived in small towns on the outskirts of Tel Aviv and others in new more distant settlements that were built for the immigrants. In the latter case, many of the sex workers moved from the periphery to the central large city where they pursued their occupation. By leaving the new immigrant settlements they hoped to increase their anonymity and take advantage of the greater resources and opportunities of the large urban centre.

In Tel Aviv and Jaffa, sex work became more apparent and visible than before. This was due to changes in police surveillance and law enforcement. The legal penal amendment of 1962, discussed above, prohibited women from taking up sex work in their own homes, even when they were living independently on their own. This led to sex work being conducted predominantly in public spaces outdoors. Concomitantly it led to stricter supervision by the police, who recurrently detained women for a few hours or a few days on grounds of soliciting, often in contradiction to the guidelines of the law. By the mid-1970s the middle-class residents of Tel Aviv started voicing their indignation at the prevalence of sex work, and some politicians, among them MK Shoshana Arbeli-Almoznino, called for the regulation and institutionalization of sex work. As a result, in 1975 the government appointed District Judge Ben-Ito to head a committee that would survey the state of sex work and recommend an appropriate policy.

The Ben-Ito Committee recommended a different balance between the implementation of the law and police supervision.²⁵ The committee strongly opposed regulation or institutionalization. It stated that the police had transcended their authority in their frequent arrests. They should, instead, detain clients who had sex with minor sex workers, rather than harass women

25 The Report of the Committee for the Study of Prostitution, headed by Judge Hadassa Ben-Ito, p. 182.

workers who did not cause public disturbances. It was also recommended that health services should be provided by the state free of charge and state welfare services should also create various institutions to help women who wished to quit sex work. Finally, the Ben-Ito Committee recommended a return to a more tolerant approach, whereby law enforcement authorities would overlook cases of women working independently so long as they were not coerced and did not cause a breach of the peace. Few of these recommendations were put into practice. According to Ben-Ito in her autobiography, the committee's recommendations were never implemented and remained a dead letter, as often happened with the suggestions of state-appointed committees.²⁶

The interim period between the large migration of the early decades of the state and the later migration of the 1990s was coming to an end. This time, sex work was directly shaped by migration from the FSU.

From the 1990s Onwards

From the mid-1990s to the late 2000s migration from the FSU brought about a new and clearly visible distinction in the Israel sex industry between Israeli citizens and non-citizens (whether undocumented migrants or trafficked persons). During these two decades, two distinct migration waves reached Israel from the FSU and they affected the Israeli sex industry. The first was a large-scale migration of Jews, who under the Law of Return were granted immediate citizenship. Among them were women who were sex workers. Because the morality of immigrating women in general was deemed suspect, or owing to the higher proportion of women from the FSU in the Israeli sex industry, women from that region were often perceived as “prostitutes” regardless of their employment or way of life.²⁷ The second wave was predominantly of non-Jewish women who did not obtain Israel citizenship and had migrated to Israel to work in the sex industry. Some of these women migrated intentionally, some were smuggled, and others were “trafficked”. It is estimated that each year from 1995 to 2006, 3,000 women entered Israel illegally; some of them were trafficked from FSU countries (Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine) to work in Israel's

26 Hadassa Ben-Ito, *Pninim Vrudot MeShenghai (Pink Pearls from Shanghai)* (Tel Aviv, 2008), pp. 230–235.

27 Deborah Golden, “A National Cautionary Tale: Russian Women Newcomers to Israel Portrayed”, *Nations and Nationalism*, 9 (2003), pp. 83–104.

sex industry.²⁸ Many of the labour migrants incurred large debts in order to travel to Israel, making them particularly vulnerable to exploitation and debt bondage.

These migrations from the FSU transformed the Israeli sex industry. There is disagreement about how many of the women who entered Israel illegally were migrant sex workers and how many were victims of trafficking. Under Israeli law, trafficking is defined as the “selling or purchasing of a person or conducting other transactions via a person, with or without consideration.” Trafficking was recognized as a crime in 2001, first only in relation to prostitution and in 2006 in relation to other end purposes, including forced labour, slavery, organ harvesting, and more.²⁹ For the purpose of this article we assume that while some women were indeed trafficked into the Israeli sex industry, or trafficked once in Israel—namely bought and sold between brothels, as NGO reports and court opinions suggest—others were migrants in search of work. We therefore use both terms—migrant sex workers and trafficked women—to describe non-Israeli workers in the Israeli sex industry in those years.

These women entered the country mostly as tourists and overstayed their visas, or entered with false documents, posing as Jewish immigrants. As awareness of sex trafficking increased in the early 2000s, border controls were tightened, and young women arriving from the FSU became subject to suspicion. As a result, migration routes changed, and women were mostly smuggled or trafficked through a third country, mainly across the Egyptian border on the fringes of the Sinai desert. This route usually involved walking long distances in the relentless desert sun with few supplies, and often entailed rape and violence.³⁰

In this period, migrant sex workers and trafficked women replaced Israeli workers in the sex sector and enlarged it. Hardly any research has been done on the scope and nature of prostitution by Israeli workers in these years. Therefore there is no definite answer to the question of what Israeli sex workers did when the industry was flooded by migrants, and how migration influenced the

28 Nomi Levenkron and Yossi Dahan, *Isha Overet LaSoher (Women as Commodities)* (Tel Aviv, 2003), p. 19.

29 Hok LeMeni'at Sahar BiVnei Adam (Tikunei Hakika) (Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (Legislative Amendments) Law), 5766–2006, SH no. 2067 p. 2 (Isr.); *Hok HaOnshin (Penal Code) 5737–1977*, SH no. 2067 p. 2, 377A (Isr.).

30 Ministry of Public Security, *Din VeHeshbon Shel HaTsevet HaBein-Misradi LaPe'ulot SheNe'esu BeTguva LeShinuy Dfusei HaSahar BeNashim LeMatrut Znut VeAverot Nilvot (Report of the Inter-Ministerial Team on the Actions to be Taken in Response to Changing Patterns in Human Trafficking for the Purpose of Prostitution and Related Crimes)* (Jerusalem: Ministry of Public Security, 2010), p. 3.

market; but it was clear at the time that an overwhelmingly high percentage of all sex work in Israel was conducted by migrant sex workers from the FSU, some of whom were victims of trafficking.³¹ Owing to successful enforcement of anti-trafficking laws, police raids on brothels, deportations, and repatriation, the number of non-Jewish sex workers declined from the mid-2000s onward. Following the removal of migrant sex workers and victims of trafficking from the Israel sex industry, most sex workers were, once again, Israeli citizens of diverse ethnic origin, many of them, as already noted, Jewish immigrants from the FSU.³²

Most of our information about non-Jewish sex workers and their working conditions was obtained by Israeli NGOs through interviews. Their content suggests that the women came to Israel to improve their and their families' economic situation. A minority arrived in Israel not knowing they would provide sexual services, and did so under coercion and because of their dependence on their traffickers and employers. Others, possibly the majority, came to Israel knowing they would engage in sex work, but many of them were put to work under extremely coercive and exploitative conditions, that is, they were subjected to human trafficking according to Israeli law. Some migrant sex workers had previously worked in prostitution, some had been unemployed, and others had worked in middle- to low-range typically female occupations. In their countries of origin they had been promised earnings from sex work in Israel that was at least twenty times higher than their earnings at home.³³

As far as we can tell from the few systematic surveys of women who had been detained prior to deportation, the average education level of non-Jewish migrant sex workers was eleven years of schooling; approximately one quarter were university students or had already completed their studies. There was a small number of minors, but the majority were women in their twenties, mostly single with no children.

31 Levenkron and Dahan, *Women as Commodities*, pp. 26–30.

32 Menachem Amir, a specialist in organized crime in Israel, estimated that 70 per cent of the women involved in prostitution in Tel-Aviv were from former Soviet republics; see Martina Vandenberg, *Havrahah Nashim LeYisrael VeZnut Bekfiya: Din VeHeshbon Shdulat HaNashim BeYisrael (Trafficking of Women into Israel and Forced Prostitution: Report of The Israel Women's Network)* (Tel Aviv, 1997).

33 Hana Safran and Rita Haikin, "Bein Sahar BeNashim LeZnut: Gilgulo Shel Ma'avak Hevra-ti" ("Between Trafficking in Women and Prostitution: The Evolution of a Social Struggle"), in Esther Herzog and Erella Shadmi (eds), *Basar VeDamim: Znut, Sahar BeNashim VePornographia BeYisrael (Blood Money: Prostitution, Trafficking in Women and Pornography in Israel)* (Haifa, 2013), pp. 237–238.

NGO reports from the early 2000s suggest that the working conditions of at least some of the migrant women who entered Israel were harsh. They were bought and sold, and moved from one brothel to another; their travel documents were taken from them, they incurred huge debts, and they had little or no control over the number of clients they were forced to receive. Some were imprisoned in brothels or apartments, and were victims of frequent rape, violence, and death threats to themselves and their families by traffickers, pimps, and clients. A minority of women received no pay for their work; most received little pay, and some managed to earn a satisfactory living.

In contrast to the abundant reports about migrant sex workers and victims of trafficking, little is known about the characteristics of Israeli sex workers during these years. In the 1990s, as in the earlier periods, most Israeli sex workers apparently chose this occupation. Some did so on account of the few labour market alternatives, while others did so in spite of the fact that they had other alternatives available. Yet others might have been drug addicts and chose sex work to support their addiction. Our general impression is that many Israeli sex workers, especially those who operated outdoors, did not hold any other steady jobs.

While most migrant sex workers worked in brothels, the anti-trafficking campaign of the 2000s resulted in the closure of most well-known brothels and there was a transition to “discreet apartments” scattered in all parts of the town, as well as strip clubs and hotels.³⁴ At present, there is disagreement as to the level of involvement of pimps in the industry. The police claim that following the eradication of sex trafficking most sex workers now work independently and violence is relatively rare. Feminist NGOs, on the other hand, argue that violence is endemic to the sex industry, and now new more sophisticated and perhaps subtler forms of pimping are at work.³⁵

Despite the abolitionist stance in the Penal Code, before public awareness of sex trafficking increased, prostitution in Israel was widely tolerated.³⁶ The main indication of this attitude was the Attorney General’s directive “Investigation and Prosecution Policy in Offences of Prostitution and Trafficking in Persons for the Purpose of Prostitution”.³⁷ The directive asserted that the

34 Levenkron and Dahan, *Women as Commodities*, pp. 12, 20–21, 26–30.

35 Ministry of Public Security, *Changing Patterns Report*, p. 16.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 19.

37 Hila Shamir, “Gishot Feministiyot LaRegulatsia Shel HaZnut: Mabat Ohed Al Hapa’ar SheBein HaMishpat Alei Sefer LaMishpat BiF’uula” (“Feminist Approaches to the Regulation of Sex Work in Israel: A Sympathetic Reading of the Gap between Law on the Books and Law in Action”), in Yishai Blank, David Levi-Faur and Roy Krietner (eds), *Regulatsiot (Regulations)* (Tel Aviv, forthcoming 2016).

police should not investigate “regular” prostitution unless there was suspicion of aggravating circumstances. The latter, according to the directive, included trafficking, underage prostitution, drugs, involvement of known criminal actors, or neighbourhood disturbances. All other forms of prostitution were therefore tolerated—in the sense that the criminal law was not enforced in relation to them—even if it wasn’t fully legalized. Various other state institutions also broadly tolerated sex work. The Labour Court issued rulings granting sex workers full workers’ rights despite claims that under Israeli Criminal Law their contracts of employment violated public policy and therefore should not be enforced. In a similar vein, other institutions also acknowledged sex work as a form of employment, both to sex workers’ benefit and detriment; for example, the Tax Authority regularly collected taxes from sex workers, viewing sex work as a legitimate source of income, and the National Insurance Institute, which granted sex workers their rights as workers while also denying them social security benefits on account of the fact that they made their money from sex.³⁸ Another indication of the high level of tolerance was the existence of distinct urban areas where unofficial “red-light” districts existed, which aside from occasional random raids were generally left undisturbed.

This contradictory yet tolerant approach changed somewhat—but was not wholly abandoned—with the growth of international and national awareness of human trafficking generated by the international Anti-Trafficking Protocol (the Palermo Protocol 2001) and the passage of US legislation, “The Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000” (TVPA). The TVPA authorized an annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report which categorizes countries’ efforts into one of three tiers of compliance: countries fully complying with the minimum standards (tier one); countries that are not yet fully complying with these standards but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance (tier two); and countries that do not fully comply with the minimum standards and are not taking any significant steps to comply (tier three). A country that receives a noncomplying assessment (tier three) risks the withholding of financial assistance from the United States which is not humanitarian or trade-related, as well as American opposition to the same assistance from the International Monetary Fund and multilateral development banks. In the 2001 US TIP report, Israel was placed in tier three.³⁹ Taking to

38 *Medini'yut Ha'Akhifa BeAverot HaNilvot La'Isuk BeZnut, Hanhayot Praklit HaMedina 2.2 (Enforcement Policy in Offences of Prostitution and Trafficking in Persons for the Purpose of Prostitution, 2.2 Attorney General)* (amended 2012) (Isr.).

39 *Va'adat HaHakira HaParlamentarit LaMa'avak BaSahar BeNashim: Din VeHeshbon Mesakem (The Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry on the Subject of Trafficking in Women: Final Report)* (Jerusalem: The Knesset, 2005); Gilad Natan, *Siyu'aa HaRashuyot LeKorbanot*

heart the economic consequences, the Israeli government began to treat trafficking more seriously. These efforts bore fruit: in the 2002 report Israel was placed on the second tier, and in 2012 it was upgraded to the desired first tier.⁴⁰

Still, as early as 2000, when it became clear that Israel would fare poorly in the US TIP report, Israeli legislators criminalized the trafficking in women.⁴¹ The amendment continued the abolitionist approach of the Israeli Penal Code and did not require that women consent to migrate for the purpose of sex work, on the assumption that all migrant sex workers were a priori victims of trafficking. The amendment was heavily criticized by NGOs as being too narrow in that it dealt only with trafficking for purposes of prostitution and was concerned with the punishment of the traffickers alone, and not with the rights of victims.

As noted above, in the following years, and owing to the relentless work of Israel NGOs backed by the US threat embodied in the TVPA, Israel established an elaborate anti-trafficking policy, one aspect of which was a victim-centred approach. This included the establishment of a rehabilitative shelter for women victims of trafficking, legal aid funded by the state, and the receipt of visas and work permits—at first in exchange for testimony for the prosecution against traffickers but later without this proviso.⁴²

In recent years, since about 2006, intense enforcement of anti-trafficking laws and strict migration measures have led to general agreement among the authorities and civil society that the migration and trafficking of non-Israeli women into the Israeli sex industry has practically ceased to exist.

During these recent years, policy developments occurred in relation to Israeli sex workers as well, some positive and some negative. A positive development is the growing attention paid to their plight by both civil society organizations and the Ministry of Social Services. One outcome has been the establishment of two rehabilitation frameworks for women who want to leave the sex industry. On the negative side, increased police enforcement has led to higher levels of police violence and harassment against sex workers, and to greater surveillance of sex workers operating without pimps, resulting in

Sahar BiVnei Adam Bet'humei HaRevaha VeHaBri'ut (Authorities' Assistance to Victims of Human Trafficking in Welfare and Health) (Jerusalem, 2009).

40 Office of the Under Secretary for Global Affairs, US Dept. of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report* (2001), p. 88.

41 Office of the Under Secretary for Global Affairs, US Dept. of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report* (2002), p. 63; Office of the Under Secretary for Global Affairs, US Dept. of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report* (2012), pp. 194–195.

42 *Hok HaOnshin (Penal Code)* 203A–D (Amendment no. 56), 5760–2000, 1746 S.H. 226 (2000) (Isr.).

public shaming and difficulty in making a living.⁴³ Another policy change looming over the Israeli sex industry is an End Demand Bill, which seeks to criminalize clients who purchase sex services. The bill was proposed in 2008 but to date has not been enacted.⁴⁴

In response to the new circumstances, Israeli sex workers have begun organizing once again after earlier attempts to do so failed. In 2013 a group of sex workers established the Association for the Regulation of Sex Work. Their representatives have begun writing op-eds, giving press interviews, and attending sessions of the appropriate Knesset committee, all in an attempt to present an alternative position to the End Demand Bill.⁴⁵ It remains to be seen whether the voices of sex workers themselves will be heard in a political arena overcrowded with feminist organizations who claim to speak on their behalf.

Concluding Comments

Our case study as set forth in this chapter has indicated that there are three major issues concerning migration for sex work in Palestine/Israel. The first is sex work as a response to problems in the receiving country and community, which drove migrants to engage in sex work upon arrival. This, we have argued, was the major feature in Palestine/Israel until the 1990s. The second association is migration for the specific purpose of sex work, characteristic mainly since the 1990s. The third is the stigmatization of migrant women, as they are thought of as working in prostitution, and more generally as guilty of engaging in immoral sexual behaviour, whether they are or not. Such stigmatization, which due to a lack of space we have not adequately elaborated upon, is characteristic of Jewish and Arab communities alike, past and present.

Some final comments are called for concerning common trends. The various sources used in our study for the colonial period and after the founding

43 Dafna Hacker and Orna Cohen, *Research Report: The Shelters in Israel for Survivors of Human Trafficking* (submitted to the US Department of State, 2012); Maria Rabinovitz, *Skirat Pe'ilut Medinat Yisrael BeT'hum HaMa'avak BaSahar BiVnei Adam: HaTipul BeTofa'at HaSahar BeNashim* (Survey of the Actions Taken by Israel to Combat Human Trafficking: Dealing with Trafficking in Women) (Jerusalem, Knesset Research and Information Center, 2013), pp. 55–57.

44 Nomi Levenkron, "Ma La LaStudentit LeMishpatim BeVeit Zonot?" ("What is a Law Student Doing in a Brothel?"), *Hamishpat*, 17 (2013), pp. 161–208, 190, 198.

45 Hatsa'at Hok: Isur Tsrikhat Znut VeTipul BaKehila (Tikunei Hakika) (Draft Bill: Prohibition of Consumption of Prostitution Services and Community Treatment (Legislative Amendments)) (No. 1), 2013 HH 1, 1(Isr.).

of the Israeli state indicate that most women, Jewish as well as Arab, were not forced into sex work by others. In many cases economic and social hardship characterized the women's lives, although we have no way of identifying which of the many women who experienced hardship, through migration or otherwise, chose to engage in sex work and which adopted other means to contend with such difficulties. Also, during the various periods under discussion, in Tel Aviv and Jaffa, as in many other places, most women in the sex industry earned significantly more than they could doing other work, unskilled or even skilled. This factor may be a consideration for entering sex work. Still more, it may deter those contemplating exiting such work from actually taking this step. Thus we conclude that most women were not forcibly coerced into sex work. Nevertheless, we suggest that the distinction between physical coercion and choice is often, perhaps usually, blurred. Economic hardship, being the sole provider for one's family, collapse of support systems, and at times a history of domestic violence and addiction may all make women opt for sex work. Many of these phenomena may be initiated or exacerbated by migration, as we have tried to demonstrate in the case of Israel, focusing on the urban centres of Tel Aviv and Jaffa.

Official policy during the British mandate period and later in the Israeli state was broadly similar. Open and direct regulation of prostitution was clearly avoided, but so was de facto prohibition. The major orientation of legislation, and even more so of enforcement agencies, was toleration of the existence of prostitution, while focusing legal criminalization on those who directly benefitted financially from the sex worker's income and on public disturbances. Issues of "disturbances" placed a wide range of law enforcement regulations at the disposal of the police and the courts. From time to time there have been proposals and debates about the possibility of regulation, the prohibition of prostitution, or the criminalization of clients, but to date nothing has come of them.

However, law and order were and are only one aspect of social reactions to prostitution. Historically, society was on the whole far less forgiving. The stigmatization of sex workers was often linked to a much more general and encompassing stigmatization of immigrant women, regardless of their work or source of income. The morality and sexual behaviour of women coming from elsewhere were often suspect, as were women deemed to have crossed normative social and collective boundaries, regardless of the nature and grounds of such crossings. Thus the derogatory popular terms commonly used—the Hebrew *prutsa*, literally "without boundary", and *mufkeret*, "wanton" and "reckless", or the coarse Arabic *sharmuta*, "slut", "loose woman"—created a category of women that was sexually immoral and a threat to the basic patriarchal

order, regardless of whether they actually engaged in commercial sex or not. This vulgar rhetoric, stigmas, and denunciations held true for both the Jewish society of Tel Aviv and the predominantly Arab society of Jaffa. We should point out that the terms “sex worker” and “sex work” have not been used in policy debates, in popular speech (Hebrew or Arabic), or in feminist discourses in Israel. The term commonly used in policy debates is “prostitutes”, and in feminist circles “prostituted women” or more recently “victims of trafficking in women”. The use of these terms in this paper enabled us to study much about “sex work” in Israel, but in a rhetoric that is foreign to the societies discussed.

SECTION 3

The Americas



A Social History of Prostitution in Buenos Aires

Cristiana Schettini

Historiography, Methodology, and Sources

Established in 1580 as a minor commercial and administrative Spanish settlement, the city of Buenos Aires began to experience a certain amount of economic and political development in the eighteenth century. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, it became the centre for the demand for autonomy from Spain, which was finally obtained in 1816. Its population grew from 14,000 in 1750 to 25,000 in 1780, and to 40,000 by the end of the century. In 1880, after decades of political instability, the city was federalized, thereby concentrating the political power of the Argentine Republic. From then on, massive influxes of Europeans changed the city's demographics, paving the way for its transformation into a major world port and metropolis with a population of 1,300,000 by 1910 and around 3,000,000 as the twentieth century wore on.

The study of prostitution in Buenos Aires has attracted the attention of researchers from various fields such as social history and cultural and literary studies, and more recently urban history and the social sciences, especially anthropology. Although the topic has been addressed in its symbolic dimension, much less attention has been devoted to the social organization of the sex trade, its changes, the social profiles of prostitutes, and their relationships with other types of workers and social groups. Similarly, the importance granted to the period of the municipal regulation of prostitution (1875–1936) and to stories about the trafficking of European women stands in stark contrast to the scarcity of studies on the long period since 1936, especially as regards issues aside from public policies implemented to fight venereal diseases. In the last decade, the unionization of prostitutes and the reappearance of narratives about trafficked women in public debates have captured the interest of social scientists.

The centrality of prostitution in popular culture and public debates about the nation in Buenos Aires at the end of the nineteenth century were major factors that may explain the profusion of historical research about the period

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of municipal regulation. In fact, throughout the first half of the twentieth century prostitution was intrinsically linked to various aspects of public debates about national cultural identity that were taking place in Buenos Aires. Prostitutes occupied an important role in national literature and theatre plays; they were part of popular sociability and took centre stage in stories about broken hearts, as told through the lyrics of tangos.¹ Narratives about the white slave trade, particularly those identifying Buenos Aires as one of the main receiving centres of European prostitutes at the turn of the twentieth century, were also widespread in literature, plays, and films.

While in some European cities narratives of this kind served as a morality tale for young female migrants going to the Americas and gave voice to the gendered social fears of diverse European reformist and nationalist groups, such stories took on particular connotations in Buenos Aires, a city undergoing a process of rapid urbanization at that time and an important port of arrival for European immigration starting in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

References to prostitutes, particularly foreign ones, fulfilled a range of discursive purposes in turn-of-the-century Buenos Aires. In essence, they strengthened the link between female honour and national honour; the symbolic centrality of foreign prostitutes from this period onwards, combined with their notorious over-representation in the municipal regulation registers, generated a debate in which domestic prostitutes were relegated to the background. In literature, Argentinian women generally were not involved in prostitution; rather, they were ascribed values of authenticity and purity, and were tasked with facing the challenges of modernity, such as consumerism, fashion, and presence in the public space.² The negative—or at the very least, ambiguous—connotations of social changes at the turn of the twentieth century were therefore focused on the foreign prostitute, a figure that enabled writers to elaborate

1 Domingo Casadevall, *El Tema de la mala vida en el teatro nacional* (Buenos Aires, 1970); José Sebastián Tallón, *El Tango en sus etapas de música prohibida* (Buenos Aires, 1959); Sirena Pellarolo, *Sainetes, cabaret, minas y tangos* (Buenos Aires, 2010). For an analysis of photographs of male sociability in an Argentinian brothel, see Dora Barrancos, "Sexo-s en el lupanar: Un documento fotográfico (circa 1940)", *Cadernos Pagu*, 25 (2005), pp. 357–390. See also Pablo Ben, "Plebeyan Masculinity and Sexual Comedy in Buenos Aires, 1880–1930", *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 16 (2007), pp. 436–458.

2 Donna Guy, *El Sexo peligroso: La prostitución legal en Buenos Aires 1875–1955* (Buenos Aires, 1994); Francine Masiello, *Entre civilización y barbarie: Mujer, nación y cultura literaria en la Argentina moderna* (Rosario, 1997). For the changes that occurred in the 1920s, see Cecilia Toussounian, "Images of the Modern Girl: From the Flapper to the Joven Moderna (Buenos Aires, 1920–1940)", *Forum for Inter American Research*, 6 (2013), available at: <http://interamericaonline.org/volume-6-2/toussounian/#more-35>; last accessed 7 July 2017.

on tensions arising from the commercialization of social relationships. From a local perspective, the (foreign) prostitute embodied the effects of money circulation and of the “otherness” that was invading Argentina.³

At the same time, hygienist physicians saw prostitutes as part of their wider interest in “marginality”. Such interest was evidenced by their obsession with observing different subjects who, in their minds at least, represented the dangers of disorder resulting from the growing cultural heterogeneity that characterized the city in those years.⁴

The most significant historiographical research about the period of regulated prostitution in Buenos Aires (1875–1936) was written by Donna Guy, a North American historian, and it was published in 1991. Her time frame partly overlaps with the period of consolidation of the nation-state (1880–1910), a time characterized by economic growth, the mass immigration of European workers, and the establishment of a national plan of organization following the long period of instability that had characterized most of the nineteenth century. This period has come to be seen as a foundational time in the history of a modern, prosperous, and cosmopolitan Argentina, and it has also been seen as indicative of its contradictions, social tensions, and authoritarian practices. The policies that were implemented to control the sex trade can also be included under this heading. Thus, it is commonplace in the diverse literary and historiographical productions on the subject to find reiterations of rapid urban changes, massive European immigration, and the high number of men among immigrants as factors that drove prostitution.⁵

Influenced by Foucauldian and gender-based approaches to social history, Guy sought to study prostitution in connection with debates about definitions of family, nation, and citizenship.⁶ Among the wide variety of primary sources she used, Guy privileged the contributions of politically active professional men and women to public debates about the regulation of prostitution and their

3 Masiello, *Entre civilización y barbarie*, pp. 156–157.

4 Guy, *El Sexo Peligroso*, pp. 104–137; for more on contemporary scientific thinking about criminals (and prostitutes), see Lila Caimari, *Apenas un delincuente: Crimen, castigo y cultura en la Argentina, 1880–1955* (Buenos Aires, 2004), pp. 75–99.

5 Ernesto Godar, *La “Mala Vida”* (Buenos Aires, 1971); Guy, *El Sexo peligroso*; Yvette Trochon, *La Ruta de Eros* (Montevideo, 2006). For a global perspective, see Pablo Ben, “Historia global y prostitución porteña: El fenómeno de la prostitución moderna en Buenos Aires, 1880–1930”, *Revista de Estudios Marítimos*, 5/6 (2012/2013), pp. 13–26. Also see Lex Heerma van Voss, “The Worst Class of Workers: Migration, Labour Relations and Living Strategies of Prostitutes around 1900”, in Marcel van der Linden and Leo Lucassen (eds), *Working on Labor: Essays in Honor of Jan Lucassen* (Leiden, 2012), pp. 153–170, 162.

6 Guy, *El Sexo peligroso*, p. 11.

effects in terms of the definition of the limitations of citizenship. Her research underpins a large part of what is now known about the social organization of the sex trade in Buenos Aires. In particular, it has shed light on the disputes that occurred between the municipal authorities, police, and doctors about the social control of the sex trade, as well as on the local meanings of the global dissemination of stories about the trafficking of women. Attention was especially paid to the overrepresentation in the contemporary official and literary registers of European women, particularly Jewish women, in stark contrast to the significant and enduring silence about native prostitutes.

Recent debates about the unionization of prostitutes attracted the attention of scholars in the social sciences. In the last few years, several scholars have focused on the meanings and implications of the Argentinean Female Sex Workers Organization, AMMAR (*Asociación de Mujeres Meretrices de la Argentina*), and they have studied its trajectory, relationships with other workers' organizations, and its fight for the derogation of Article 81 of the Code of Contraventions (*Código Contravencional/Código de Convivencia Urbana*), in addition to the political identity of its members and its conflicts and divisions.⁷ Thus, the period of regulation (1875–1936) and the period initiated in 1994 have received the most attention, leaving the majority of the twentieth century understudied.

The period that opens with Law 12.331 (1936), which abolished regulated prostitution nationwide, has been relatively understudied with regard to the dynamics of the sex trade. The implications of the law itself, especially in the medical debates, have, however, been the subject of a few studies.⁸ The scarce

7 Mario Pecheny and Mónica Petracci, "Derechos humanos y sexualidad en la Argentina", *Horizontes Antropológicos*, 12 (2006), pp. 43–69; Carolina Von Lurzer, "Putas, el estigma: aproximación a las representaciones y organización de las mujeres que ejercen la prostitución en la ciudad de Buenos Aires", *Question*, 1 (2006), available at: <http://perio.unlp.edu.ar/ojs/index.php/question/article/view/295/232>; last accessed 10 July 2017; Silvana Gurrera and Juan Pablo Ferrero, "Prostitución, búsqueda de reconocimiento y reivindicación de derechos en la Ciudad de Buenos Aires", in Gabriela Delamata (ed.), *Movimientos sociales: ¿Nuevas ciudadanías? Reclamos, derechos, estado en Argentina, Bolivia y Brasil* (Buenos Aires, 2009), pp. 85–108; Kate Hardy, "Incorporating Sex Workers into the Argentine Labor Movement", *International Labour and Working Class History*, 77 (2010), pp. 89–108.

8 On the law of social prophylaxis, see, among others, Carolina Biernat, "Médicos, especialistas, políticos y funcionarios en la organización centralizada de la profilaxis de las enfermedades venéreas en la Argentina (1930–1954)", *Anuario de Estudios Americanos*, 64 (2007), pp. 257–288; Marisa Miranda, "Buenos Aires, entre Eros y Tánatos: La prostitución como amenaza disgénica (1930–1955)", *Dynamis* 32 (2012), pp. 93–113, available at: <http://www.raco.cat/index.php/Dynamis/article/viewFile/257776/344970>; last accessed 7 July 2017; Karin Grammatico,

available references suggest that from that moment on a long period began in which prostitution came under police control within an abolitionist framework.⁹ Backed up by the code of contraventions and police edicts (*Código de Faltas y Edictos Contravencionales*), the police acted in order to create a sphere of legitimacy for moralizing measures in public spaces, which coexisted with a more or less veiled acceptance of cabarets, night clubs, and hotels that rent out rooms by the hour.¹⁰

In the mid-twentieth century, the moralizing police campaign and periodic raids not only affected prostitutes but eventually cast vast sectors of the young “porteño” citizens and a variety of groups of women under broad moral suspicion.¹¹ The more recent historiographical work that has looked into the impacts of sexuality on definitions of social identities since the mid-twentieth century has contributed to our understandings of those times. With an emphasis on the middle social sectors and specifically on the young, these works indicate the forms and movements of a mass consumer market, its relationship with the expansion of new gendered spheres of sociability, the circulation

“Obreras, prostitutas, y mal venéreo: El Estado en busca de la profilaxis”, in Valeria Pita *et al.*, *Historia de las mujeres en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 2000), pp. 116–135. See also Maria Luisa Mugica, *La ciudad de las Venus Impudicas: Rosario, historia y prostitución, 1874–1932* (Rosario, 2014).

9 There was a brief interruption at the end of the second Peronist government when prostitution was regulated again in 1954 within the context of an increasing conflict with the Catholic Church. Guy, *El Sexo peligroso*, pp. 213–239.

10 This picture also appears to be pertinent for the city of Rosario, a port near Buenos Aires that had regulated prostitution two years before the capital city (1873) and had abolished it in 1932, four years before the rest of Argentina. In the debates about the social prophylaxis law of Rosario, there was fear that the new legal framework would grant the police too much power and warnings were made about the risks of bribery. Mugica, *La ciudad de las Venus*. One of the few studies on the activities of the paramilitary organization “Triple A” in systematically persecuting prostitutes in the city of Mendoza in the 1970s was carried out by Laura Rodríguez Agüero, “Mujeres en situación de prostitución como blanco del accionar represivo: El caso del Comando Moralizador Pío XII, Mendoza, 1974–1976”, in Andrea Andujar *et al.*, *De Minifaldas, militancias y revoluciones* (Buenos Aires, 2009), pp. 109–126. See also Santiago Morcillo and Carolina Justo Von Lurzer, “Mujeres públicas y sexo clandestino: Ambigüedades sobre la normativa legal sobre la prostitución en la Argentina”, in Daniel Jones *et al.*, *La producción de la sexualidad: Políticas y regulaciones sexuales en Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 2012), pp. 89–121, 190–192.

11 Andrés Carretero, *Prostitución en Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires, 1998), pp. 182–200; Valeria Manzano, “Sexualizing Youth: Morality Campaigns and Representations of Youth in Early 1960s Buenos Aires”, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 14 (2005), pp. 433–461.

of new ideas and life styles, and the standards of respectability that involved variations of sexual relationships, couples, and intimacy.¹²

Andrés Carretero, a traditional historian of prostitution, studied police actions regarding meeting places such as bars, artistic spaces like the Di Tella Institute, long-haired young men, and women in miniskirts by looking through police documents dating from the 1960s. More recently, Valeria Manzano found scattered references to the dangers of the traffic in women in the same period which in her interpretation may have served to express moral fears about young women leaving their homes or acting against paternal and maternal mandates.¹³ The shift in focus from prostitution to a much broader range of moral behaviour, both by the police and historians, has left us with scarce information about the social organization of the sex trade in this period, which included two strongly moralistic military dictatorships: the Onganía dictatorship (1966–1970) and the last Military Dictatorship (1976–1983).

The question as to how the social and cultural changes in the field of sexuality in Argentina specifically affected the exercise and the organization of prostitution cannot be explored yet, as there is a lack of more detailed research into not only the living and working conditions of prostitutes, but also the links between the moralizing campaigns by democratic and authoritarian governments over the course of the twentieth century.

The sources most frequently consulted by researchers consist of medical and public authority reports which show the privileged position occupied by public health opinions focused on social reform in Buenos Aires. Historians have also consulted works of fiction, newspapers, and works of popular culture. Overall, historians combined a wide range of documents, including tango lyrics, plays, memoirs, travel writings, and even brothel plans.¹⁴ Legal documentation, both civil and criminal, has not yet been examined in detail,

12 Andrea Andújar *et al.*, *De Minifaldas, militancias y revoluciones*; Isabella Cosse, *Pareja, sexualidad y familia en Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires, 2010); Isabella Cosse *et al.*, *Los 60 de otra manera: Vida cotidiana, género y sexualidades en Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 2010); Karina Felitti, *La Revolución de la píldora: Sexualidad y política en los Sesenta* (Buenos Aires, 2012); Valeria Manzano, *The Age of Youth in Argentina: Culture, Politics and Sexuality from Peron to Videla* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2014).

13 Carretero, *Prostitución en Buenos Aires*, p. 182; Valeria Manzano, "Sexualizing Youth", pp. 433–461.

14 Pablo Ben, "Historia global y prostitución". Horacio Caride analysed municipal sources together with plans of prostibules found in the archives of the National Sanitary Works Agency (Dirección Nacional de Obras Sanitarias de la Nación), "Lugares de mal vivir: Una historia cultural de los prostibulos de Buenos Aires, 1875–1936" (Unpublished Ph.D., University of Buenos Aires, 2014).

but it would improve our knowledge of strategies for survival and negotiations between prostitutes and the public authorities.¹⁵

Finally, another source used in research on prostitution are the reports produced by international observers. In fact, in international reports on the traffic of women, Buenos Aires is represented as the epitome of a destination for European prostitutes in the early decades of the twentieth century. The widespread existence of more or less sensationalist white slave trade stories frequently involving the Argentinian capital attracted the attention of various observers. Particularly worthy of note are reports produced by reformist organizations, especially Jewish ones, and the documentation produced by the League of Nations Body of Experts, plus those of independent observers. In this documentation, prostitution carried out by Jewish women and the activities of groups of Jewish pimps were given a central and far more visible position than other protagonists in the Buenos Aires sex trade.¹⁶

Definitions

As was the case in other societies that were part of the Spanish Empire, female sexuality was an important issue for the Catholic Church—formally at least—in Buenos Aires throughout the colonial period until 1810. In contrast with the central position occupied by virginity in the Catholic view, the diversity of affective arrangements and sexual relations that actually existed in colonial society led to a large number of women being likened to the image of a prostitute, the symbol of a disorderly woman, in the rhetoric present in many social settings. In practice, however, as Ann Twinman has suggested, it is most likely that

15 Mir Yarfitz uses the judicial reports in the *Gaceta del Foro* to trace the development of the case against the association of Jewish traffickers, the “infamous” Zwi Migdal. Mir Yarfitz, “Polacos, White Slaves and Stille Chuppahs: Organized Prostitution and the Jews in Buenos Aires, 1890–1939” (Unpublished Ph.D., University of California, 2012), pp. 145, 133, 224. See also Sandra McGee Deutsch, *Crossing Borders, Claiming a Nation: A History of Argentine Jewish Women, 1880–1995* (Durham, 2010).

16 League of Nations, *Report of the Special Body of Experts on Traffic in Women and Children* (Geneva, 1927). Sandra McGee Deutsch also employed the registers from the Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women, which worked “to maintain Jewish immigrants out of commercial sex”, particularly with “Ezras Noschim”, the Buenos Aires branch: *Crossing Borders*, pp. 107–108; Guy, *El Sexo Peligroso*; Yarfitz, “Polacos, White Slaves and Stille Chuppahs”, pp. 53–110. The telling exception is Albert Londres’ journalistic research on the traffic in women in Buenos Aires which highlighted French pimps’ practices. Albert Londres, *The Road to Buenos Aires* (London, 1928).

colonial society recognized “varying degrees of illicit (sexual) activity”, similar to the way colonial Latin American societies viewed race relations.¹⁷ In fact, the same author suggests that a “creative ambiguity” existed in the complex connection between illicit sexual relations and honour. There were multiple ways to regain honour that was lost.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the city of Buenos Aires underwent major changes that reflected the crisis in colonial dominance, which also represented a shift towards local expansion and modernization. For the first time, the city began to take a distinct position in the economy and administration of the region, culminating in the 1810 crisis that led to independence. In her survey of crimes involving women in the last decades of the colonial era, Susan Socolow describes a society dominated by men, in which most of the offences committed against women were sexual in nature. Married women, or those under the protection of a man, were most often the victims of violence committed by men known to them, and the vulnerability of single women to violent sexual advances suggests that unprotected women were largely at risk of being considered to be sexually available.¹⁸ Single women and slaves were able to take legal action against men who committed violence against them; qualitative evidence from criminal courts suggests that women in some social groups had a certain amount of sexual autonomy.¹⁹ Nevertheless, their ability to act did not override what the author identifies as a generalized perception that women were naturally subject to sexual excess and violent acts.

In post-revolutionary Buenos Aires, contemporary commentators noted that there was an increase in prostitution, which they believed was related to the broader context of political changes and social instability, geographical

17 Ann Twinman, “Honor, Sexuality and Illegitimacy in Colonial Spanish America”, in Asunción Lavrín (ed.), *Sexuality and Marriage in Colonial Latin America* (Lincoln [etc.], 1989), pp. 118–155, 148–149.

18 Susan Socolow, “Women and Crime: Buenos Aires, 1757–97”, in Lyman L. Johnson (ed.), *The Problem of Order in Changing Societies: Essays on Crime and Policing in Argentina and Uruguay* (Albuquerque, 1990), pp. 1–19, 8, 11.

19 Historian José Luis Moreno observes that towards the end of the colonial period, the Spanish justice system was receptive to claims made by members of lower social groups, including slaves. He analysed a judicial case in which a freedwoman accused a man of trying to re-enslave her and take over her gains made via prostitution. To achieve his aims, the accused apparently threatened to send her to the “prostitutes’ jail”. In this particular case, the freedwoman succeeded in mobilising her former owner and the Ombudsman (*Defensor de Pobres*) in her favour. José Luis Moreno, “Conflicto y violencia familiar en el Río de la Plata, 1770–1810”, *Revista de Historia Social y de las Mentalidades*, 6 (2002), pp. 13–38, 37.

mobility, and wars of independence. Mark Szuchman has linked contemporary preoccupations with the sex trade to evidence of a greater participation by women in public life throughout the early decades of the nineteenth century.²⁰ In this context of major social and political uncertainty and shifts in behaviour, narratives on prostitution served to express social anxieties in the face of larger social changes.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, political stability increased and public debates began to focus on the municipal regulation of prostitution, which came into force in Buenos Aires in 1875. A few years earlier, in the 1869 National Census 361 people identified their occupation as “pimp” or “prostitute”. Of 301 prostitutes, 198 worked in Buenos Aires while the others were spread throughout the country. In 1889, the number of prostitutes registered in the municipality rose as high as 2,007 for the first and only time. That was the first year in which regulation statistics were published. In the following years, persecution by the police and the closure of houses located outside the area stipulated for prostitution also led to a decrease in the number of registered houses. Historian Mirta Lobato has noted that there were disparities in the numbers which were certainly related to differences in the organization of the sex trade but chiefly expressed the preoccupations of those counting the prostitutes. Despite the fact that the information was obtained through the declarations of women, what those figures did not register was the power relationships that led women to identify themselves as prostitutes. Moreover, they did not register “the fragile line separating the work of bringing pleasure with that of other female work related to the ideal of domesticity, such as sewing and cleaning.”²¹

The 1875 municipal ordinance considered women to be prostitutes if they sold sexual favours to more than one man.²² However, it soon became clear that the diversity of short-term sexual arrangements could never be socially isolated as laid down in the ordinance. Public officials and doctors resorted to a broader category of “clandestine prostitution” which included various types of occupations, such as actresses, waitresses in cafés and taverns, and a multitude of other types of activities carried out by female workers who went about their

20 Mark Szuchman, *Order, Family and Community in Buenos Aires, 1810–1860* (Stanford, 1988), p. 119.

21 Mirta Lobato, *Historia de las trabajadoras en la Argentina (1880–1960)* (Buenos Aires, 2007), pp. 72–73; Cristiana Schettini, “Esclavitud en blanco y negro: Elementos para una historia del trabajo sexual femenino en Buenos Aires y en Río de Janeiro, a fines del siglo XIX”, *Entre pasados*, 29 (2006), pp. 43–62.

22 Guy, *El Sexo peligroso*, p. 69.

business in the city. In a society in which women working in the sex trade often shared the same spaces and performed the same jobs as most other female workers, ordinances that regulated prostitution were repeatedly reformed without ever managing to reduce the numbers of women involved in various forms of “clandestine” activities. This expression would continue to be used by public officials throughout the twentieth century, both during periods of regulation and during predominantly “abolitionist” phases, stigmatizing a range of women who worked in places where men socialized in contexts loaded with class and gender tensions.²³

Successive municipal ordinances regulating public prostitution from 1875 to 1936 were based on public health arguments, namely protecting the health of customers and safeguarding the future of the Argentinian nation against the menace of syphilis, and they were also based on moral arguments quite familiar to contemporary commentators. As was the case in other countries that implemented regulations concerning prostitution, the municipality of Buenos Aires created a separate legal status for prostitutes, stipulated that registered prostitutes had to get compulsory medical examinations, established the hours which they could be on the streets, and defined the outer appearance of brothels and their location in relation to places of worship, theatres, and educational establishments. In other words, it regulated their living and working conditions. Of course, such controls suggested that there were serious difficulties in implementation of the law and tremendous challenges in defining who was a prostitute. Guy points out that those suspected of being clandestine prostitutes had to pay a fine to the municipality but were not obliged to register; those who registered had to submit to regular medical examinations and pay taxes besides being treated like “part-time jail inmates”.²⁴ Thus, in one sense the ordinance for regulating prostitution attempted to create mechanisms in order to separate prostitutes from “honest women” both spatially and legally while at the same time it had the practical effect of encouraging avoidance, which meant an increase of the “clandestine” sex trade.

The 1875 ordinance was also based on a peculiar legal fiction aimed at avoiding another point that was difficult to define: coercion. In the municipal regulation, it was assumed that, in order to be registered, a prostitute had to be a free person of legal age who spontaneously decided to submit herself to the municipal laws. The idea was that a registered woman freely and voluntarily

23 Marcial Quiroga, “Aspecto actual de la prostitución”, *Semana Médica*, 3 (1962), p. 1785; Carretero, *La Prostitución en Buenos Aires*, p. 196; Sandra Gayol, *Sociabilidad en Buenos Aires: Hombres, honor y cafés, 1862–1910* (Buenos Aires, 2000).

24 Guy, *El Sexo peligroso*, p. 69.

renounced her honesty and, by the same token, state protection of it. Public intervention in prostitution, therefore, was justified in order to protect public health and public order. The failure of municipal regulation to separate situations of “free will” from “coercion” became evident over the years. Particularly embarrassing was the widely-known registration of minors who could not legally consent. Nevertheless, “everybody knew”, as a deputy stated, that any minor could register herself in the municipality even though she could not get married.²⁵

The general attitude of the authorities regarding the issues of minors and coercion in regulated prostitution is evident in a case about the corruption of youths who were taken to court in 1877. Through it, we also have access to some basic aspects of prostitution that Donna Guy argues had remained invisible during the regulatory period.²⁶ Two girls from the Argentinian provinces of Santa Fe and Tucumán were found in a (licensed) brothel in the port area of Paseo de Julio. Due to uncertainty about whether they were minors, police officers investigated their previous lives. Both women had not come directly from their provinces to become prostitutes in Buenos Aires but had been working in local brothels in the port city of Rosario. One of them stated that she had previously worked in “houses of ill-repute” in small villages in rural areas, such as Pergamino and San Pedro. The girl told the police chief that she had decided to go to Buenos Aires because the owner of the brothel “whom she had met in Santa Fe” had come to San Pedro and “told her that he was going around looking for girls to bring to this city.” All the people involved seemed to agree that the dispute over their ability to give full and spontaneous consent to live in that brothel was, in practice, more related to their previous experience in prostitution than to their ages. Besides this, their story inadvertently made a record of an internal circuit in Argentina which involved native young women who made contacts and travelled in search of better working conditions. Through this glimpse into a specific moment of their lives, we can imagine that the legal definition of consent and corruption did not match their daily decisions.

25 For more on records of the legislative debates on the minimum age for women to register themselves and the common knowledge that minors were working as prostitutes, see Enrique Feinmann, *Policía Social: Estudio sobre las costumbres y la moralidad pública* (Buenos Aires, 1913), pp. 38–76, esp. p. 48.

26 Colón or Alzarán, Cristobal, and Rosa Zabaleta for prostitution of minors. C, 12, A–F, Criminal Court, National Archive, 1877. For further analysis on this and similar cases, see María Dolores Quaglia, “Corrupción y prostitución infantil en Buenos Aires (1870–1904): Una aproximación al tema”; José Luis Moreno, *La Política social antes de la política social (Caridad, beneficencia y política social en Buenos Aires, siglos XVII a XX)* (Buenos Aires, 2000), pp. 205–223; Schettini, “Esclavitud en blanco y negro”, pp. 43–64.

Actually, every time an amendment to the regulation was discussed, legislators had to tackle this legal fiction and the definition of prostitution that it encompassed. As early as in 1887, nearly a decade after the first ordinance came into force, Doctor Eugenio Ramirez, enthusiastic about A. Fournier's neo-regulationist ideas, found it important to explain in his reform proposals, that "no woman may remain in a brothel *against her will* and she will only have to mention this to the visiting inspector in order to have her request attended by the police."²⁷ Besides hinting at the increasing criticism raining down on regulationists, that statement suggests that there were increasing social difficulties in accepting coercive practices as being relevant in defining who was a prostitute.

For this reason, during the 1890s municipal legislators once again returned to the subject of how to define a prostitute while debating reforms to increase the effectiveness of the regulations and overcome their many failings. In subsequent years, national and municipal legislators would return to the discussion of the legal status of prostitutes several times when reforming municipal regulations and when drawing up definitions of offences such as the corruption of minors. From 1913 onwards, at the time of the adoption of the so-called Palacios Law against the trafficking of women, the offence of procurement came under scrutiny. Although it recognized that adult women could be forced into prostitution, the Palacios Law was seen more as a "national" response to the increasingly negative international reputation that Buenos Aires was acquiring and less as a way of protecting the victims of sexual exploitation.²⁸ The notion that prostitutes were a vector for venereal diseases was invoked as a justification for state regulation of the sex trade and it would not be strongly challenged again until the 1920s. From 1921 onwards, the Argentine Penal Code incorporated some features of the Palacios Law, and reforms of the municipal regulation focused more on sexual exploitation.

In 1936, a social prophylaxis law was passed, giving rise to a broader debate about whether this law ceased to regulate prostitution or whether it

27 By linking syphilis and degeneration, French doctor Alfred Fournier became the most important exponent of neo-regulationism and the redrafting of regulations in the face of abolitionist arguments. See Sergio Carrara, *Tributo a Venus: A luta contra a sífilis no Brasil, da passagem do século aos anos 40* (Rio de Janeiro, 1996), pp. 61–64. The author of the 1887 proposal was Doctor Eugenio Ramirez, *Profilaxis Pública de la Sífilis. Reformas urgente a la reglamentación de la prostitución (Estudios de higiene social)* (Buenos Aires, 1887) (underlining as in the original).

28 Guy, *El Sexo peligroso*, pp. 41–42.

specifically outlawed brothels.²⁹ The law banned “the creation of houses or places in which prostitution is exercised or incited” and punished those who “sustained, administered, or managed houses of ill-repute whether in an explicit or covert way.” Presidential Decree number 10.638 of 1944 reformed the prophylaxis law, accepting the existence of regulated brothels near barracks on the grounds that they would help tackle what was viewed as the threat of male homosexuality. That decree also consolidated the interpretation that the 1936 law did not ban the exercise of prostitution but the “houses of ill-repute” in which many women gathered. It set out that the “mere exercise of prostitution by a woman in her home, individually or independently, does not constitute an offence.” From that point onwards, whilst prostitution began to be discussed publicly as an antidote to homosexuality, especially male homosexuality, it was not deemed necessary to define “prostitution” or “brothel” any further.³⁰

The absence of a new vocabulary to describe the abolitionist context, the blaming of “clandestine prostitutes” (also at this point meaning “women who worked in dance halls or boarding houses”) for the rise in venereal diseases towards the end of the 1940s, and even the brief return to regulated prostitution between 1954 and 1955 in the final days of the second Perón government, are all factors suggesting that the community of Buenos Aires had been profoundly marked by the experience of regulation that had left in its wake a particular way of approaching and organizing the sex trade within the urban environment.³¹ In fact, throughout the second half of the twentieth century municipal debates about where prostitution should be carried out continued to suggest the idea that known prostitutes would voluntarily submit to an exceptional order at first managed by the municipality and then by the police; that “order”, however, was not written down.³²

Once the social prophylaxis law of 1936 had shifted public debates to the topic of venereal diseases, the problems associated with monitoring and locating prostitutes were also progressively removed from public debate, and ultimately they were left in the hands of the police and their discretionary

29 Biernat, “Médicos, especialistas, políticos y funcionarios en la organización centralizada de la profilaxis de las enfermedades venéreas en la Argentina (1930–1954)”, *Anuario de Estudios Americanos*, 64 (2007), pp. 257–288, 278. For Rosario, see Mugica, *La ciudad de las Venus*.

30 Guy, *El sexo peligroso*, p. 213. Horacio Caride argues that the regulation created the figure of the “prostibule” in a state of tension with other collective housing and forms of commerce. Caride, “Lugares de mal vivir”, pp. 89–249.

31 Biernat, “Médicos, especialistas, políticos y funcionarios”, p. 285.

32 Goldar, *La Mala vida*; Carretero, *Prostitución en Buenos Aires*, pp. 173–200.

power which could be unleashed against women “soliciting” in the street.³³ In this new era, the notion that most prostitutes operated alone in their apartments or picked up clients in the street gave rise to police actions against a variety of women, mostly Argentinian, who were often identified as “servants” or “employees”, and this brought about a practice that would endure into the second half of the twentieth century.³⁴ At the same time, an international debate was taking place about the hitherto undefined boundaries between consent and coercion in the course of attempts to define the idea of sexual exploitation itself.³⁵ Thus, in Buenos Aires the definitions of prostitution, prostitute, and brothel were negotiated with the public authorities throughout the twentieth century in multiple social relations that were typically at the edge of legality.

The Labour Market: Regulated Prostitution

One of the main effects of the regulation of prostitution in Buenos Aires between 1875 and 1936 was the production of information about regulated prostitutes to the detriment of the unregulated sex trade that was registered only in an indirect manner. The data available about registered women represent a relevant source of information for historians as regards the characteristics of the trade—that is, once its partiality in relation to the complexity of the sex trade has been taken into account.

It is crucial to ponder over some of these indicators in light of other available documents. The over-representation of foreign prostitutes in the municipal registers is arguably the one feature that has attracted the most attention from contemporary commentators and historians. Donna Guy points out that foreign observers were likely to misinterpret the official lists of houses due to

33 Grammatico, “Obreras, prostitutas y mal venéreo”, pp. 116–135.

34 Goldar, *La Mala vida*; Carretero, *Prostitución en Buenos Aires*, pp. 173–200; Omar Acha’s articles “Las sirvientas asesinas: Mal paso, delito y experiencia de clase en la Argentina peronista” and “Cuerpos y Sexualidades”, in *Herramienta: Debate y crítica marxista* (2013), discuss tensions over domestic workers’ sexuality in the context of the first Peronism.

35 Cecilia Varela, “Entre las demandas de protección y autodeterminación: Los procesos de judicialización de la trata de mujeres y niñas en la Argentina (2008–2011)”, in José Olivari *et al.* (ed.), *La prostitución hoy en América Latina: Entre el trabajo, políticas y placer* (Bogotá, 2011); Cecilia Varela, “La campaña antitrata en la Argentina y la agenda supranacional”, in Debora Daich and Mariana Sirimarco (eds), *Género y violencia en el mercado del sexo: política, policía y prostitución* (Buenos Aires, 2015), pp. 109–150.

the recorded preponderance of foreign women at least in the early years, and those lists usually referred to the owners of the houses rather than to the tenants, among whom there were many more Argentinians.³⁶

The brothel licensing system that came into force in 1875 seems, at least in the early years, to have encouraged the development of regulated brothels with numerous inmates and that made it much easier for owners to pay the fees requested by the municipality. As a matter of fact, regulating prostitution became a mechanism for transferring revenues generated by prostitution into municipal coffers. Thus, multiple interests converged in the regulation of prostitution, which helps us understand why this was one of the main causes of conflicts between the municipal authorities, the police, brothel owners, and the prostitutes themselves.

The number of registered women rose from around 600 early in the twentieth century to 1,128 in 1910.³⁷ In 1910, Argentinian women represented just 14.2 per cent of the total number of registered women. Of the foreign women, 22.3 per cent were identified as Russian, 20 per cent as French, and almost the same proportion, 20.4 per cent, as Uruguayan (although these were probably European women). Spanish women represented 8 per cent and Italians 6.7 per cent. The demographic profile remained roughly constant after the end of the nineteenth century; registered prostitutes were mostly 18 to 25 years old, with a literacy rate of 40 per cent.³⁸ Although around one third of the women seem to have had children or dependant relatives, the young age at which women were registered might suggest a prevailing profile of women who had recently arrived and had no local connection, and there were thereby more vulnerable to being registered. This was the opinion of many contemporaries, such as for example Doctor Looyer, who commented that trafficked women “are poor, miserable women who do not know the language and who, despite earning 20 pesos a day, are content to receive only 3 pesos for themselves.”³⁹

Throughout this period, the proportion of Jewish women among the owners of licensed brothels was much higher than the overall proportion of the Jewish population in Buenos Aires. Furthermore, in 1930, Jewish prostitutes were estimated to represent around 30 per cent of registered prostitutes, while Jews as a whole represented no more than 5 per cent of the population, and French and Argentinian prostitutes each constituted approximately 22 per cent of the

36 Guy, *El Sexo peligroso*, p. 83.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 92.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 93.

39 Dr Carlos Looyer, *Los Grandes misterios de la mala vida en Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires, 1911), p. 248.

total number of prostitutes.⁴⁰ Yarfitz has pointed out that there was a particular concentration of registered brothels in the Once neighbourhood where the Jewish population gradually converged in this period. This showed that there was a link between prostitution and other types of business, and this helps to contextualize the preoccupation of members of the Jewish community with those involved in the sex trade.⁴¹

All of the authors working on this issue observed that those figures became increasingly unreliable not only because they were influenced by the interests of those producing them but also because they may reveal the efforts of the women themselves to appear as being from the nationalities most valued by customers. In fact, there are many references to Argentinian men having a predilection for French women, as they were seen as being synonymous with “civilized” sex, and Jewish women for their sexual and racial “otherness”.⁴²

Likewise, Guy has argued that the figures produced by the regulatory system were used by foreign observers as proof that legalized prostitution in Buenos Aires sustained the traffic of women. Besides taking no account of the local female employment market, anti-trafficking organizations pulled a veil over Argentinian-born prostitutes who were not registered in Buenos Aires but who nonetheless were far more visible and active in inland cities such as Tandil and Rosario.⁴³

Local and foreign observers ascribed different meanings to the various nationalities of the prostitutes they saw. Indirectly, those meanings revealed fragmentary aspects of the prostitutes’ work experiences and life after prostitution. In 1907, for instance, criminologist Eusebio Gómez referred to native “creole” prostitutes’ expectation that they would eventually return to their “place of birth to live out a life of rest and relative honesty.”⁴⁴ Although his observations were designed to differentiate native women from foreign ones, it is possible to find evidence, also among the European prostitutes, of expectations or hopes for a chance to retire and move back to be with their families. As with the overrepresentation of eastern European and Jewish prostitutes in official

40 McGee Deutsch, *Crossing Borders*, p. 110.

41 Yarfitz, “Polacos, White Slaves and Stille Chuppahs”, pp. 89–110.

42 McGee Deutsch, *Crossing Borders*, p. 106; Guy, *El Sexo peligroso*; Yarfitz, “Polacos, White Slaves and Stille Chuppahs”, p. 93.

43 Guy, *El Sexo peligroso*, p. 94; McGee Deutsch, *Crossing Borders*, p. 110. 41 per cent of Argentinian women were owners of brothels outside Buenos Aires; Yarfitz, “Polacos, White Slaves and Stille Chuppahs”, p. 93, found many women who were “native to Argentina” in census data for the year 1895.

44 Eusebio Gómez, *La Mala vida en Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires, 2011 [1908]).

municipal documentation, there are also more accounts of the life experiences and pathways of Jewish women who were the main focus of anti-trafficking organizations in the early twentieth century.

That was the case of a Russian woman named Raquel Liberman, whose story has endured because of her fame in denouncing the Jewish mutual aid society Zwi Migdal as a white slavery organization that was trafficking Jewish women. Her story became paradigmatic of the cause-effect connection between regulation and traffic that was sustained by abolitionists internationally. Although she was portrayed as a typical victim of traffickers, more recent information brings to light aspects of her life that were not covered in the various reports. Liberman arrived in a village in the province of Buenos Aires in the early 1920s with her two young sons to live with her husband, who very soon afterwards died of tuberculosis.⁴⁵ Only then did she leave her family and go to Buenos Aires to work as a prostitute. Neither Zwi Migdal nor the police ever knew either that Liberman had been legally married in Warsaw or that she had two sons who had stayed in the province in the care of family members.⁴⁶ With her silence and her decision to protect certain aspects of her life, she herself helped perpetuate the stereotype of the Jewish prostitute who was tricked and forced into prostitution. Likewise, whilst her decision to denounce her exploiters to the police in Buenos Aires may be viewed as a courageous and exceptional one, it can be put in context by evidence that many other women from a similar background in different parts of South America denounced their former partners and other men as pimps in certain circumstances.⁴⁷

Frequent amendments to the municipal ordinances that regulated prostitution affected the organization of brothels. Whilst in the early years of

45 For different portrayals of Raquel Liberman and her image as the “typical victim of traffickers”, see Myrtha Shalom, *La Polaca: Inmigrantes, rufianes y esclavas a comienzos del siglo XX* (Buenos Aires, 2009); Patricia Suarez, *Las Polacas: historias tártaras, casamentera, La Varsovia* (Buenos Aires, 2002); Nora Glickman, *The Jewish White Slave Trade and the Untold Story of Raquel Liberman* (New York [etc.], 2000); Larry Levy, *La Mancha de la Migdal* (Buenos Aires, 2007); for a broad discussion, see Yarfitz, “Polacos, White Slaves and Stille Chuppahs”, pp. 111–149.

46 Glickman, *The Jewish White Slave Trade*, pp. 43–47.

47 Cristiana Schettini, “Viajando solas: prácticas de vigilancia policial y experiencias de prostitución en la América del Sur”, in Jorge Trujillo Bretón (ed.), *En la Encrucijada. Historia, marginalidad y delito en América Latina y los Estados Unidos de Norteamérica, siglos XIX y XX* (Guadalajara, 2010), pp. 331–353. Yarfitz describes previous legal actions taken against Zwi Migdal, which contextualizes the impact of Liberman’s denunciation. Yarfitz, “Polacos, White Slaves and Stille Chuppahs”, pp. 115–116.

regulation houses with many residents were more convenient as they offset the high cost of the licence that had to be purchased, the ordinances passed from 1903 onwards legislated a reduction in the number of women per house and abolished the defined areas for brothels. This gave way to the opening of brothels in many more quarters of the city.⁴⁸ At the same time, new ordinances began to regulate the work of café waitresses, the main source of clandestine prostitution according to the doctors of the time. The strictness of the new rules seems to have increased clandestine prostitution.⁴⁹ In 1908 there was a return to a system of a dedicated zone for brothels located away from the city centre. This new situation of spatial segregation contributed to a division between the “pure” and the “impure” Jewish communities.

In practice, throughout the whole period of regulation police officials repeatedly complained that municipal officials limited their freedom to act both in terms of tackling the sex trade and in persecuting pimps. Meanwhile, accusations of police corruption were on the rise in line with reports on the trafficking of women.

Narratives of the White Slave Trade

Narratives on the traffic of European women who might have been tricked and enslaved in Buenos Aires brothels thanks to the wide scope for action made possible via regulation by pimps and house owners and police corruption were widespread in Argentina during the years of regulation. Buenos Aires also gained an international reputation as a centre for the trafficking of women in newspapers, League of Nations documents, and other reports produced outside Argentina. This reputation should be seen in light of a confluence of factors, among which stands out international abolitionist militancy in the context of the persistence of licensed brothels in various forms during the first decades of the twentieth century.

Locally, the existence of trafficking and its characteristics were the subject of public debate. In 1908, in contrast to the many sensationalist stories in circulation at the time, the young criminologist Eusebio Gómez stated in one of his many studies on the underworld:

It is not exactly a question of the sale and purchase of women, as is widely thought; nor did wily trickery, devious seduction, or violent sequestration

48 Guy, *El Sexo peligroso*, p. 83.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 80.

play a part; no. The trade of white women in its truest form was nothing more than the recruitment of women aware of their future fate and who with a certain degree of freedom accepted the terms of a service hire contract, whose iron regime was bearable and possibly even comfortable to them [...].⁵⁰

Gómez's and others' ideas about trafficking indicate a distrust in the massive waves of immigrants disembarking in Buenos Aires; for this reason, the international character of the sex trade was attributed to the cultural characteristics of the recently-arrived unknown foreigners in terms of "a spirit of vassalage and sensual corruption". Some pages later, however, Gómez argued that there was a "perverse" system that prevented women from changing their lives: when they left the control of one exploiter, it was said that they fell straight into the hands of another.

A few years later in 1913, as the tarnished reputation of Buenos Aires worsened still more, Samuel Cohen, the Secretary General of the London-based Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women, visited the city and found reason to doubt the outlines and dimensions of the stories circulating in Europe.⁵¹ The registered women with whom he spoke told him that they had already worked as prostitutes in Europe and that they had gone to Buenos Aires expecting that they would continue to work in the sex trade.⁵² There was a similar expectation when immigration resumed after the First World War. At the beginning of the 1920s, a researcher working for the League of Nations was told by a brothel owner in Europe, "They keep on going [to Buenos Aires] as if they expected to find gold in the streets. It must be good as they say because they won't come back."⁵³ In a way, that is not so different from the expectations of many other European migrants at the time who had gone in the hope of finding a better life in the Americas.⁵⁴ However, for the League of Nations, this was further proof of the existence of the traffic.

50 Gómez, *La Mala vida*, p. 119.

51 On the subject of the worsening reputation of Buenos Aires, see Ernesto Bott, who tells how at the start of 1913 the Foreign Affairs Minister began to distribute a publication to Argentinian consulates and a memo to the press contradicting reports in the European publications about the white slave trade in Buenos Aires. Ernesto Bott, *Las Condiciones de lucha contra la trata de blancas en Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires, 1916), p. 15.

52 McGee Deutsch, *Crossing Borders*, p. 111.

53 League of Nations, *Report of the Special Body of Experts*, p. 12.

54 A similar argument is developed by Yarfitz when he suggests that Zwi Migdal basically worked like any other mutual aids association of Jewish immigrants at the time; Yarfitz, "Polacos, White Slaves and Stille Chuppahs", pp. 150–196.

The adoption of the Palacios Law in 1913, a law that criminalized for the first time the exploitation of women over 21 years of age, was widely criticized for its ineffectiveness. General police corruption and the contradictions between the law and the regulatory system were the main factors that contemporaries stressed as causes for its failure. In a revealing remark, another contemporary observer, Ernesto Bott, commented that the law was “contrary to the customs of Buenos Aires”, which suggested the reach of a “regulatory culture”, albeit increasingly challenged.⁵⁵ Bott’s observation allows us to add “internal conditions” to the internationally established association between regulation and trafficking. These included the naturalization of licenced brothels and cultural tensions generated by a major increase in European immigration; the flourishing of anti-liberal, nationalist, and conservative currents of ideas tinged with anti-Semitism; and, finally, the actions of the Jewish community itself which were organized against the stigma of prostitution.

In a detailed study of the many Jewish voluntary organizations and individuals involved in the fight against the trafficking of women, Edward Bristow was of the opinion that the high visibility of Jews in Buenos Aires could partly be an unintended consequence of the intervention in public debates by the Jewish community through its reformist and rescue organizations. Because of its preoccupation with the differentiation between “pure” and “impure” people and with safeguarding the public image of the community in an increasingly anti-Semitic context, its public actions in segregating the “impure” sectors of the community ended up working against it by granting higher visibility to the part of the community involved in the international sex trade.⁵⁶

Coexistence in the same urban spaces and economic activities among Jewish groups connected to white slavery and those who weren’t was made more difficult by the reaction to the creation of the Mutual Aid Society Varsovia (formally organized in 1906 and called Zwi Migdal after 1927), which in 1930 was accused of covering for an organization of Jewish traffickers. As happened in other places that received Jewish immigrants, the “impure” (*t’meiim*) in Argentina faced discrimination from both their host society and from the Jewish community. And as happened in other cities, Jewish men and women involved in the sex trade were the first to acquire land to build a cemetery (1904) and a synagogue before the formal community was organized. The organization performed burials and religious ceremonies in their own temple.

55 Guy, *El Sexo peligroso*, p. 150; Bott, *Las Condiciones*.

56 Edward Bristow, *Prostitution and Prejudice: The Jewish Fight against White Slavery 1870–1939* (Oxford, 1982).

Yarfitz has argued that the association actually fulfilled religious and mutual aid duties among its members.

The legal case against Zwi Migdal came about during the rise to power of a conservative government and at a time of economic crisis and increasing nationalism.⁵⁷ The evidence that Zwi Migdal was essentially an organization of pimps operating under the guise of a mutual aid association was mainly produced by police officer Julio Alsogaray. The main accusation against the Zwi Migdal was about illegal association, not trafficking, which suggests that there was a lack of legal proof.⁵⁸ In fact, the case ended with the application of the *Ley de Residencia*, as the law for the expulsion of foreigners was called. This law, which was implemented in 1902, gave the Executive Branch Authority the power to expel “undesirable” aliens without judicial proceedings.⁵⁹ Alsogaray’s book, *La Trilogía de la trata de blancas*, has been the main source for research on the topic. However, some recent works have posited that there is a serious need to further study the case in connection with other aspects of ethnic and immigration experiences.⁶⁰

The Labour Market: The World beyond Regulation

Authors who wrote on the topic of prostitution in Buenos Aires were unanimous in acknowledging that the formal terms underpinning the municipal regulations did not correspond to a complex and contradictory reality. Few authors, however, made progress in identifying the scope for action and the

57 The existence of a mutual aid society and its achievements, such as purchasing a cemetery and a synagogue, later brought to light in the midst of a public scandal that reinforced the association between the trafficking of women and the Jewish community, reflects and condenses the contradictions between the liberal principles that organised society and the spreading of nationalistic, conservative, and anti-Semitic thinking in Argentina. For more on this see among others McGee Deutsch, *Crossing Borders* and Daniel Lvovich, *Nacionalismo y antisemitismo en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 2003).

58 Julio Alsogaray, *Trilogía de la trata de blancas* (Buenos Aires, 1933); Levy, *La Mancha de la Migdal*, p. 243.

59 Levy asserts that, based on the law, the members of the organization were deported to the neighbouring country of Uruguay from where they had no difficulty in returning. Levy, *La Mancha de la Migdal*, p. 248.

60 Yvette Trochon, *La Ruta de Eros* (Montevideo, 2006); José Luis Scarsi, “Cómo y por qué se formó la Zwi Migdal”, *Todo es historia*, 482 (2007), pp. 6–22; McGee Deutsch, *Crossing Borders*; Yarfitz, “Polacos, White Slaves and Stille Chuppahs”.

unanticipated ways that the prostitutes used this body of norms. From 1887 onwards, regulated brothels had to display a notice that stated that women were “free to stay or not to stay there”. The forces that led them to stay, however, were not always linked to the mythical figure of the pimp nor to the organization of pimps that benefited from the regulation but rather to a myriad of complex factors including economic and cultural motivations. Indeed, the *madamas* carried on several of these factors, such as, for example, Madam Blanca, who had set up a brothel in La Boca at the start of the twentieth century and bragged about having sway with the local police; she bound her women to the brothel via everlasting debts that were never paid.⁶¹ As a law student, writer Manuel Galvez also identified and described multiple forms of oppression of foreign prostitutes in regulated brothels in 1905. Some years later however, he offered up a different portrait of the world of prostitution in his novel *Nacha Regules* (1918) whose main character was an Argentinian prostitute who was a prisoner not of regulations or pimps but her own story of impossible love.⁶²

Perhaps the most visible form of prostitution away from the regulated brothels was the so-called “*casas de citas*” or call houses (they also flourished in the centre of Rio de Janeiro at the time to evade the vigilance of a police force that lacked municipal ordinances). Descriptions from the time characterize them as places where clandestine prostitutes worked, adulteresses could meet up with their lovers, and minors ended up being seduced. According to Goldar, the women who frequented these houses (but never lived there) were “newly initiated into *the life* or pretended to be.”⁶³ Descriptions like his suggest that an increase in the number of these places of a more or less distinguished kind gave rise to a wide variety of affective and sexual encounters. Classified by doctors and police officers as acts of “clandestine prostitution”, these encounters may better be understood as part of the changes in urban nightlife and entertainment, the increased circulation of women in the urban environment, and the possibilities for the sex trade that were very different from the stereotypes of pimp and slave.

Also highly revealing are observations by the poet Sebastián Tallón about the so-called “*casas de comisionistas*” or “agent houses”, a kind of intermediary between city and rural brothels. Besides suggesting the existence of national sex work circuits linking small villages to the city (overshadowed by the

61 Goldar, *La Mala vida*, pp. 34–35.

62 Manuel Gálvez, *La trata de blancas* (Buenos Aires, 1905); Manuel Gálvez, *Nacha regules* (Buenos Aires, 1919).

63 Goldar, *La Mala vida*, p. 39.

predominance at the time of reports on the white slave trade), Tallón outlines the operation of these houses which displayed similarities with many other employment agencies for women seeking work as domestic servants or wet-nurses, mirroring the pattern of female employment at the beginning of the century.⁶⁴ According to this author, it was a form of “legal white slavery” of which very little was known at the time, involving women who “came from afar without a *protector*, and stayed there, paying for their lodging. For them these houses were something akin to an employment agency.”⁶⁵ In this way, some women waited for “a job inland” to materialize, whilst others waited for a job in the capital. The “*comisionista*”, or agent, made arrangements with “the inland boss requiring *staff*” and the “*rentistas*” or “rentiers” who left the women in their care while the women tended to remain trapped in these circuits through debts that were impossible to repay. In this peculiar organization of the sex work market, the disruptive element was, according to Tallón, men identified as “*cafishos*” or “pimps” and even tango musicians who took the women with them to other places.

That was how Tallón contextualizes prostitution in the female labour market at the time. He points to the existence of women who lived in relative autonomy and portrays the pimp not as an agent of coercion, but precisely the opposite: as a break in the circuits set up by these employment agencies. Finally, he notes the importance of prostitution as a setting for male and popular socializing. Around it, diverse elements of the informal economy flourished. In these “agent houses”, for instance, there was non-stop dancing, which created work opportunities for many creole tango orchestras.⁶⁶

Similarly, a few cases of men who were expelled from Brazil and travelled from Buenos Aires with young “artists” on tour further distinguishes the men identified in police documents as “pimps”, “procurers”, or “*cáftenes*” from the stereotypical coercive exploiter. An analysis of the police investigations upon which the expulsions were based in light of the organization of a labour market in the variety theatre in South American cities reveals the existence of transnational employment circuits and sheds light on the conflicts between the “artists” and entrepreneurs. This was a market in which young female singers and dancers travelled under employment contracts that imposed on them

64 Cecilia Allemandi, “El servicio doméstico en el marco de la transformaciones de la ciudad de Buenos Aires, 1869–1914”, *Diálogos*, 16 (2012), pp. 385–415. For more on the Argentinian female labour market, see Lobato, *Historia de las Trabajadoras en la Argentina*.

65 Sebastián Tallón, *El Tango en sus etapas de música prohibida* (Buenos Aires, 1959), p. 42.

66 Tallón, *El Tango en sus etapas*, p. 44; Pellarolo, *Sainetes, cabaret, minas y tangos*.

many hours of rehearsal, many hours on stage, and other unwritten conditions such as having to live in particular “artists’ boarding houses” and accept visits from men who would pay their bills in return for their company. In this respect, any male companion who occasionally prevented women artists from carrying out some of these activities came to be viewed as a threat by entrepreneurs, directors, and managers. Oddly, it was usually at this point that the local police accused these young men of being pimps whilst the entrepreneurs, directors, and managers who more directly benefited financially from the sexual, social, and artistic activities of the women were never investigated.⁶⁷

This is evidence that suggests that regulated prostitution coexisted with multiple forms of work. Both worlds did not seem so radically separated. Many foreign women arrived within the framework of dependency relationships with the owners of the licenced houses who paid for their tickets, and eventually those women changed houses and dependency relationships. Others set out as independent workers with the expectation of finding an opening in licensed houses. In order to define the “real” characteristics of traffic, the League of Nations sent a team of North American undercover agents to Buenos Aires (followed by Montevideo and Rio de Janeiro, in the South American part of the research) in 1924. The agents observed that many of the women working on the streets in the port area solicited discretely, taking their clients to flats or hotel rooms. They also found women who solicited in certain restaurants and at the Casino Theatre. During interviews made with some of these women, they confirmed what an owner of licenced houses had told them: if prostitutes specialized in oral sex (the “French way” or “perversion”), they could make between 10 and 20 pesos per client, while at an “honest” job they would not make more than 4 pesos a day. A girl could see an average of 15 men per day, as one informant explained. Even if they had to give half the money obtained to the house owner, “they can get a nice few dollars together in a few years.”⁶⁸

Thus, even having to pay high percentages to different people, such as the owner of the hotel or the brothel they frequented, those women expected to make enough to save up and increase their margin of autonomy in the market. The exploratory trips made by the League of Nations’ agents in Buenos Aires show a diverse universe of possibilities of dependency relationships. Their questions revealed a preconceived idea about such relationships, such as

67 Cristiana Schettini, “South American Tours: Work Relations in the Entertainment Market in South America”, *International Review of Social History*, 57 (2012), pp. 129–160.

68 “Clandestine Prostitution”, 24 June, 1924. League of Nations Archive [hereafter LNA], box S 171.

that they involved young and inexperienced women (“greenies”) who were seduced and induced into prostitution. However, their vision was repeatedly questioned and broadened by their interlocutors from the “underworld”. The interviewed women often told stories in which they cast out their husbands or lovers for being virtual parasites. A Turkish woman at the Casino Theatre summarized it thus: “That’s all the men here are good for! They won’t work and they want money! I kicked him out!” At the same time, a male informant explained over and over again that the best women for a sex market like Buenos Aires were not the inexperienced young women but “business girls”, experienced girls who were willing to give oral sex.⁶⁹

They could work on their own, with or without a steady partner; however, the informant stressed, probably trying to make himself sound important, that they still needed “a man” to negotiate working conditions with the owners of the houses, municipal officials, and the police.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the pathways of some of the women who were identified as members of Zwi Migdal in Yarfitz’s study, some of whom prosperous house owners, former prostitutes, and *madamas*, demonstrate that for some women, such accumulations of profit and degrees of autonomy were carefully brought into being.

The Abolitionist Period

Initial resistance to the regulation of prostitution was replaced at the beginning of the twentieth century by a widely extended vision that the coercive aspects of the system were in accordance with Argentinian “customs” and “nature”. Nevertheless, critics of the regulation system, such as feminists and socialists, went about denouncing the limits and inefficiencies of the system, even as it was repeatedly reformed. In 1934, licensed brothels were abolished in the federal capital, and in 1936 the regulatory system was abolished nationally through the adoption of the social prophylaxis law which was based on a draft law project by socialist deputy Angel Giménez. This was a time when an

69 Argentine Report. Appendix n.4: “Suspicious Case”. LNA, box S 171. The extra value accorded to foreign and older prostitutes due to their greater experience in the trade was a recurrent theme among clients. In the mid-1930s, for instance, police officer Ernesto Pareja suggested that men from Buenos Aires preferred European prostitutes because they were seen as “veterans of the trade”. Ernesto Pareja, *La Prostitución en Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires, 1937).

70 At one point, the informant told the undercover investigator: “A green girl is twice as much trouble as a wife. [...] The girl must be an expert.” “Traffic in women and children”, pp. 7–9, June, 1924. LNA, box S 171.

increasingly eugenic perspective was spreading through Argentina. Giménez himself was a member of the Argentinian Society of Biotypology, Eugenics, and Social Medicine. The 1936 law made provisions for coercive mechanisms aimed at preventing the spread of venereal diseases. It made prenuptial medical certificates compulsory for young men, with medical treatment and obligatory medical interment for those found to be sick, along with sex education.⁷¹

At the time, people disputed whether prostitution practised outside of houses of ill-repute, basically individual prostitution, was prohibited or not under this law. Its adoption heralded a long period in which the police appear to have acquired more routine discretion to act in terms of monitoring brothels and prostitutes who carried out their business in the streets. In the beginning, for example, Manuel Fresco, governor of the province of Buenos Aires, closed some of the brothels until they complied with the new rules of the General Office of Hygiene.⁷² In subsequent years, the uncertainty surrounding this legal framework seems to have fostered greater police monitoring, repression, and probably even involvement in running brothels from apartments in the vein of the old regulated brothels, along with action against women who picked up their clients on the streets, or in cafés or bars in various parts of the city, but especially in areas near the river. From the 1950s onwards, women waited for clients at different times in cafés in the city centre.⁷³

Although the bibliography for this period focuses on official policies on the topic and mostly on the legislation and conditions of anti-venereal disease campaigns, there is evidence that various “regulationist” practices were retained, such as the closure of particular brothels, medical interventions, and the acceptance of legal brothels in military areas and national territories.⁷⁴ In fact, between 1954 and 1955 there was a brief return to regulation in response to a sex scandal involving young soldiers which occurred in the midst of a conflict

71 Miranda, “Buenos Aires, entre Eros y Tanatos”, p. 109.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 110.

73 Carretero, *Prostitución en Buenos Aires*, p. 189.

74 María Luisa Mugica found that in the first months after the law of social prophylaxis was implemented some prostitutes in the city of Rosario tried to attract their clients by proudly exhibiting their health booklets. They used this document like the earlier official medical examination, unintentionally putting doctors in the awkward position of being their guarantors. In the doctors' view, this was a regular medical certificate that had no resemblance to the previous official medical certificates issued under the system of regulation. Mugica, *La ciudad de las Venus*.

between the Peronist government and the Catholic Church.⁷⁵ The argument in evidence from the mid-twentieth century onwards that the regulation of prostitution might be an effective response to male homosexuality and to what continued to be called “clandestine prostitution” (in reference to women working as prostitutes in a covert form in bars and cafés) offers hints about the impact in subsequent public debates of the five decades of regulation between 1875 and 1936.

Recent Trends

Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, the control and monitoring of prostitution was carried out through the discretionary activities of police officers, which led to the police becoming increasingly involved in organizing the sex trade in the city. This was evident in the periodical outlining of red zones, but also in their participation as organizing agents in the sex business. Prostitution thereby became yet another activity that contributed to the financial autonomy of the police.⁷⁶ Because of this, debates about prostitution began to reflect the tensions and broader public debates about the limits and scope of police powers in the city and about constitutional and human rights. Although there are no substantial studies on the period from the 1950s to the 1990s, there is scope for further investigations into whether the ensuing periods of the military dictatorship (1966–1970 and 1976–1983) had a legitimizing effect on police activities in the sex trade.

The scarce information and knowledge about this period, which reflects a particular view that associated prostitution with cultural and behavioural shifts in Buenos Aires society during this period. Throughout the decades following the 1930s, the police practice of imprisoning people to interrogate them became generalized, giving rise to a wide range of abuse. Statistics available for the period usually refer to women interned in hospitals to be treated

75 Guy, *El Sexo peligroso*, pp. 213–239.

76 Sofia Tiscornia (ed.), *Burocracias y violencia. Estudios de antropología jurídica* (Buenos Aires, 2004), esp. pp. 89–125; Marcelo Sain, “La policía en las ciencias sociales: Ensayo sobre los obstáculos epistemológicos para el estudio de la institución policial en el campo de las ciencias sociales”, in Mariana Sirimarco (ed.), *Estudiar la policía: La mirada de las ciencias sociales sobre la institución policial* (Buenos Aires, 2010), pp. 27–56; and Debora Daich, “Contravenciones y prostitución: La producción burocrática-administrativa de estadísticas”, *Papeles de Trabajo*, 24 (2012), pp. 31–48; Deborah Daich and Mariana Sirimarco, “Policías y prostitutas en la Argentina: el control territorial en clave de género”, in Daich and Sirimarco, *Género y violencia*, pp. 61–84.

for syphilis, which very often was brought about through violent police intervention.

In 1994, ten years after the 1983 return to democracy, the city of Buenos Aires became autonomous. One of the first effects of this was that in 1998 the police lost its power to arrest prostitutes as a way of controlling and monitoring the sex trade. In turn, a reform of the contravention code was debated once the municipal government was back in the hands of politically conservative groups. The debate once again turned to determining the advantages and disadvantages of drawing up a red zone, and to stipulating a minimum required distance from places of worship and educational establishments.

At the beginning of 1994, women prostitutes founded AMMAR, *Asociación de Mujeres Meretrices de la Argentina* (Association of Prostitute Women of Argentina). Today there are two basic trains of thought regarding prostitution: one trend has been influenced by radical feminist groups, which see prostitutes as victims and prostitution as “sexual exploitation”, whilst the other tends to conceive of them as “sex workers” and pursues policies of de-victimization and acknowledgement of basic labour rights.⁷⁷

Recent anthropological scholarship has identified a wide variety of situations, working arrangements, and employment conditions behind the small clues left by sex trade advertising, such as the widespread practice of distributing small flyers in public spaces advertising sexual services in apartments. These small ads, which include photos of naked women and telephone numbers, may be a front for women working independently, either alone or with other women, or they may be managed by the police or pimps. On the whole, they reveal the existence of women seeking to leave street prostitution, whilst also hinting at a reality far more complex than the one-dimensional concept of the sexual exploitation view of prostitution espoused by the abolitionist feminist hegemony in Argentina.⁷⁸

For her part, Cecilia Varela explains the local, national and transnational connections involved in the strong resurgence of stories about the trafficking of women in the last decade in Argentina. Varela identifies a resurgence of trafficking stories about Dominican women based on reports in the popular press. There are remarkable similarities with the stories that circulated at the start of the twentieth century. The basic storylines emphasize trickery

77 See note 7 and Mario Pecheny and Mónica Petracci, “Derechos humanos y sexualidad en la Argentina”, pp. 43–69.

78 Debora Daich, “Los Papelitos de la prostitución: Hacia una descripción feminista y densa de la prostitución en Buenos Aires”, in José Olivari *et al.* (eds), *La prostitución hoy en América Latina: Entre el trabajo, políticas y placer* (Bogotá, 2011).

through promises of work, indebtedness, and the kidnapping of women who are then obliged to live and work in brothels. These stories conceal a range of arrangements “featuring varying levels of autonomy” for the women, and also the varying conditions of the sex trade involving the street, cabarets, and apartments. The spread of trafficking narratives from 2005 onwards has occurred in parallel with criticisms of the existing legal framework, which was said only to cover up the international dimension of trafficking without acknowledging the existence of internal networks. Abolitionist feminist organizations therefore began to call for the creation of legal policies for trafficking, even in the case of women of legal age who consent to be prostitutes.⁷⁹

On the whole, the history of sexual work in Buenos Aires is a good case for a reflection on the historical construction of certain legal frameworks and the meanings they acquire in the lives of different individuals. Between both extremes—that of the regulatory fiction, which assumes the existence of self-determined women, free from any coercion, and that of abolitionism, which tends to see all prostitutes through the prism of victimization (in as far as prostitution is always seen as a “form of violence against women”)—the women who have been involved in prostitution in Buenos Aires have shed light, through their livelihood strategies, on the contradictions, borders, and gaps in the diverse forms of the organization of sexual commerce over the last century.

79 Varela, “Entre las demandas de protección y autodeterminación”.

Prostitution in the US: Chicago

Mary Linehan

Introduction

Chicago, Illinois, is located on the south-eastern shore of Lake Michigan. As a portage between the Great Lakes and Mississippi River, it has always been an international trade and transportation centre. By the mid-eighteenth century, the Potawatomi controlled the area. In the 1780s, the first non-native settler—a trader with French and African antecedents—arrived. Around 1800, Chicago was home to troops and rival traders from France, England, and the United States, as well as the Potawatomi. The US solidified its position in Chicago during the War of 1812. By 1833, the Potawatomi were forcibly removed and, in 1837, Chicago was incorporated as a town with 200 residents. It very quickly grew. Between 1840 and 1890, the population grew from 4,000 to over one million making Chicago the fifth largest city in the world. This population was predominantly white, with 77 per cent being immigrants or their children. They came from all parts of Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, but the majority were German, Irish, Polish, and Italian. From 1910–1930, the number of black Chicagoans increased from about 44,000 to 234,000. Still, as late as 1940, 91 per cent of Chicagoans were white. Since the 1950s, however, the city's population has declined from 3.6 million to about 2.7 million. It is now the third largest city in the US. The population decline was spurred by racially-motivated suburbanization by whites who opposed integration, as well as by the changing global economy and deindustrialization through which the city lost hundreds of thousands of working class jobs. Today, Chicago remains an international transportation and trade hub, with a diverse population that is roughly 33 per cent black, 32 per cent white, 29 per cent Latino, and 6 per cent Asian.

Befitting Chicago's historic role as a major industrial city, a transportation hub, a centre for academic research, and the epicentre of Progressive Era (1891–1920) prostitution policy, there is a richly documented history of sex work in the city. However, the scholarship is stronger in some periods than in others. There are two eras in which substantial research has been done. The first extends from the end of the Civil War in 1865 to the early 1930s. The second period encompasses the first eight years of the twenty-first century. Based on the availability of source material, this paper will often compare these two periods.

The historical research that has been carried out includes Mary Linehan's dissertation, "Vicious Circle: Prostitution, Reform, And Public Policy in Chicago", which surveys much of the nineteenth century through 1930. Strong studies focusing on the Progressive Era include Cynthia Blair's book *I've Got to Make My Livin': Black Women's Sex Work in Turn of the Century Chicago* and Kevin Mumford's *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century*. This history is continued in an article by Anya Jabour, "Prostitution Policies and Feminism in Modern America", which discusses the evolution of the Chicago Morals Court from 1913 to 1932.¹

Serious social science research into Chicago's sex industry has also focused on the Progressive Era, as with *The Social Evil in Chicago* which was written by the municipally appointed Chicago Vice Commission (CVC). In 1933, a University of Chicago sociology student, Walter Reckless, published his dissertation as a book titled *Vice in Chicago*. However, sixty-eight years passed before a new spate of empirical works emerged. In 2001 and 2002, the Center for Impact Research released two studies that used interviews with prostitutes, police, and service providers to document the lives and work experiences of Chicago sex workers. In 2004, legal researcher Jody Raphael used the story of Olivia, a woman who spent nineteen years working the streets of Chicago, to trace the trajectory of a woman's entrance into prostitution and the difficulties involved in exiting the business. Three years later, Steven Levitt and Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh used economic and ethnographic research to calculate the experiences of streetwalkers in three south-side neighbourhoods.²

1 Mary Linehan, "Vicious Circle: Prostitution, Reform, and Public Policy in Chicago, 1830–1930", (Unpublished Ph.D., University of Notre Dame, 1991); Cynthia Blair, *I've Got to Make My Livin': Black Women's Sex Work in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago* (Chicago, 2010); Kevin Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York, 1997); Anya Jabour, "Prostitution Politics and Feminist Activism in Modern America", *Journal of Women's History*, 25 (2013), pp. 141–164. Only one woman is known to have written of her own experiences as a prostitute in Chicago; see Ben Lindsey, *Madeleine: An Autobiography* (New York: 1919).

2 Chicago Vice Commission, *The Social Evil in Chicago* (Chicago: 1911), hereafter cited as *The Social Evil*; Walter Reckless, *Vice in Chicago* (Chicago: 1933); Claudine O'Leary and Olivia Howard, "The Prostitution of Women and Girls in Metropolitan Chicago", (Chicago: Center for Impact Research, 2001); Jody Raphael and Deborah L. Shapiro, "Sisters Speak Out: The Lives and Needs of Prostituted Women in Chicago", (Chicago: Center for Impact Research, 2002); Jody Raphael, *Listening to Olivia: Violence, Poverty, and Prostitution*, (Boston: 2004); Steven Levitt and Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh, "An Empirical Analysis of Street-level Prostitution", (Unpublished report, University of Chicago, 2007).

To complement the Chicago story, reference will occasionally be made to prostitution in New York City to the east, New Orleans to the south, and San Francisco to the west. Like Chicago, these cities were important centres of sexual commerce from, at least, the nineteenth century to the present and are historically well-documented. Timothy Gilfoyle's *City of Eros* considers sex work in New York from 1790–1920 and that history is continued through World War II in Elizabeth Clement's *Love for Sale*. Alecia Long's *The Great Southern Babylon* considers race and sex work in New Orleans between 1865 and 1920. Josh Sides surveys prostitution in San Francisco from the 1849 Gold Rush to the present in *Erotic City*. Finally, sexual commerce in the Progressive Era and in the post-industrial north are, respectively, the focus of Ruth Rosen's *The Lost Sisterhood* and Susan Dewey's *Neon Wasteland*.³

Definitions

Despite tremendous increases in opportunities for women, several sexual revolutions, and a myriad of policies and programmes designed to end prostitution and, at times, improve the lives of sex workers, prostitution in 2014 has many similarities to the way it was practiced in the past. It is still the work choice of primarily young, marginalized women with financial needs. Violence, disease, and police malfeasance are often the hazards of doing business. Prostitutes are still publicly stigmatized and shunned by “respectable” Chicagoans. However, women in this line of work continue to express agency and strive, with more or less success, to make the realities of sex work more amenable to their needs.

Three things about commercial sex in Chicago should be noted from the outset. Firstly, boys, men, and transgender individuals have prostituted in the city since at least the 1880s. However, women and girls have always predominated and they are the focus of this essay. Secondly, while scholars have intensely debated the use of the words “prostitution” and “sex work”, the terms are used interchangeably in this study. For some women, it was an empowering opportunity to control and profit from their own sexuality and sex work seemed little different than the other options available to them. For others, it was degrading, desperate, and exploitive. The interchanging terminology reflects both of these realities. Thirdly, the extant sources do not generally

3 Timothy Gilfoyle, *City of Eros* (New York, 1992); Elizabeth Clement, *Love for Sale* (Chapel Hill, 2006); Alecia Long, *The Great Southern Babylon* (Baton Rouge, 2004); Josh Sides, *Erotic City* (New York, 2009); Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood* (Baltimore, 1982); Susan Dewey, *Neon Wasteland* (Berkeley, 2011).

present both realities. The scholarship and memoirs available overemphasize the negative aspects of prostitution and only occasionally grant agency to the women they study. Accordingly, this paper must be speculative about the potential rewards of sex work in Chicago.

Social Profiles

Prostitution, or sex as a purely commercial transaction, was rare among the Potawatomi, if it existed at all before Europeans arrived in the Chicago area. The first French traders found native women to be “modest” and intermarried with them, either formally or “in the manner of the country”, without legal or religious sanction. These unions gave traders acceptance and access to trade networks and produced strong networks of métis or biracial children. For British officers, however, this miscegenation created a race of “base, cowardly, abandoned wretches”.⁴

As the lands in the area of what would become Chicago came under the control of the US government, British prejudices remained. Racial mixing and “in-country” marriages were considered grossly immoral and resulted in prosecution for adultery or fornication. Potawatomi women were seen as entirely lacking in purity and submissiveness. There is some indication that deteriorating conditions for natives in the 1820s and ‘30s led to increased alcohol consumption and some debauchery that served to confirm the purview of whites about “immodest” native women. It is possible that as they struggled to acculturate and watched the destruction of their homeland and culture, some women coped through—or were forced into—prostitution. By the time of the signing of the 1833 Treaty of Chicago, the Potawatomi and other tribes had been driven from Chicago.⁵

For the remainder of the nineteenth century, white women provided most of the sexual labour in Chicago. Although white women are historically over-represented in brothel prostitution, only 15 per cent of brothel prostitutes in Chicago in 1880 were black. Of the white women, 78 per cent were native born. In a southern city like New Orleans, whose culture of commercial sexuality rested on the allure of sex across the colour line, black women were more

4 Albert Hurtado, “When Strangers Met”, *Frontiers*, 17 (1996), pp. 52–75, 54; Ann Searcy, “The Value of Ethnohistorical Reconstructions of American Indian Type Personality”, *Transactions of the Kansas Academy of Science*, 68 (1965), pp. 274–282, 274–275; Lucy Eldersveld Murphy, “Public Mothers”, *Journal of Women’s History*, 14 (2003), pp. 142–166.

5 Murphy, “Public Mothers”, pp. 146, 152.

prominent in off-street prostitution. As a more remote, western town, San Francisco sex workers were even more racially and ethnically diverse, including European immigrants and African Americans, as well as Mexican, Chinese, and Japanese women.⁶ Frontier cities were overwhelmingly male (62 per cent in nineteenth century Chicago), transient, and working class. Since such men were often unable to marry and start a family, prostitution was accepted as a “necessary evil” to meet the sexual demands of these men and preserve the social order. While seeing prostitution as necessary for public order, most nineteenth-century Chicagoans also saw people who engaged in extra-marital sex as sinful and thus prostitution was also a moral problem. These women may have been considered “morally weak”, but they built a large and, for some, lucrative industry. Sex work in Chicago was never legal as it was elsewhere, but it was not entirely illegal either. In 1881, the Illinois Appellate Court ruled that the cursory laws against prostitution applied only to patrons and pimps. While women, especially women of colour, who sold sex were occasionally arrested for fighting, public intoxication, and theft, as long as they confined their sex work to recognized vice districts they were not bothered by the police. Outside the districts, prostitutes were viewed as a nuisance and small fines were used to shepherd prostitution back into the districts.⁷ After 1865, doctors wanting to expand their powers over women’s bodies (as they had done with the first anti-abortion laws) persuaded profit-seeking municipal officials to establish regulated, medically inspected sex districts as was being done in many European cities. Whether such US districts were legalized, as in New Orleans’ Storyville, or tacitly tolerated as in Chicago, they became the standard response to the “necessary evil” of prostitution in the last third of the nineteenth century.⁸

By the start of the twentieth century, Chicago was an established city with a more equalized sex ratio and new ideas about sexuality and policing began to spread across the country. These changes led to a criminalization of female sexuality outside of marriage, including prostitution. Instead of small fines, sex workers were placed in newly built institutions, sent to specialized courts, and entered into probation.⁹ Chicago’s Revised Criminal Code of 1905 made prostitution a crime. By 1911, there were ten state and city laws against sexual commerce and the city authorities used them to close the tolerated sex districts

6 Blair, “I’ve Got to Make My Livin’”, p. 28; Long, *Great Southern Babylon*, p. 193; Sides, *Erotic City*, p. 20.

7 *The Social Evil*, pp. 25–26, 127; *Chicago Tribune*, 6 February 1856, 20 August 1857, 9 April 1859, 14 August 1871; *Chicago Times*, 6 January 1864, 20 February 1870.

8 Long, *Great Southern Babylon*, p. 107.

9 Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, pp. 19–27.

as part of a global effort to abolish prostitution.¹⁰ This process was completed by 1913 and the criminality of women's sexual labour was confirmed by the creation of a specialized Morals Court that prosecuted and even persecuted prostitutes. As this happened, the sex industry became dominated by men, including men involved in organized crime, and they had the wherewithal to buy or bail women's way out of court.

Criminalization separated sex work in the public mind from "immoral" behaviour like adultery and premarital sex. A new definition of prostitution emerged. In the words of a modern researcher, it is "the exchange of money or something of value—including drugs, shelter, or other survival needs—for sexual activity. This includes vaginal, oral, and anal sex, as well as manipulation of another person's genitals for the purpose of sexual arousal."¹¹ By the turn of the twenty-first century, there were approximately 16,000 women in the six-county Chicagoland area who met the definition of a professional prostitute (at least part of the time), although many of them did not identify themselves as prostitutes. These women saw the commodification of sex as "how women get by", "dating for dollars", and "survival sex". The latter term dates to the nineteenth century for black women and at least back to the Great Depression for white women. It connotes that prostitution is one of many albeit highly stigmatized forms of gendered labour that poor people engage in as part of a broader mix of strategies for economic survival.¹² In 2000, there were thirty-three municipal and state criminal statues directly related to prostitution. They are primarily enforced against women, although there have been brief periods in which male customers were subject to more police harassment.¹³

Throughout the 1900s and beyond, its centrality to international transportation and its large immigrant communities allegedly made Chicago a locus for sexual trafficking. During the Progressive Era, Chicago was the US centre of a widespread belief that innocent, white, country girls were being kidnapped and forced into sexual slavery by sinister immigrant men. This myth was promoted by ministers, state's attorneys, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, prominent feminists like Jane Addams, and the US Congress as a way

10 George Worthington and Ruth Topping, *Specialized Courts Dealing with Sex Delinquency* (New York, 1925), pp. 6–11; Michael Willrich, *City of Courts: Socializing Justice in Progressive Era Chicago* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 61; Jabour, "Prostitution Politics", p. 144.

11 O'Leary and Howard, "The Prostitution", p. 6.

12 Dewey, *Neon Wasteland*, p. 4; Rosen, *Lost Sisterhood*, p. 80.

13 *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 29; *Chicago Tribune*, 30 September 2007, 11 January 2008, 27 February 2009, 17 September 2009.

to capture attention and push for other reform objectives.¹⁴ In the 1930s, a University of Chicago sociologist disproved the “white slavery” accusations of the Progressive Era. Other researchers, however, maintained that, almost always by coercion or force, women and girls from other countries or other places in the US were brought to Chicago. It was claimed that they were compelled to prostitute themselves for the profit of the traffickers and then they moved to other locations.¹⁵ It was argued that constant relocation kept women from establishing contacts with those who might provide assistance and made it possible for traffickers to avoid detection by law enforcement agencies. Because of the supposed coercion involved, such “sex slaves” were perceived to be victims and received public and police sympathy that is often withheld from other sex workers.¹⁶ In the 2010s, local women controlled by pimps are also beginning to be viewed as victims of trafficking and to receive a share of the small amount of aid and resources available.¹⁷

Prostitution in Chicago has always been a young woman’s enterprise. Although census records from the Gilded Age and Progressive Era (1880–1920) reveal that there were self-identified prostitutes in their 50s and 60s, the vast majority of women were in their 20s. In the 1880s, most women entered Chicago prostitution between 19 and 22 years of age, with black women at the older end of the spectrum. By the turn of the century, as more employment opportunities for women became available, the age of entrance rose, yet most prostitutes were in their 20s. This is consistent with studies on other US cities although outside of Chicago women entered sex work almost two years earlier.¹⁸ The population of sex workers in the city included girls as young as 12. Men paid extra for teenagers, and the daughters of prostitutes frequently performed sexual labour. In all, 15 per cent of women in the 1880, 1900, and 1910 censuses who claimed to be prostitutes were younger than 19 years of age. According to the CVC, the average age of women who entered sex work was 18, but because it was illegal for persons under that age to enter a brothel, it is conceivable that some women may have lied to investigators. However, unlike in New York City, few would truly be considered child prostitutes. Chicago police made a concerted effort to keep those between the ages of 3 and 18 out

14 See, for example: Jane Addams, *A New Conscience and an Ancient Evil* (Chicago, 1912); Jean Turner Zimmerman, *Chicago’s Black Traffic in White Girls* (Chicago, 1911).

15 O’Leary and Howard, “The Prostitution”, p. 3.

16 Raphael, *Listening*, p. 40; O’Leary and Howard, “The Prostitution”, pp. 3, 28; *Chicago Tribune*, 5 August 2005, 3 February 2013, 3 September 2010.

17 *Chicago Tribune*, 4 March 2013.

18 Blair, “*I’ve Got to Make My Livin’*”, pp. 19–14, 35–39; Rosen, *Lost Sisterhood*, p. 144.

of brothels and off the streets, and most madams refused to employ teens.¹⁹ The authors of contemporary studies have also had difficulty pinpointing the mean age of new sex workers, and the ages of such women range from 15 to almost 21. In 2004, it appeared that 15 per cent of girls began prostitution before the age of 13 and more than half begin by 17, and 72 per cent of those early starters were runaways. 13 per cent of prostitutes were found to be over 40, but because these samples were drawn from prison populations, this may be an over-representation. Because sex work privileges the young, mature women have fewer options for employment and concentrate on street-level prostitution which makes them much more vulnerable to arrest. It is, and has always been, a business for the young.²⁰

In the twentieth century, sex work in Chicago was increasingly identified with immigrants, whether European, Asian, or Central American, and native-born women of colour. There is some justification for this perception. As the most economically marginalized members of society, and as newcomers with few social resources, prostitution becomes both a hazard and a survival option. It also produced unintended consequences in group perceptions. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the identification of prostitution in New Orleans and New York City in areas with high concentrations of non-white residents led to the erroneous belief that such women were innately highly-sexed and more prone to prostitution.²¹ Originally, there was great sensitivity to the over-representation of black women in sex work in Chicago. In 1910, 2 per cent of the population was black but women of colour represented 15 per cent of arrested prostitutes. The CVC decried the prejudices which existed that limited the alternatives for earning a living and drove such women to prostitution. But when the great migration (1915–1930) increased the black population of Chicago to 6.9 per cent, whites were less sanguine about the matter. As a result of outside pressure and racist policing, black women became almost entirely identified with sex work. Around 1905, Chicago police began clamping down on interracial intimacy and banned black men from brothels. As a result, black women were increasingly driven to more “extreme” and “perverse” sexual acts in order to retain white male customers and they took to the streets to service

19 Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*, pp. 63–75; Rosen, *Lost Sisterhood*, p. 79.

20 *US Federal Manuscript Census*, 1880, 1900, 1910; *Chicago Tribune*, 9 March 1858, 23 March 1858, 26 February 1874; *The Social Evil*, p. 169; Raphael, *Listening*, pp. 35, 143; O’Leary and Howard, “The Prostitution”, pp. 8–9, 17, 26; Raphael and Shapiro, “Sisters Speak”, pp. 4–5; Margot Patterson, “Hard Truths About Prostitution”, *National Catholic Reporter*, 2 March 2007, pp. 12–14.

21 Long, *Great Southern Babylon*, p. 129; Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*, pp. 6, 41–42.

black men.²² Prior to 1928, arrested prostitutes were 85 per cent white and 15 per cent black. After 1928, those numbers were reversed and, without public comment, black women continued to account for about 80 per cent of prostitution arrests. Today, while about 36 per cent of the Chicago population is black, 74 per cent of arrested prostitutes are women of colour, 19 per cent are white, and Latinas account for 6 per cent of arrests. In part, black women are more vulnerable to arrest because sex work today is loosely stratified by race. Asian women most often work in massage parlours, Caucasians dominate escort prostitution, Latinas solicit in clubs and bars, and black women are most often found working the streets. As the most visible practitioners, they are the easiest to arrest. However, as black women's presence on the streets in the first place is often a matter of prejudice, because other work options are less open to them, racism cannot be divorced from the long-standing myth that women of colour are more prone to prostitution than white women.²³

Across the centuries, family dynamics have been a much more accurate predictor of potential prostitution than race or ethnicity. In the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, 87 per cent of sex workers came from two-parent families. However, poverty, alcoholism, violence, and sexual abuse made these homes far from safe and they were not ideal environments for the rearing of girls. For later generations, much more precise data is available. Of twenty-first century Chicago prostitutes, 25 per cent grew up without a mother figure and 59 per cent had no father figure. 82 per cent of women came from homes with substance abuse, and 30 per cent were from homes where someone prostituted. 61 per cent of sex workers grew up with domestic violence and 50 per cent were victims of physical abuse. 53 per cent of prostitutes were sexually abused as children and, as a group, they are three to five times more likely to have experienced incest. In both time periods, such family dysfunction could deprive girls of self-esteem, a sense of personal efficacy, and the emotional and financial support to withstand the lure of sexual commerce. More than that, it was often the need to support children or other family members that made a woman's choice to prostitute herself so inevitable.²⁴

Troubled childhoods may contribute to the educational gaps found among many sex workers, but that does not mean that they are deficient in term of

22 Blair, "I've Got to Make My Livin'", pp. 140–143; Rosen, *Lost Sisterhood*, 80.

23 Henry William Herbert, *The Tricks and Traps of Chicago* (Chicago, 1859); *The Social Evil*, p. 39; Reckless, *Vice*, p. 2006; Linehan, "Vicious Circle", p. 294; O'Leary and Howard, "The Prostitution", pp. 6, 10; Raphael, *Listening*, p. 142.

24 *The Social Evil*, pp. 93, 127, 134, 237–241; Linehan, "Vicious Circle", p. 219; Raphael and Shapiro, "Sisters Speak", pp. 4–5, 13–15, 17; Raphael, *Listening*, pp. 19–23.

intelligence. As early as 1870, a *Chicago Times* survey indicated that few prostitutes had much formal education. The CVC report refined this in 1911 when they claimed that sex workers were “not necessarily unintelligent, but certainly, from their opportunity and environment since birth, uneducated, unskilled, and with little opportunity for or possibility for social advancement.” Since then, compulsory schooling and alternate modes of instruction have changed the educational profile of women involved in prostitution. Studies have shown that the majority of women who entered the business after age 15 graduated from high school or gotten a Graduate Equivalency Degree, while 19 per cent of 2001 prostitutes attended college. It is the early starters, typically runaways, who have not completed their schooling. However, in these cases sex work did not disrupt their education; rather, it was their home conditions that prompted the child to leave home, which in turn meant that they had to drop out of school, and that brought about their entrance into sexual commerce.²⁵

Incomplete education is one factor involved in unemployment and employment is the area in which there is the biggest difference between twenty-first century prostitutes and their counterparts in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. 90 per cent of the earlier generation had engaged in legal employment before prostituting. They were primarily servants, clerks, and waitresses, and their average weekly wage of \$5 was 80 per cent less than what could be made in sex work. Not only was \$5 about half of what was considered necessary to support an individual, but women’s work was often seasonal with long periods of unemployment. Consequently, there were even girls who were legally employed engaged in “treating” (sex play for gifts or other non-monetary considerations). They came from a culture that admired people who made large amounts of money with little physical labour, and commercializing their sexuality was the only way working-class women could accomplish this version of the American dream. From the end of the nineteenth century until World War II, treating allowed working class girls to negotiate the boundaries between respectable sex play and prostitution, while granting them access to recreation opportunities and material goods they could not afford to buy for themselves.²⁶

Conversely, service providers in the twenty-first century report that most sex workers have never earned money outside of prostitution. Modern laws

25 *The Social Evil*, p. 110; Linehan, “Vicious Circle”, pp. 103, 287; Raphael and Shapiro, “Sisters Speak”, p. 11; Patterson, “Hard Truths”, p. 12.

26 State of Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Fourteenth Biennial Report* (Springfield, 1908), pp. 181, 244–247; *Broad Ax*, 22 June 1911; *The Social Evil*, pp. 43, 92, 169–170; Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earning Women in Chicago, 1880–1930* (Chicago, 1988), p. 34; Clement, *Love For Sale*, pp. 3–4, 58, 238.

against child labour mean girls do not enter the paid labour force as early as they once did and the large number of young prostitutes in Chicago means that few girls have had the opportunity to try legitimate work before prostitution. As a result, “most of the women have not had any other skills [or options] for making money except prostitution.”²⁷ Likewise, as 71 per cent of such women grew up knowing sex workers, including their own mothers, these women often experience prostitution as a legitimate occupational choice and not a taboo. One prostitute recalls watching women work the streets when she was a child and thinking, “I’ll probably do that.” As a 16-year-old with two babies to support, this woman began a twenty-five year career as a Chicago prostitute. Still, in this case, as in many others, it is impossible to separate sex work as an employment option from social factors such as this woman’s early experiences of sexual abuse and alcoholic caregivers. And even when sex work is a first choice for a job, many women try to supplement their earnings by also working legally. These jobs are about evenly divided between the formal economy, the informal economy, and childcare. However, their average wage of \$110 in 2001 was 60 to 75 per cent less than what they earned while working on the streets.²⁸

The health of prostitutes is a subject of much greater concern today. In the past, despite the myth that all prostitutes died within five years, only two health issues received attention. The Morals Court found that 11 per cent of prostitutes arrested between 1913 and 1930 had a venereal disease. At that time, beginning with the most elite class of sex workers, oral and anal sex were promoted to reduce the transmission of disease. The other health issue was drug addiction. An opium dealer claimed that 75 per cent of his clientele were addicted prostitutes. The CVC concluded, “it is generally recognized that [most] [...] are addicted to the use of cocaine and morphine.”²⁹ Among today’s prostitutes, drug use may be as high as 90 per cent of all women involved in prostitution.³⁰ As one streetwalker said, “it is impossible to do these kinds of acts and be treated in that manner in the right state of mind.” Addiction is as likely to be a cause as a woman’s decision to prostitute herself. We are also aware that there are a myriad of other health issues that accompany twenty-first century sex work. These include post-traumatic stress disorder and depression as well as venereal diseases. 50 per cent of women have migraines and 44 per cent

27 O’Leary and Howard, “The Prostitution”, p. 3.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 29; Raphael and Shapiro, “Sisters Speak”, pp. 14, 17; Raphael, *Listening*, p. 136; Patterson, “Hard Truths”, p. 12.

29 *Chicago Tribune*, 26 November 1867, 29 January 1868, 4 March 1881, 6 April 1886, 26 January 1898; *The Social Evil*, pp. 73, 84; Linehan, “Vicious Circle”, p. 286.

30 O’Leary and Howard, “The Prostitution”, p. 3.

have menstrual problems. 22 per cent of all sex workers—and 60 per cent of those who began before age 18—are HIV positive. This is partially due to the infrequent use of condoms in Chicago prostitution. Because it costs \$2 extra, only 20 per cent of customers use prophylactics. While venereal diseases are not unique to sex workers, no matter what the illness or condition, prostitutes face significant barriers in getting treatment and often lack consistent health care. Though there is no known empirical evidence, it is the opinion of police and service providers that women in sex work are getting “younger and younger and sicker and sicker.”³¹

Push and Pull Factors

Over time, a combination of emotional, external, and economic causes have factored into women’s decision to prostitute themselves. Among the emotional factors is a sense of guilt which often accompanies childhood sexual abuse, something experienced by many women, including some sex workers. This cause appears prominent in accounts from the early twentieth century. At that time, according to prostitute Madeleine Blair and brothel physician Benjamin Reitman, there were few options for unwed mothers, and brothels were one of the few places where a woman could receive the emotional and financial support needed by lone mothers.³² Motherhood as a pull factor was not limited to historic Chicago. In a Progressive Era study of Massachusetts prostitutes, one-third were mothers. Many more supported other family members through the proceeds of sex work. Twenty-first century erotic performers are likewise engaged in sexual commerce to provide for children.³³

External causes figured heavily in accounts from the Progressive Era, though they tended to be written by reformers eager to imagine women as being innately pure and relatively sexless. The women interviewed by the CVC reported the influences of lewd vaudeville shows, growing up in neighbourhoods with “immoral influences”, and the lack of moral teaching in schools and homes

31 *Ibid.*; Raphael and Shapiro, “Sisters Speak”, pp. 4–5, 14, 27; Raphael, *Listening*, pp. 55, 101, 116; Levitt and Venkatesh, “Empirical Analysis”, pp. 15–19; Patterson, “Hard Truths”, p. 1; Emily Muskovitz Sweet, “The Intersystem Assessment of Prostitution in Chicago”, (Chicago, Mayor’s Office on Domestic Violence, 2006), p. 4.

32 *Chicago Tribune*, 9 March 1858, 21 October 1858, 24 December 1858, 23 March 1859, 26 February 1874; Lindsey, *Madeleine*, p. 13; Benjamin Reitman, *The Second Oldest Profession: A Study of the Prostitute’s Business Manager* (New York, 1931), p. 229.

33 Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, pp. 143–151; Long, *Great Southern Babylon*, p. 174; Dewey, *Neon Wasteland*, p. 6.

as the precipitating causes in their decision to take up prostitution, although they chose from a pre-determined list of causes that may have reflected reformers' biases. Newspapers noted the emerging culture of recreation at the turn of the century—and as peer supervision replaced parental supervision of courtship—peer pressure caused some girls to engage in “treating”, dress provocatively, and flirt. It was argued by those outside the peer culture that these forms of behaviour led to increased sexual expression and, ultimately, prostitution.³⁴ 20 per cent of contemporary prostitutes reported that they were under “pressure” from their boyfriends or girlfriends, and others reported that they had partners who forced them to get involved in prostitution or passed them around to service a debt.³⁵

The very real and most commonly cited cause of prostitution in the history of Chicago was economic need. The most revolutionary part of the CVC report asked, “Is it any wonder that a tempted girl who receives only six dollars per week working with her hands sells her body for twenty-five dollars per week when she learns there is a demand for it and men are willing to pay the price”? In its ninety-two recommendations, however, the CVC did not call for economic justice. A century later, need still compels women into sex work. For some women, getting involved in prostitution is a response to the loss of a job, a cut in benefits, or other temporary setbacks. Others begin as strippers or exotic dancers, but find they cannot make a living in those enterprises without selling sex. For runaways and homeless mothers, survival sex is a means of obtaining food, shelter, or protection. Some drug addicts prostitute themselves while others use drugs and alcohol to self-medicate and deal with the trauma of sex work. While some sex workers feel empowered by their choices and the relatively high pay they receive compared to other forms of work, many women become trapped in prostitution as they find it difficult to make enough money to support their habits. Historically, women have suffered economically, especially poorly educated working-class women. They often lack the skills and opportunities needed to make a living wage in the formal economy.³⁶

The economic factors pushing women into prostitution are not specific to any one time or place, though they do come with regional variations. The California Gold Rush made prostitution in 1850s San Francisco one of several ways the very small minority of women in the frontier town could acquire

34 Clement, *Love for Sale*, pp. 222–223.

35 *Broad Ax*, 22 June 1911; *The Social Evil*, pp. 34–36; Reckless, *Vice*, p. 42; O'Leary and Howard, “The Prostitution”, pp. 27–28; Raphael and Shapiro, “Sisters Speak”, p. 17.

36 *The Social Evil*, pp. 40, 43, 169–172; O'Leary and Howard, “The Prostitution”, pp. 9, 14, 17–18, 24, 29; Raphael and Shapiro, “Sisters Speak”, p. 24.

some of that newfound wealth for themselves. In New Orleans, the post-Civil War sex work of black women cannot be understood divorced from the sexual and economic exploitation of slavery. Similarly, throughout the north, young black women were less likely than whites to have family nearby. Without family support and supervision, they were especially vulnerable to sexual abuse. As the lowest paid workers in the city and exceedingly vulnerable to exploitation, prostitution was for many black women a practical, and even empowering, strategy for achieving economic independence. This belief that sex work is the best available option is also present in modern deindustrialized cities where it represents the best hope of upward mobility for unskilled women in economically depressed areas. For all of these women, however, sex work was believed to be a temporary path to betterment amid the structure of poverty in the US.³⁷

Historically, the economic impact of prostitution on women's lives has been minimal, though this does not mean the economic impact of prostitution is minimal. A recent study shows that the average Chicago streetwalker earns about \$20,000 a year, which is about \$5,550 more than a full-time minimum wage worker. While income from prostitution is tax-free and requires only about thirteen hours of work (ten sex acts) per week, it is not a wage on which women will grow rich or lead lives of luxury. However, it is still better paid than other jobs and offers non-economic advantages, including flexibility for single moms. While escorts and women in massage parlours earn more money, this is predicated on youth and attractiveness and is very short-lived. Although prostitution does make economic sense in the short term, it is a very uncertain way to make a living. Prostitution at all levels carries the risk of arrest, disease, violence, and quickly ageing out of the business with few prospects for the future. At the height of brothel prostitution in Chicago, the financial gains for most women were limited and short-lived (though always higher than in other available jobs). Prostitutes in the CVC sample claimed to make \$28 to \$50 per week for forty to fifty-six sex acts. While this was up to eight times what they could expect to make in legal work, women did not retain all the money they earned.³⁸

The money made in sex work has mostly always gone to other people. In the brothel period, madams took 40–50 per cent of a woman's total earnings as board. As prostitution was criminalized and brothels were eliminated, women retained even less of their earnings. Pimps and people involved in organized

37 Long, *Great Southern Babylon*, p. 5; Blair, *I've Got to Make My Livin'*, pp. 10, 33; Dewey, *Neon Wasteland*, pp. 21–23.

38 O'Leary and Howard, "The Prostitution", pp. 19, 23; Levitt and Venkatesh, "Empirical Analysis", pp. 2–3, 14.

crime controlled prostitution and took 60 per cent of what women made in sex work. In this century, pimps still arrange meetings and protection from the police, but they have lost power. Pimps now only receive 25 per cent of a woman's wages and, while they may protect women from arrest, one in every twenty sex acts a woman performs is a "freebie" for policemen. Even without pimps, more than half of prostitutes give their money to someone else and most fear they will be "harmed" if they stop.³⁹ This, however, may be said to be true of other jobs held by economically marginalized women.

While some people took an unfair cut of women's earnings, other individuals and businesses profited from the existence of prostitution. Historically, prostitutes could not shop in ordinary stores and had to buy their clothes, wigs, make-up, birth control pills, and other supplies from traveling salesman at inflated prices. Druggists, doctors, abortionists, grocers, liquor dealers, coal dealers, and other merchants charged premium prices to brothel residents. On the streets, women paid policemen, taxi drivers, and bellboys as part of the cost of doing business. Ancillary businesses in the vice district like saloons, theatres, and dance halls profited handsomely from the existence of prostitutes nearby, but none of that money went to the women themselves. In the twenty-first century, there is also a long list of profiteers making money from the labour of sex workers. These include gangs that allow women to work the streets they control for a fee. Motels that offer "nap rates" and hotels which look the other way also profit from prostitution. Other profiteers include traffickers, drug dealers, and advertisers. This includes internet service providers and media where escorts and massage parlours advertise, phone books, specialized newspapers like *Chicago after Dark* and *The Gentlemen's Pages*, and reputable newspapers like the *Reader* and *Sun Times*.⁴⁰

Changes in Working Conditions

The places where prostitution takes place have changed a bit over the centuries, but other aspects of sex work such as uncertainty, violence, and police harassment have remained constant. This does not mean that all women who choose this line of work are victims or lack agency. They often find ways to make the most of the situation for themselves. Prostitutes have always worked

39 *The Social Evil*, pp. 39–40, 82, 97, 119, 198, 392; Reckless, *Vice*, p. 271; Jabour, "Prostitution Politics", pp. 146, 150.

40 O'Leary and Howard, "The Prostitution", pp. 18, 21–23, 28–29; Raphael and Shapiro, "Sisters Speak", p. 5; Levitt and Venkatesh, "Empirical Analysis", pp. 12, 15.

all over the city in rooms, parks, salons, and a variety of other venues. From the 1830s until 1913, however, most women involved in prostitution congregated in restricted districts where sex work, though never fully legal, was tolerated. These districts provided institutions and a community, and they also created some degree of security for prostitutes. The first district was the Sands located on the beach north of the Chicago River. It was torn down in 1857 and for the rest of the nineteenth century the downtown Levee, from Wabash to the River and from Van Buren to 16th Street, was Chicago's premiere vice district. By the start of the twentieth century, police pressure and improved public transportation forced sex businesses to relocate to the near South side, centred on 22nd and Dearborn. The recommendations of the Chicago Vice Commission led to the closing of the vice districts in 1913 and increased the marginality and vulnerability of prostitutes.⁴¹

In 1913, a lame duck State's Attorney in Chicago closed down the tolerated Levee district. This was in keeping with developments in cities across the US. San Francisco closed its district in 1915 and New Orleans and New York did the same in 1917. That same year, the federal government—perpetuating the myth that prostitutes spread venereal diseases—ordered all sex districts in the vicinity of military training camps to close. While these bans were never fully realized—and many districts were back in business by the 1930s—the closures, when coupled with Prohibition (1920–1933), led to great increases in other forms of sexually-oriented commercial leisure. Burlesque, taxi dance halls, speakeasies, cabarets, buffet flats, and “slumming” in African American communities provided new opportunities for sex workers. Racial prejudice meant that most of these jobs—though primarily located in black neighbourhoods—were reserved for white women. Black prostitutes were relegated to streetwalking which made them vulnerable to aggressive racist policing. By the 1930s, most white prostitutes and some black women worked for organized crime syndicates. Mobsters like Lucky Luciano and Dutch Schultz in New York and Al Capone in Chicago used violence to control women. Though organized crime protected women from over-zealous police and threatening customers, they also involved sex workers in more criminal activities like driving for rum runners and fostering the sale of illegal alcohol which were federal crimes. Organized crime's reach was extensive—Chicago mobsters controlled prostitution in the city, suburbs, and neighbouring states—but it was temporary. As the FBI began to reign in the syndicates, madams regained control of the sex business,

41 Linehan, “Vicious Circle”, Ch. 1.

often as fronts for gangsters, though they more frequently operated call girl rings than brothels.⁴²

Today, street prostitution is still dominated by black women and they continue to work many of the same streets that have been used for prostitution for decades. Most of these locations are near train stations and major roads, though researchers report that some streets on the west side are used by streetwalkers for miles, especially Madison between Damen and Cicero. Yet, in the twenty-first century, they account for less than 20 per cent of all sex workers. Most sexual commerce is conducted at massage parlours and strip clubs or by on-call escorts. The development of the internet and cell phones has facilitated the growth of off-street sexual commerce in such venues as health spas, beauty salons, bars, truck stops, private residences, and other locations. Reportedly, most of this kind of prostitution is still controlled by organized criminal networks.⁴³

Prostitute/Employer/Client Relationships

The locations of sex work have changed over the years, as have the sexual services women provide. At one point, oral and anal sex were considered perversions and were restricted to specialized brothels and offered at premium prices. Today, they are standard options offered to customers, and generally cost less than genital intercourse. Escorts used to dance or model lingerie while men masturbated. Now, they are expected to provide penetrative sex. Similarly, stripping and exotic dancing were stand-alone jobs. Nude dancing, for example, emerged in the late 1960s but was soon in competition with pornographic videos. As had historically happened, competition meant sex workers had to perform increasingly sexually explicit acts fuelled by economic desperation. Today, women report that “it is so easy for the line to become blurred” because they cannot make much money without offering sex in backrooms or accepting outside dates. Some customers have little respect for sex

42 *The Social Evil*, pp. 73–74; Reckless, *Vice*, pp. viii, 12, 96, 271; Joel E. Black, “Space and Status in Chicago’s Legal Landscapes”, *Journal of Planning History*, 12 (2013), pp. 227–244, 234; Sides, *Erotic City*, p. 24; Clement, *Love for Sale*, pp. 128, 177–179, 204–205; Blair, “I’ve Got to Make My Livin’”, pp. 233–234; Genevieve Davis, *Secret Life, Secret Death*, (Milwaukee, 2013), pp. 221, 255, 282.

43 O’Leary and Howard, “The Prostitution”, pp. 3, 14–15; Levitt and Venkatesh, “Empirical Analysis”, pp. 3, 7.

workers and behave in sadistic ways.⁴⁴ Moreover, repetitive labour of any kind is not an easy or appealing way to make a living. Over the years, Chicago prostitutes have described their work as “joyless”, “tiresome”, and “distasteful”, yet this is true for many low-wage occupations. Researchers also claim that many women become repressed in their personal lives as a response to repulsive sex acts and talk in their work lives. This constant splitting of personal and public intimacy may result in emotional trauma, another costly result of sex work conditions in Chicago.⁴⁵

Violence has always been a regular part of the work of prostitution, as well as a factor in the personal lives of many women. Olivia, a 25-year veteran street worker, claimed, “You expect violence at any time and you are scared at all time. For the most part, I tried to be as quick as I could.” The average streetwalker is assaulted by a customer once per month and violence is not limited to the streets. Even during the brothel era when women were ostensibly better protected, physical abuse at the hands of customers was common and, because women could not fight back, they often turned violent with each other. At all times, rape was a fact of life and, like being robbed by clients, considered to be part of the cost of doing business.⁴⁶ Murders of prostitutes have not been uncommon, as in the period between 1995 and 1999 when twelve sex workers were killed. They all worked the lucrative corner at 51st and Halsted; DNA analysis revealed that there were four different perpetrators involved, but no arrests were made. Historically, the assault and murder of prostitutes has received little police attention. Ostensibly, this is because violence is assumed to be an omnipresent feature of the sex business. Frontier mobs, other women, customers, pimps, mobsters, and police all targeted sex workers.⁴⁷

Problems with the police have been part of the work life of Chicago prostitutes since the 1830s. The CVC reported that police leadership was “ignorant” of actual conditions and that beat officers were susceptible to bribes, drank in saloons while on the job, and ignored brothel prostitution. They focused

44 *Madeleine*, p. 110; Reitman, *Second Oldest Profession*, pp. 43, 75; Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900–1918* (Baltimore: 1982), p. 95; Alexa Albert, *Brothel: Mustang Ranch and Its Women* (New York: 2000), p. 89; Dewey, *Neon Wasteland*, p. 30.

45 *The Social Evil*, p. 73; *Madeleine*, p. 110; Reitman, *Second Oldest Profession*, pp. 43, 75, 199; O’Leary and Howard, “The Prostitution”, pp. 20–24; Rosen, *Lost Sisterhood*, p. 95; Albert, *Brothel*, p. 89.

46 *Chicago Tribune*, 12 February 1856, 13 July 1858, 17 January 1860, 16 November 1864, 9 September 1867, 24 January 1871, 12 December 1876, 22 July 1879, 22 October 1890.

47 Raphael and Shapiro, “Sisters Speak”, pp. 19–20, 30; Raphael, *Listening*, p. 92; Levitt and Venkatesh, “Empirical Analysis”, pp. 3, 14; “Murder Times Four”, *Newsweek*, 6 September 1999, p. 33.

their attention on outdoor prostitution, and streetwalkers complained, "There is not a policeman around here that doesn't hold us up" and "you can't trust a copper." One woman left the streets for a brothel "to be protected from the police." Older, underage, less attractive, disabled, and non-white women did not have this option and were the ones most often arrested and imprisoned for prostitution-related offenses. The end of the brothel era brought no real improvements. Crime bosses took control of prostitution and stayed in power by bribing politicians and police officers. Those women not "protected" by the mob were threatened with arrest if they did not offer sex and money. The specialized Morals Court was designed to help women, but from 1913 to 1932 it subjected them to mandatory examinations for venereal diseases and confined those found to be infected without trial or a conviction; a positive examination result was considered to be proof of guilt. For non-infected women, a policeman's word was proof that she was a prostitute and resulted in criminal penalties.⁴⁸

Although changing moral standards and policing priorities mean that fewer arrests are made in the twenty-first century, women still have much to fear from the police. Today, most arrests are driven by community complaints and the average sex worker is only arrested once in every 450 transactions. The majority of women are charged with misdemeanours, released without bail, and fail to show up for court dates. Avoiding trial, however, makes women liable for re-arrest and indictment on more serious charges; until 2013, after the second charge of prostitution became a felony, women became more vulnerable to police officers seeking bribes or "freebies". Additionally, there are reports that the police perpetrate a "great deal" of the violence to which women are subjected and more than 25 per cent of the rapes of sex workers.⁴⁹ Prostitutes also have complicated and contested relationships with the men with whom they work, including both customers and pimps. Customer relations can be very antagonistic. The typical client has always been a man under 40 years of age. Working-class men in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era often could not afford to marry and support a family. For their more affluent counterparts, a sporting culture among young men applauded sexual expressiveness and cultivated anti-marriage attitudes. For both of these groups, going to prostitutes was an expedient method of sexual release. Subsequently, the introduction of more reliable and accessible forms of birth control, the feminist drive for more equality in all spheres, and a pronounced lessening of sexual taboos combined to create greater opportunities for consensual sexual activity by unmarried

48 *The Social Evil*, pp. 150, 160, 198; Reitman, *Second Oldest Profession*, pp. 15, 144, 271; Jabour, "Prostitution Politics", p. 146.

49 O'Leary and Howard, "The Prostitution", pp. 10, 12.

people.⁵⁰ However, some men still preferred sex with no strings attached. Others lacked confidence with women, were unattractive, or were physically or mentally challenged and had fewer alternatives for female companionship and sex. Contemporary prostitutes service all these men.

Despite men's real or imagined need for women's sexual labour, some customers have historically been cruel to sex workers. Anecdotal evidence shows men who are violent, thieving, and cheap. One woman left Chicago in the mid-twentieth century when she realized the city's men were "tighter than the bark on a tree." Most aggravating were the men who expected to know a woman's real name and her life story and considered such personal information to be part of the services they paid for. A brothel physician in the Progressive Era noted that most customers were "brutal" and forced women to practise "all sorts of perversions", though what was considered perverse changed over time. Many men wanted prostitutes to cut and hurt them, but more found sexual release in dominating and abusing women. Rape was their preferred sexual fantasy. Men have never been shy about publicly attacking a woman's appearance, attitude, or sexual skills. In the earlier period there were red-light district newspapers like the *Chicago Street Gazette* which rated and critiqued women for the entertainment of other men. Today, women are similarly judged and their livelihoods threatened by reviews on specialized websites and Craig's List.⁵¹

Although customers had most of the power in these relationships, sex workers have never been passive victims. From the beginning, they learned to demand payment in advance. They also overcharged drunks, teamed up to pick the pockets of unwary customers, and, more recently, attempted to create new types of economically advantageous relationships. Many sex workers today seek to find "sugar daddies", while younger women live with elderly men in public housing and perform errands, and occasionally provide sex, in exchange for money. These relationships combine a sense (or illusion) of affection and a regular source of income, thereby blurring the lines between prostitution and dating.⁵²

50 Howard Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor: Creating an American Subculture* (Princeton, 1999), pp. 35–36; Gilbert Geis, "Prostitution as a Reckless Enterprise", *Sociological Focus*, 30 (1997), pp. 17–29, 26.

51 *Madeleine*, pp. 110, 189; Reitman, *Second Oldest Profession*, p. 20; Polly Adler, *A House is Not a Home* (New York, 1953), p. 238; Josie Washburn, *The Underworld Sewer: A Prostitute Reflects on Life in the Trade, 1871–1909* (Lincoln, 1997), p. 92; Raphael and Shapiro, "Sisters Speak", p. 8; Levitt and Venkatesh, "Empirical Analysis", p. 3.

52 *Chicago Tribune*, 31 March 1858, 16 December 1866, 18 July 1876, 14 January 1877, 26 September 1879; Lindsey, *Madeleine*, p. 38; O'Leary and Howard, "The Prostitution", pp. 18, 25.

Racial politics also complicate the transactions between prostitutes and clients. In the brothel period, the vice districts were the most integrated sections of Chicago. White men of any income bracket could be serviced by a large supply of white, black, and Asian women. However, black men were excluded from all but the lowest-priced brothels and, even then, many women refused to service them; up until 1905, however, there were a small number of white women in Chicago who specialized in servicing black men. In the south of the US, however, sex across the colour line was a driving force of the sex business. Vice districts, like Storyville in New Orleans, became notorious largely because of their toleration of interracial intimacy allowing white men to fulfil their fantasies of sex with a black woman. Racial politics were no less a part of the sex business on the west coast. In the nineteenth century, San Francisco women worked in the same brothels, but English, French, and American women were on the top floors, while Mexican, Japanese, and Chinese women were available—at lower prices—downstairs. Today, black streetwalkers charge premium prices to white and Latino men while offering black men discounts. Because prices are generally negotiated on a case-by-case basis and are not pre-determined, other racially motivated price discrepancies probably exist among groups of women that have not been studied by researchers. Repeat customers and more attractive men also receive discounts.⁵³

Another complication is the unfairness of the criminal justice system. Although men and women engage in the same illegal behaviour, the consequences for women are much more severe. Customers are sometimes arrested but not to the extent that women are jailed. There are no standardized sentencing guidelines for johns and when women were forced to submit to disease testing, men were exempt. For men, the biggest risk of prostitution may be having a mug shot posted on the Chicago Police Department website. For women, the penalties may escalate to felony convictions and mandatory prison sentences. As early as 1911, the Chicago Vice Commission noted the inherent injustice in the city's prostitution policy: "it is a man and not a woman problem which we face today—commercialized by man—supported by man—the supply of fresh victims furnished by man." Yet, more than one hundred years later, women still bear the brunt of the punishment and the stigma inherent in sexual commerce.⁵⁴

53 Linehan, "Vicious Circle", ch. 1; Levitt and Venkatesh, "Empirical Analysis", pp. 3, 15; Blair, *I've Got to Make My Livin'*, p. 183; Long, *Great Southern Babylon*, pp. 88, 129, 192–198; Rosen, *Lost Sisterhood*, p. 80.

54 *The Social Evil*, p. 47; Sweet, "The Intersystem", pp. 2, 7; Levitt and Venkatesh, "Empirical Analysis", p. 5; Jabour, "Prostitution Politics", p. 149.

Prostitutes have always had complicated relationships with their customers and these are well-documented. Relationships between sex workers and pimps are harder to understand as women seldom acknowledge they exist. Although the term “pimp” was used in Chicago newspapers as early as 1861 to denote men who lived off the earnings of prostitutes, the women interviewed by the CVC denied that they supported men. The commission concluded that “cadet” was the preferred term for a complicated partnership between young women and men of their own age and class. While the women earned the money, the man “looks after her” and used his political connections to get her out of trouble when she was arrested. The women viewed these men as lovers and beaux and, although often the men were abusive, the women would not testify against them because “she loves him.” Thus men could not be prosecuted for pimping. Today, police believe there are few pimps working in Chicago, though service providers disagree. Researchers found streetwalkers on the south side of the city working alone and working with pimps. Those who operated alone claimed they would prefer to have a pimp because of the higher pay and protection from the police. All told, it is estimated that about half of Chicago sex workers give the money they earn to someone else whether they use the term “pimp” or not and that the majority of those fear they will be harmed if they stop prostituting.⁵⁵

Prostitute Culture

In the brothel era, there was a strong sub-culture uniting the women of prostitution. Nineteenth-century sex workers wore a distinctive outfit consisting of wigs, jewellery, heavily embellished gowns, and fancy hats, and they also wore makeup. As the women of their times, they also developed a strong female network of comfort and companionship. Those from abusive homes sought new families in the Levee. They chose new names to symbolize their break from their previous lives. Brothel prostitutes referred to madams as “mother”. Although they were businesswomen primarily concerned with profits, many madams did generally care for the women they employed. Co-workers who became like sisters also helped defuse the harsher realities of sex work. Asked if a sense of sisterhood pervaded at Mother Herrick’s Prairie Queen, one prostitute replied, “You bet your life there is.” Women lent money to each other,

55 *Chicago Tribune*, 2 July 1861; *The Social Evil*, pp. 170, 184; O’Leary and Howard, “The Prostitution”, pp. 16, 17; Raphael and Shapiro, “Sisters Speak”, p. 5; Raphael, *Listening*, p. 48; Levitt and Venkatesh, “Empirical Analysis”, pp. 2–4.

shared clothes, cared for each other during pregnancy and illness, and paid for each other's funerals. Such bonds, however, could be fragile. Though some relationships did become romantic and many friendships were very tender, these women also competed with each other for financial survival. This made it difficult for them to trust each other and necessitated a long initiation period of intimidation and tricks played on newcomers who challenged the status quo. Survivors of this initiation were allowed into the sisterhood. In the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, sex workers in cities like New York were also deeply entrenched in the working class communities in which they lived and, generally, were accepted by their neighbours.⁵⁶

By the 1930s, the culture of sex work had been shattered. Criminalization drove prostitution underground and organized crime networks pushed women across the city, forcing them to frequently move from place to place. Under these conditions, it was impossible for women to recreate the sisterly relationships of brothel life or the close bonds of community with their neighbours. Moreover, the unique accoutrements of prostitutes—rouge, bleached hair, strong perfume, shorter dresses—were being adopted by other women. As women outside of sex work engaged in street flirtation with unknown men, prostitutes refined their manners and became more subtle in their approach to prospective clients. By the mid-century, not only had the number of prostitutes declined, it was also increasingly difficult for the uninitiated to distinguish prostitutes on the street or in bars from other young women.⁵⁷

Today, prostitutes may be recognized by the fact that they frequent certain city streets or work in massage parlours or gentlemen's clubs. They also may be found on the internet or through advertisements. There are some 4,000 Chicago women who may be identified as full-time professional prostitutes. These women share many of the same problems and often come from similar backgrounds. Yet, contemporary research finds that public and private shame discourages collective labour action among sex workers and that they remain largely socially invisible. Yet, a sense that they are engaged in an adversarial relationship with authority also helps some women forge short-lived solidarity and support networks. This suggests, but does not prove, that most women in prostitution in Chicago have only tenuous and fleeting connections with

56 *Chicago Daily Journal*, 19 July 1853; *Chicago Tribune*, 29 May 1857; *Chicago Times*, 16 December 1866, 27 November 1870; Frederick Francis Cook, *Bygone Days in Chicago: Reflections on the Garden City of the Sixties* (Chicago, 1910), pp. 131–133; Lindsey, *Madeleine*, pp. 55, 65, 113, 165; Albert, *Brothel*, p. 161; Rosen, *Lost Sisterhood*, p. 105; Clement, *Love for Sale*, p. 113.

57 Reckless, *Vice*, pp. 12, 55, 159.

other sex workers. Since the 1980s, agencies have offered coffee, interaction, condoms, and necessary medical and legal services for prostitutes, but the ultimate objective of these organizations has been to get women out of prostitution. It is not clear where women committed to remaining in the business can find respite and support.⁵⁸

It has never been easy for women to leave prostitution and, in the nineteenth century, conventional wisdom was that women didn't leave the trade. The myth was that most prostitutes died of disease and degradation within five years. In reality, many women moved west and re-established themselves. By the early twentieth century, researchers and madams agreed that women left prostitution to make "good marriages to men they really cared about", or, at least, "men willing to overlook the past."⁵⁹

Society and Prostitution

Prior to the 1930s, periodic efforts were made by reformers to assist prostitutes trying to leave sex work. In the 1860s, Catholic sisters founded the House of the Good Shepherd, while Protestant women opened the Chicago Erring Women's Refuge for Reform. Founded on a religious basis, both institutions strove to create a family environment and to instill moral training in their "inmates." They also provided obstetric care, medical services, education, job training, and emotional support. The House of the Good Shepherd also offered women the opportunity to enter a permanent, quasi-religious order of penitents. The refuge found women jobs, often away from the city, and sponsored some former prostitutes who pursued teacher training at the Illinois Normal School. As they were dependent on public funding, however, by the end of the century they turned to the more publicly pleasing (and therefore more lucrative) preventative work among young and relatively innocent girls. At the same time, New Orleans established its Storyville district to control the lives and movement of women. Conversely, in the chaos following the 1906 earthquake, the city opened a non-punitive, municipal venereal disease clinic to help women. However, the national trend was towards criminalization and, in 1914, San Francisco adopted a Red-light Abatement Act to force prostitutes out of business. In 1913

58 O'Leary and Howard, "The Prostitution"; Raphael and Shapiro, "Sisters Speak"; Levitt and Venkatesh, "Empirical Analysis"; Dewey, *Neon Wasteland*, pp. 35, 104–105.

59 *Chicago Tribune*, 26 November 1867; Linehan, "Vicious Circle", p. 286; Reckless, *Vice*, p. 57; *Madeleine*, pp. 325–326; Pauline Tabor, *Memoirs of the Madam on Clay Street* (Louisville, 1972), p. 218.

Chicago created the first Morals Court to investigate social problems and assign social workers who were tasked with helping women leave prostitution. In practice, however, the court persecuted women, subjected them to mandatory medical examinations, and placed them in confinement for having contracted a venereal disease before their guilt or innocence was even determined. Under these circumstances, very little attention was given to the provision of social services.⁶⁰

Today, the difficulties women experience transitioning out of sex work are understood, but rather inadequately handled, by service providers. Legal scholar Jody Raphael has documented the many obstacles to exiting prostitution. Foremost among these problems is the fact that many women have never done anything else and, for them, the notion of “escape” is meaningless. When Raphael asked one long-term prostitute why she did not leave, the woman replied, “leave for what?”. Even for women who can envision an alternative life, serious and persistent violence, addiction to drugs and alcohol, physical and mental health problems, and frequent homelessness make it difficult to leave prostitution. Other sex workers, friends, and family members who feel threatened by a woman’s independence withhold support, sabotage attempts at change, and argue that the lack of education and finances make escape impossible. Traffickers may take foreign-born women’s passports, restrict their movements, and control them with violence or threats to hurt their families to hinder escape. Compounding all of these obstacles is the rarity of specialized social service programmes available to prostitutes.⁶¹

In 1983, lay missionary Edwina Gateley opened Genesis House as part of her ministry dedicated to north side prostitutes. The house, located down the street from Wrigley Field, was to be a safe place where, in her words, women in trouble could “find some external order amid their personal chaos: a haven to cry, spill their guts, drink a cup of coffee, and work on their recovery within rules, but at their own pace.”⁶² Like its nineteenth-century predecessors, the House of the Good Shepherd and the Erring Women’s Refuge, Genesis House had a long-term residential component and offered a spiritual basis for transformation. It also provided educational and medical services, court advocacy, and support groups. As AIDS became a crisis, Genesis House became a source for condoms and clean needles. However, when Gateley left the ministry, the

60 Linehan, “Vicious Circle”, ch. 2; Suellen Hoy, *Good Hearts: Catholic Sisters in Chicago’s Past* (Urbana [etc.], 2006); Long, *Great Southern Babylon*, p. 103; Sides, *Erotic City*, pp. 22–23; *Jabour*, “Prostitution Politics”, pp. 144, 155.

61 Raphael and Shapiro, “Sisters Speak”, pp. 5–6; Raphael, *Listening*, pp. 8, 40, 136, 143, 212.

62 *Chicago Reader*, 30 July 1987.

home entered a period of decline. By 1997, the three-year residential programme had been “streamlined” to six months, and the hospitality and spirituality programmes were discontinued. In April 2006, the Executive Director and Chief Financial Officer were charged with embezzling more than a half million dollars of taxpayer funding from the home and using the money for personal expenses. This created an irreparable financial crisis and, no longer able to provide vital services to sex workers, the home closed its doors for good.⁶³

Brenda Myers-Powell was a Genesis House resident during Gateley’s ministry and is now using her own successful rehabilitation to help other women. A sexually abused child, she began her “inevitable” life in prostitution at the age of 14 in order to support her two children and grandmother. At first, she was ecstatic about the large sums of money she was earning on Chicago’s streets. But soon, Myers-Powell was kidnapped by two men—“pimp arrested”—and forced to prostitute herself for their profit. She also did exotic dancing and became addicted to crack cocaine; she stayed in sex work for twenty-four years before she met Gateley. Today, she is a member of the Cook County Sheriff’s Department prostitution intervention team and runs support groups and counsels women who have been incarcerated for prostitution. Myers-Powell also conducts and presents scholarly research on prostitution and trains social workers how to understand human trafficking and provide for victims. With another survivor, she co-founded the Dreamcatcher Foundation. This non-profit for young women aged 12 to 24 helps victims transition to a new life through a residential programme and trains and empowers vulnerable girls so that they can better resist exploitation.⁶⁴

As an activist, Myers-Powell has successfully challenged the laws which hinder women’s exit from prostitution; those laws place all of the criminal penalties on the vulnerable woman while the pimps and johns who profit from the crime go unpunished. In 2013, two laws were changed. First, the Justice for Victims of Sex Trafficking Crimes Act clears the criminal records of people who can prove they were sexually trafficked, including those forced to work in prostitution. Also, the law which made a third conviction for prostitution a felony was repealed. These legal changes remove some of the obstacles women face in transitioning out of prostitution. They also improve women’s prospects for employment, clear the way for legal immigration status, and offer former sex workers the opportunity to adopt and foster children.

63 Patterson, “Hard Truths”, pp. 12–14; *Chicago Tribune*, 27 December 1995, 3 October 2006; *Chicago Sun Times*, 4 October 2006; *Chicago Reader*, 30 July 1987; Edwina Gateley, *I Hear a Seed Growing* (Naperville, 1990).

64 *Chicago Tribune*, 14 March 2011.

As a survivor, Myers-Powell is in a unique position. Historically, she is the first Chicago sex worker to play a prominent role in the establishment of municipal prostitution policy. While women in the sex business have always had problems, concerns, issues, and needs, Myers-Powell is the first to have acquired a wide public audience to advocate on sex workers' behalf. Moreover, she is also uniquely qualified to work with women in the business and those in danger of being trafficked. She understands how difficult it is to change lives when women feel like "damaged goods", and outsiders are reluctant to help because they don't see prostitutes as "salvageable". Thus, Myers-Powell believes in survivors helping each other. As she explains, "a woman like myself who started as a youth and didn't get out until I was 39 years, proves that if it can happen to me, it can happen to anybody."⁶⁵

Brenda Myers-Powell tells the women and girls she works with that "you are never too young or too old to start a new life."⁶⁶ She is a woman of profound wisdom, survival experience, abundant compassion, and enormous energy, but she is just one woman and there are at least 16,000 prostitutes in the Chicagoland area. While there are certainly more non-profits and government agencies working to help sex workers than there have ever been before, they are still woefully inadequate for the needs at hand. The vast majority of prostitutes in Chicago are—as they have always been—virtually alone as they negotiate the dangers of their risky profession and the uncertainty of their futures.

Conclusion

Despite the passage of time, there are more commonalities than differences in the ways prostitution was practised, policed, and viewed between the Gilded Age and the early twenty-first century. Women and girls may enter sex work at younger ages and spend fewer hours engaging in penetrative intercourse these days, but sex work can still be a dangerous, tedious, exploitive, and low-paying occupation. However, these choices have always been the same for young, economically marginalized women. Moreover, sex work has always provided the flexibility and resources that single mothers need to tend to their families. Prostitution is more criminalized than it was in the past and the penalties still primarily affect women. The laws that do apply, however, are seldom enforced, but when they are used they still tend to disproportionately penalize black women. Then as now, sex workers' biggest problems with the police are

65 *Ibid.*, 14 March 2011, 4 March 2013, 23 August 2013.

66 *Ibid.*, 14 March 2011.

constant harassment and demands for cash and sexual bribes. In both time periods, prostitutes were the subject of ribald humour, derision, and social stigmatization. However, there is now a greater public understanding of the factors—internal, external, and economic—that lead women into sex work. As a result, public policy is slowly adjusting to the needs of these women, and prostitution survivors—though not active sex workers—are accorded a greater role in the shaping of policy and provision of services in Chicago. However, as in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, most Chicagoans still perceive prostitution as something a woman would never actually want to do.

Prostitution in Havana

Amalia L. Cabezas

The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

For more than 200 years, from 1566–1790 Havana, Cuba was central to the Spanish *flota*, or fleet system, a convoy designed to avoid and repel attacks by other European pirates and privateers. By 1592, the Spanish crown granted Havana the title of “city” due to its large population. Its strategic importance as a shipping port and its location facilitated the conquest of new lands throughout the Americas. As historian Alejandro de la Fuente explains, “With the organization of the great viceroyalties of Mexico and, later, Peru, the crown’s emphasis shifted from Cuba’s settlements on the southern coast to the Cuban northwest, particularly the Bay of Havana.”¹ Ships returning treasure and goods from the ports of Veracruz, Portobelo, and Cartagena congregated at Havana harbour in order to return together to Spain. For several weeks, sometimes months, Havana was a city filled with sailors, soldiers, merchants, adventurers, and travellers passing the time until the ships were ready to sail back to Spain. Scholar Antonio Benítez-Rojo notes, “In 1594 the people of Havana had to provide lodging, food, drink, and entertainment with song and dance for seven months to the 5,000 people who visited [...] many of whom had sufficient means for the enjoyment of the pleasures that the city then offered.”²

The city of Havana is located approximately 170 kilometres from Key West, Florida at the junction of the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. Its closest neighbours are the United States, Mexico, Jamaica and Haiti. Since its inception, Havana was a city with a multinational character, a feature that continued to distinguish the capital into the twentieth century. As the city grew, it became increasingly populated by large numbers of young single men traveling from France, Italy, Portugal, and Germany, as well as Jews and Moors escaping the clutches of religious persecution.³ These voyages also brought

1 Alejandro de la Fuente, *Havana and the Atlantic in the Sixteenth Century* (Chapel Hill, 2008), p. 4.

2 Antonio Benítez-Rojo, “Creolization in Havana: The Oldest Form of Globalization”, in Franklin W. Knight and Teresita Martínez-Verge (eds), *Contemporary Caribbean Cultures and Societies in a Global Context* (Chapel Hill, 2005), pp. 75–96, 78.

3 de la Fuente, *Havana and the Atlantic*, p. 94.

what were known as *mujeres de mal vivir*, or women of ill repute, who were escaping the clutches of the Inquisition in Spain, women who were widowed or left behind by husbands traveling to the Americas, and impoverished women without dowries.⁴

Unaccompanied and unmarried women residing in Havana provided sexual and domestic services to sailors, soldiers, merchants, and adventurers. The governing institutions of the island profited from women's labour. In 1584 the Cuban Governor wrote a letter to the King of Spain reproaching Havana's military officer for "housing" several women. Later, in 1657, the clergy were accused of having disputes over prostitutes.⁵ These historical references suggest that the sale of sexual services was an activity that entangled the military and ecclesiastical power structures of the Spanish colony.

Havana became dominated by a "service" economy that was characterized by music-making, gambling, and prostitution. Thus, idle travellers "fostered robbery and speculation, as well as the growth of social vices."⁶ The procurement of sexual services was a vital part of the formation of the city and of conquest and colonialism. The sexual-service economy was important to the growth of Havana as a port city and as a crossroads for trade. Because the majority of women during the sixteenth century were illiterate, part of the wider pattern of limited or prohibited education and employment outside the home for women and girls, they often found a livelihood working in taverns and lodging houses offering domestic and sexual services to the soldiers and merchants who migrated to or were transient travellers in the city by the bay.⁷ Those who provided sexual services were often times destitute and enslaved.

During the sixteenth century, besides working in taverns and boarding houses, women who sold sexual services were connected to the service economy in the delivery of domestic services. Enslaved women brought to Cuba from Africa were able to operate taverns out of their homes, hire themselves out for household work, and, given the high demand, provide sex. Some of these slaves were employed on small farms in the areas surrounding the city, and they also worked as itinerant street vendors, coming into contact with transient travellers such as sailors and using sexual commerce to supplement their earnings and, in some cases, to save and eventually buy their manumission. Freed women slaves working in the city also used sexual services as a way to survive and to complement their wages in other sectors of the economy.

4 Mayra Beers, "Murder in San Isidro: Crime and Culture during the Second Cuban Republic", *Cuban Studies*, 34 (2003), pp. 97–129, 104.

5 Beers, "Murder in San Isidro", p. 104.

6 Benítez-Rojo, "Creolization in Havana", p. 78.

7 de la Fuente, *Havana and the Atlantic*, p. 205.

For slave-owning entrepreneurs, Havana offered the perfect setting for catering to the sexual desires of large numbers of men from the metropolis, young single men who arrived in Cuba either as immigrants or as itinerant travellers. These early procurers exploited slave women and took advantage of the shortage of white women to cater to the men staying in Havana. In 1658, Havana's governor Juan de Salamanca sought to "require the owners of black women and mulattos to keep them within their houses and not give them permission to live outside nor to go to the mills and corrals [...] because these slaves thus earn for their owners wages much greater than those that are [otherwise] earned."⁸ Even after emancipation, many of the women continued to perform these same activities, as there were no other segments of the wage economy where they could earn a living. Selling sex to the military garrisons and transient travellers, such as sailors, was an important aspect of African women's survival and processes of manumission in Havana.

Slave-owning families of Havana greatly benefited from being able to hire out their women slaves as prostitutes but other groups also profited from human trafficking and sexual slavery. It was common, for instance, for soldiers and clergy to purchase one or two female slaves so they could rent them out to other men and thereby increase their revenues.⁹

The vibrant mercantile economy reproduced the gender-based, economic, and racial division of labour in the Iberian Peninsula, where women of subordinated status were over-represented in sexual markets. Thus, *mulattas*, slaves, and free women of colour worked in saloons, lodging houses, and households offering domestic and sexual services to soldiers, sailors, and the large itinerant population in the port city. As historian Alejandro de la Fuente states, "Some of Havana's most humble residents, frequently black women, made a living cooking for them [men in the garrisons], laundering their clothing, and selling sexual services."¹⁰ More or less from the inception of the city of Havana, sexual commerce was an income-generating activity for women and a source of social reproduction that maintained the power structures of the military and the colonial mercantilist economy.

Even while being economically vital to the city and colonialism, women who sold sexual services were stigmatized. Although government decrees did not prohibit the sex trade, women of the elite classes were socially secluded in their homes. Therefore, early on a dichotomy and distinction between private and public, and good and bad women, existed and was enabled by the development of racial systems of categorization. During the seventeenth

8 Dick Cluster and Rafael Hernández, *The History of Havana* (New York, 2006), p. 13.

9 *Ibid.*

10 de la Fuente, *Havana and the Atlantic*, p. 78.

century, policies enacted regulatory measures to control women's sexuality, mobility, and behaviour, imposing standards of comportment that defined virtual womanhood according to patriarchal parameters. For centuries to come these strictures continued to influence the perception and treatment of *mujeres públicas*, or public women.

Hospitals and prisons were some of the earliest institutions established to contain and punish wayward or public women. Unruly and disorderly women, including prostitutes, were originally housed in the city's first hospital, San Francisco de Paula. Founded in 1664, it served both medical and penal functions. The mix of races in the hospital and the mingling of women from various backgrounds was cause for consternation, however, resulting in the establishment of a housing-penal institution called the *Casa de Recogidas* to confine and correct the behaviour of women considered to be rebellious.¹¹ Inaugurated in 1746 with a focus only on wayward women, the institution was initially built as a home for poor and destitute young women.¹² With the stated intent of protecting women's virginity and segregating them by race and class, it housed women who did not obey social norms and who were marginal in the social order. Indigent and poor women, slaves, alcoholics, adulteresses, murderesses, thieves, the mentally ill, political prisoners, and *mujeres públicas* were also housed there.

The *Casa de Recogidas* sought to reform women through work and religious instruction, and it was modelled after similar efforts in Spain with the *Casa de Arrepentidas* or *Recogidas*. In both Spain and the colonies, women were incarcerated to penalize and rehabilitate sexual transgressors. Sentenced by judicial authorities for defiant behaviour, incarcerated women could not leave the premises without the permission of a judge. Many were unable to escape. It was not until 1917 that the system of *Casa de Recogidas* was abolished but, as we will see, in the twentieth century similar efforts were made to restrict and rehabilitate "wayward" women.

The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

Havana in the 1770s was the largest port in the Spanish-American colonies with an estimated population of 40,000.¹³ The sex industry continued to expand

11 Tiffany A. Sippial, *Prostitution, Modernity, and the Making of the Cuban Republic, 1840–1920* (Chapel Hill, 2013), p. 27.

12 Rolando Alvarez Estévez, *La "Reeducación" de la Mujer Cubana en la Colonia: La Casa de Recogidas* (La Habana, 1976).

13 Benítez-Rojo, "Creolization in Havana", p. 78.

together with the many social and political developments that dramatically transformed the population of the capital city. During this time, women became central to debates encompassing public health, race, nation-building, and morality.

The wars fought to win independence from Spain—the Ten Years' War (1868–1878), the Little War (1879–1880), and the Spanish-American war (1895–1898)—led the population of the island to flee to Havana, as it offered more possibilities for survival than the countryside. This internal displacement resulted in an economic and social crisis which caused many families to lose their homes, jobs, and titles to their land. Impoverished rural workers migrated to cities to find work. Women who were excluded from paid employment in most sectors of the economy made a livelihood selling sex and domestic services, while men laboured or became beggars, vagrants, and petty thieves.¹⁴

Havana sustained its place as one of the busiest ports in the Americas. The internally displaced population could find opportunities for survival in what was a thriving and cosmopolitan city. As Cuba became the largest producer of sugar in the world, merchant ships were at the port of Havana during the sugar harvest for weeks and months at a time, and crews numbering in the tens of thousands spent their time ashore in pursuit of diversion and entertainment. Steamship lines linked Havana to New Orleans, and over 150 ships from the city of Philadelphia visited the port yearly.¹⁵ In addition, there were also travellers passing through Cuba on their way to the California Gold Rush. As in its inception, the city offered gambling, dancing, merry-making, and sex.

Against a backdrop of economic and political uncertainty, during the nineteenth century a more intimate relationship developed between the United States and Cuba and this greatly influenced and transformed the sex industry. By the mid-nineteenth century, as North American tourists began to visit Havana regularly for work, business, and pleasure, a tourist industry grew to accommodate northern travellers. As historian Louis A. Pérez emphasizes, “Bars, brothels, and bistros, operated by North Americans principally for North Americans, expanded along both coasts. They became familiar features of the bay streets of the port cities; around these streets there developed a nether world into which North Americans of almost every social type descended.”¹⁶ Women from the US travelled to work in the brothels, “many hired directly from the United States, others stranded in Cuba without resources or a job,

14 Louis A. Pérez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution* (New York, 1988), p. 133.

15 Benítez-Rojo, “Creolization in Havana”, p. 78.

16 Louis A. Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture* (Chapel Hill, 1999), p. 23.

some newly widowed, others recently unemployed.¹⁷ Such was the case of a nanny from Connecticut who was fired at a sugar estate in the interior. She migrated to a brothel in Havana to eke out a living. Another occurrence was a penniless North American actress who turned to prostitution in Havana after being abandoned by her lover.¹⁸

US labourers also travelled to Havana. In the 1880s an estimated 32,000 US seamen visited Havana annually. Migrant US railroad and construction workers, merchant seamen, and women selling sexual services crowded the city.¹⁹ It was the transient nature of the travellers, their tenuous social location, and loose connections to the social networks of the city that further expanded prostitution in the capital.

Another force shaping the sex trade of Havana was the slave trade. In the city of Havana, city residents owned on average 3.1 domestic slaves each. As in earlier periods, women of African descent were sexually enslaved to their owners and rented out to clients. The connection between domestic and sexual services was exacerbated by the shortage of women and easy access to slaves.²⁰

As the sex trade grew at a rapid pace, displays of sexual commerce increasingly offended influential members of society; the sale of sex was too public and too close to the centre of the city where wealthy families lived. To better implement state surveillance and address complaints, the colonial authorities moved women who were selling sex to a geographically circumscribed area. Concerned with the dual purpose of controlling health and morality, the colonial administrators sought to contain and isolate the sale of sexual services within a designated tolerance zone on the outskirts of the capital. Regulations were also implemented to prevent the spread of venereal diseases. Syphilis in particular was said to be responsible for the death of many of the Spanish military troops that arrived in Havana to fight the wars of independence, and it killed “from 14,000 in 1868 to well over 97,000 by 1877.”²¹ For Spain, it was intolerable that the majority of imperial soldiers were dying of disease and not in combat.

The category of prostitute had not received explicit juridical or disciplinary consideration. The police generally responded to common “delinquent” behaviour and not prostitution per se, particularly when the offending person was

17 *Ibid.*

18 *Ibid.*

19 *Ibid.*

20 Camillia Cowling, *Conceiving Freedom: Women of Color, Gender and the Abolition of Slavery in Havana and Rio de Janeiro* (Chapel Hill, 2013).

21 *Ibid.*, p. 49.

located in a central area of the city where influential families lived. In response to complaints about “public women”—implying delinquent and scandalous female behaviour such as drinking in public, using offensive language, and generally offending bourgeoisie sensibilities and norms—they were removed from affluent neighbourhoods and sent to the fringes of the city.

Beginning with the “Edict of Governance and Police for the Island of Cuba” enacted in 1842, legislation targeting prostitution began to be implemented. The law specifically outlawed brothels, and it stated that “houses of prostitution are prohibited and will be prosecuted according to the law.”²² By 1853, policy shifted from outright prohibition to sanctioning prostitution within the aforementioned officially authorized zones of tolerance. These zones replaced total prohibition and marked the beginning of a new era of legal regulation and control. But the overwhelming concern in the creation of zones of tolerance was more about moving public soliciting to marginal parts of the city and not so much with controlling activities within brothels. It was illegal to establish brothels outside of the geographical areas zoned for prostitution. Within the segregated district, they were further regulated by the police. Prostitutes resisted by devising various schemes and techniques to evade their stigmatization, forced relocation, and curtailed mobility. For the most part, however, there wasn’t enough funding to implement the laws and the police were rather lax in enforcing the regulation.

Starting in 1860, the city’s chief of police called for a *padrón*, or master list of prostitutes that counted all prostitutes according to race, to be drawn up. However, it was not until 1869 that the list was created, and it appears to have been the first and only such record to have survived. It took ten years to complete, and the methodologies used to create it are unclear. For instance, how was the information gathered? How were the racial categories determined? Was the identity of prostitutes imposed on the women or supplied voluntarily? Historian Tiffany Sippial maintains that police officers relied on their knowledge of known or reputed prostitutes. Women who only performed sexual services on an “as-needed” basis, clandestine prostitutes, and those living in the centre of the city away from the zones of tolerance were excluded from the *padrón*. According to these unreliable statistics, the 1869 census of brothels and prostitutes included 498 prostitutes in total, with most of the women living close to the centre of the city.²³ Although madams did not have an assigned racial category, the majority of the prostitutes were classified as white (85 per cent)

²² *Ibid.*, p. 31.

²³ Alberto J. Gullón Abao, “La Prostitución en la Habana en los primeros años del siglo xx”, *Trocadero*, 14–15 (2003), pp. 93–105, 26.

and 6 per cent were determined to be of mixed race and 9 per cent black.²⁴ These figures remained fairly stable in various other estimates of that period of Havana's history. For instance, Historian Gullón Abao claims that there were 500 prostitutes in Havana in 1878 and that the number of prostitutes did not increase until 1899 when it rose to 774 as a result of the war that broke out.²⁵

The most notorious sex district was known as Colón, an area between Habana Vieja and Centro Habana. Another district was on Zanja Street. But because the tolerance zone was vaguely defined—no one was sure where the hodgepodge of nonadjacent spaces was exactly located—the loosely defined policy was difficult to enforce and easy to evade. Ultimately, the method of geographically segregating prostitutes proved inadequate for the metropolitan government. It was abandoned in 1868 as colonial officials turned to medical-scientific regimes of regulation that were becoming increasingly popular in Paris. It was during this time that the loose and indistinct category of “public women”, or the demimonde, was replaced by that of “prostitutes”, a term that focused exclusively on sexual commerce.

For the colonial government, the census revealed that the policy of tolerance was not meeting their expectations. Creole elites and the colonial regime focused on marking and controlling prostitutes and prostitution with increased efficiency. Influenced by the debates and practices taking place with the rise of science, medicine, public health regimes, and in particular the work of French physician Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet, a system of mandatory registration for prostitutes within tolerance zones together with medical examinations and the issuance of identity cards was implemented. Similar efforts were made in London with the British Contagious Diseases Acts and they spread throughout the western European colonies in more or less the same form.²⁶ Similar measures were enacted in German Africa, Argentina, Brazil, India, Guatemala, Japan, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Mexico, and Russia.²⁷ In this way, the colonial policies and systems regarding prostitution that were established in Cuba were comparable to those developed to protect imperial soldiers in other areas of the world.

In 1873 a statutory law called the Special Public Hygiene Regulation (*Reglamento de Higiene Públicas*) was implemented and it stipulated that a hospital would be established with the aim of examining and treating sex workers

24 Sippial, *Prostitution, Modernity, and the Cuban Republic*, p. 51.

25 Gullón Abao, “La Prostitución en la Habana en los primeros años del siglo XX”, p. 26.

26 Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and US Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley, 2002).

27 *Ibid.*, p. 29.

who had contracted venereal diseases and an asylum was to be set up to house homeless women and girls who were infected. The Special Public Hygiene Regulation brought into being a regulatory scheme of surveillance through the registration of brothels, madams, and prostitutes.²⁸ The law called for all registered women to carry at all times a *cartilla sanitaria*, an identity card identifying them as prostitutes, and they were to be examined twice weekly, “once for a general exam and once internally by use of a speculum.”²⁹ Those infected with venereal or other contagious diseases were remanded to the new hospital for treatment or sent to the *Casa de Recogidas*. No efforts were made to regulate male access to sexual services as this was deemed to be a natural part of manhood.

By instituting a skeletal administrative and medical staff, the regulation sought to register madams and remand women to the hospital where they were examined and treated by medical personnel. The process of documentation involved the creation of a public record of prostitutes, medical check-ups every two weeks, and mandated hospitalization in cases of venereal infections. A letter was also issued to inform clients and the police when a prostitute was determined to be free of venereal diseases. All the costs were borne by the registered brothel madams. The fees paid by brothel workers were also used to pay a special police force that was tasked with carrying out the legal obligations outlined by the *Reglamento*. In essence, all of the costs related to the implementation of this policy were paid for by the fees collected from the sex industry. The regulation thus created a system in which those who could not afford to pay for the regulations were criminalized.

Every year after the implementation of the law new requirements were added to the legislation to closely circumscribe the public comportment of prostitutes. Women employed in brothels were not allowed to stand near windows, look outside, be drunk, or follow people on the streets. The system also included detailed rules that stipulated how often prostitutes needed to change bed linens and when they could receive visitors and for how long.³⁰ Brothel owners were also forced to cover their windows to prevent people from looking inside. The legislation also curtailed public behaviour in terms of soliciting customers, “gathering in open doorways, occupying balconies in theaters, or riding through public streets in open carriages.”³¹ Under the new directives,

28 Beatriz Calvo Peña, “Prensa, política y *prostitución* en La Habana finisecular: El caso de La Cebolla y la ‘polemica de las meretrices’”, *Cuban Studies* 36 (2005), pp. 23–49.

29 Beers, “Murder in San Isidro”, p. 104.

30 Calvo Peña, “Prensa, política y *prostitución* en La Habana finisecular”, p. 25.

31 Sippial, *Prostitution, Modernity, and the Cuban Republic*, p. 57.

prostitutes were also not allowed to sing or use profane or provocative words in public.

Women evaded the forms of surveillance created by the system of regulation any way they could. They used pseudonyms when stopped by the police and avoided the imposition of fees, and they also moved frequently to evade detection. Before being subjected to medical examinations they used powders, creams, and astringent solutions to hide signs of venereal diseases and others simply refused to undergo the examinations. Clandestine prostitutes refused to register or carry the *cartilla sanitaria*, and it did not help that the police were lax in collecting fees. By 1876, the new regulatory system was under considerable pressure, and the first chief officer of the Special Hygiene Section was fired for living in a brothel.³² Nevertheless, these challenges proved surmountable. A renewed effort was made with new legislation and leadership to execute the policy. In 1877, the General Regulation of Public Hygiene promoted a more rigorous surveillance process that called for higher fees, increased police supervision, intensified administrative accountability, and more staff to manage and control the system of regulation.³³ A maximum penalty was enforced for madams and prostitutes who violated the laws repeatedly and they were subject to three months of imprisonment and the closure of their brothels. Stiffer state regulatory measures resulted in higher revenues for the state from fines. It also solidified the formation of a class system that differentiated between types of prostitutes.

La Cebolla: The Onion

From evasion to outright confrontation, prostitutes challenged and instigated numerous forms of resistance against unjust regulations and policies. Perhaps the most creative form was the creation of a newspaper detailing their complaints and calling for the formation of a political party run by prostitutes. Financed by wealthy prostitutes and supported by the collaboration of an anarchist who served as the editor, the newspaper run by Havana's sex workers was a means by which they voiced their complaints against unjust laws and corrupt government officials.³⁴ For the first time in the history of Havana and perhaps of Latin America, a publication emerged which openly advocated for the rights of prostitutes. In 1888, *La Cebolla: Periódico Ilustrado. Órgano Oficial*

32 Beers, "Murder in San Isidro", pp. 97–129.

33 Sippial, *Prostitution, Modernity, and the Cuban Republic*, p. 65.

34 Beers, "Murder in San Isidro", p. 105.

del Partido de su Nombre (*The Onion: Illustrated Newspaper, Official Organ of the Party with the Same Name*) appeared in the capital city.³⁵ *La Cebolla*, which was “published by and for prostitutes”, was in direct opposition to the *Reglamento de Higiene Pública* and directly opposed the system of regulation. The articles in the newspaper ridiculed and complained about the high regulatory fees and the medical check-ups. One unsigned letter stated:

The Mayor, who is so old and cranky that not even a fly dares to land on him, has decreed that we cannot exhibit ourselves in the doorways of our own establishments. [...] Is this fair? What country prohibits a businessman from showing the public his merchandise? The “horizontal” of this city pay more contributions to the state than necessary. Yet, even though we contribute more than any other sector to bolster the revenues of the state with the sweat of our [...] brows, we are treated as if we were slaves, as if we were outlaws. In other words, we are considered citizens so as to meet our obligations but not to enjoy the rights of citizenship.³⁶

La Cebolla protested against the control of prostitutes’ lives by challenging an exploitative administrative system that was paid for with all the regulations enacted over their bodies. One of the articles appearing in *La Cebolla* declared “!Basta Ya! (Enough is enough!)” and objected to the fact that a child was used to take down the names of prostitutes who were found to be looking out windows and standing in doorways.³⁷ Another article advocated for the formation of a prostitute’s professional guild so they could back their demands. The newspaper carried full-length pictorials of the women, who used nicknames to conceal their identities, and it was produced four times during the month of September in 1888 and was widely distributed throughout Havana and the provinces.

Scholars dispute the authenticity of the writings and the legitimacy of the newspaper. Beatriz Calvo Peña’s argument is that Victorino Reineri Jimeno, a progressive journalist, penned all the articles. However, historian María del Carmen Barcia Zequeira speculates that literate and wealthy sex workers financed the paper and wrote some of the articles. Barcia Zequeira argues that a number of factors, including the rise of civil society, helped to solidify

35 María del Carmen Barcia Zequeira, “Entre el poder y la crisis: Las prostitutas se defienden”, in Luisa Campuzano (ed.), *Mujeres latinoamericanas: Historia y cultura: Siglos XVI al XIX* (La Habana, 1997), pp. 263–273.

36 Beers, “Murder in San Isidro”, p. 105.

37 Calvo Peña, “Prensa, política y prostitución en La Habana finisecular”, p. 26.

a context in which prostitutes could become organized and voice their concerns. Sippial's textual analysis of the writings further supports this contention. Instead of arguing that Reineri, the anarchist who was the editor, wrote all the articles, she points out how a multi-vocal and gendered writing style differentiated the prose, concluding that prostitutes contributed articles to the newspaper that were different in style from Reineri's prose. She ascertains that an alliance between the anarchist and a specific group of prostitutes made the publication possible.

Irrespective of its exact origins, the newspaper challenged the social order of late nineteenth-century Havana by affirming the demands of women who sold sexual services. But it also highlighted that, unlike in previous historical periods, so-called public women were no longer uneducated and illiterate. For instance, in 1853, Luisa Bonetti, who was born in Germany and was 26 years of age, was detained and subsequently deported for creating a public scandal and being intoxicated in public numerous times. Before being deported, she fought back against numerous arrests and contested her criminalization to the local authorities. As historian Maria del Carmen Barcia illustrates, Bonetti was the literate mother of a six-year-old daughter who refuted the charges against herself by writing many letters to the governor and Captain General of Cuba contesting her case.³⁸ Bonetti's case further confirms the findings of a study showing that 32 per cent of the Cuban-born women treated at the hygiene hospital between 1889 and 1902 were literate.³⁹

La Cebolla was an act of defiance against a colonial administration that was under constant attack. The newspaper was quickly banned and its editor was fined and incarcerated. Nevertheless, the exploitation of sex workers was publically discussed and inspired the creation of a new identity for prostitutes as labouring women.

Class and Racial Differences

La Cebolla brought to light the economic and educational hierarchies that had solidified with the system of regulation, a framework establishing socio-economic classes, and geographical demarcations. Race figured significantly in the stratified sex trade. There is evidence to suggest that women and men

38 Barcia Zequeira, "Entre el poder y la crisis: Las prostitutas se defienden", *Contrastes*, 7 (1991–1993), pp. 7–18, 10.

39 Sippial, *Prostitution, Modernity, and the Cuban Republic*, p. 96.

of African descent had to deal with the harshest working conditions and the lowest pay.

In the brothels and zone of tolerance pimps and madams were at the centre of a process of social differentiation and organization. In the pimp hierarchy, those at the top lived solely off the earnings of several women, and they wore fine clothes and ostentatious jewels. Such was the case of Alberto Yarini y Ponce de León (1882–1910). In the world of the Havana demimonde, he was commonly referred to as Yarini; he was the popular son of an aristocratic family and a leader in the conservative party who was well-known and respected in the tolerance zones as a *chulo*, or pimp. In the end, Yarini was killed during a quarrel with French pimps.⁴⁰ Indeed, long-running feuds between French pimps, known as *apaches*, and *guayabitos*—specifying Cubans—were common. Yarini's funeral was attended by as many as 10,000 people from all ranks of society and received coverage in US newspapers.

Yarini was the pinnacle of the sex industry's upper-level rank. Beneath him were working-class pimps who did not enjoy the same social admiration. Pimps known as *café con leche chulos* ("coffee with milk pimps") were such pimps, and they had few women working for them, wore cheap watches and shabby outfits, sold drugs, and had other occupations to supplement their earnings. They came up with various recruitment and money-making schemes so they could make a living off new arrivals from the countryside, underage girls, and young women seeking work at employment agencies.⁴¹ Some used newspaper advertisements or theatrical agencies to recruit women,⁴² or they served as intermediaries between madams and clients, utilizing photographic albums of available women.⁴³ Others joined a host of businessmen and property owners who charged exorbitant prices for products and living arrangements sold to sex workers.

White matrons who owned brothels were able to make a decent living in the sex industry as well. Many of these business owners had previously worked in brothels in Europe, the Canary Islands, Mexico, Panama, Venezuela, and the US, and they had earned large sums of money in their youth.⁴⁴ They invested their savings in the launching of entertainment venues that offered

40 Cañizares, Dulcira, *San Isidro 1910: Alberto Yarini y su época*, (La Habana, 2000).

41 Alberto J. Gullón Abao, "Un acercamiento a la prostitución cubana de fines del siglo XIX", in Consuelo Naranjo Orovio and Miguel Puig-Samper (eds), *La Nación Soñada: Cuba Puerto Rico y Filipinas ante el 98* (Madrid, 1996), pp. 497–507, 503.

42 Gullón Abao, "Un acercamiento a la prostitución cubana", p. 503.

43 Tomás Fernández Robaina, *Recuerdos secretos de dos mujeres públicas*, (La Habana, 1983).

44 Barcia Zequeira, "Entre el poder y la crisis", p. 11.

prostitution, gambling, and dancing. In Havana it was well-known that they treated their “pupils”, as their workers were known, harshly, keeping them under tight control to deter them from “escaping” and stealing.⁴⁵ As intermediaries in the sex trade, matrons had influential relationships with the medical and administrative officials and this made it possible for them to carry out their business by paying out bribes.

Lower-ranking prostitutes were those who could not afford the high fees associated with working in the brothels. Those at the bottom strata were women of African descent who worked as *fleteras*, (women for hire or for rent), and they were unregistered clandestine streetwalkers. More visible and hence more vulnerable, *fleteras* found clients on the streets and dark alleys, as well as by the docks and warehouses next to the bay. Often they were the most exposed to violence, and they received the lowest remunerations. *Fleteras* were usually women in ill health, the older prostitutes who were generally from vulnerable segments of society, and in their trade they faced greater stigma and denigration.⁴⁶ As illegal sex workers they were easy prey for the police who regularly rounded them up, beating and sending them to the local prison.⁴⁷

In contrast, registered brothel workers, while subject to the reach of the hygiene law, had more protection from police violence and exploitation. Nevertheless, they were subordinated by the madams who curtailed their mobility and extracted as much money from them as possible. Registered brothel workers earned more money but they had to deal with the matrons’ absolute power over them, as the matrons charged them for supposed debts for clothing and furnishings that were never incurred.

Between *fleteras* and registered brothel workers, and between high society and low-class pimps, there was a fuzzy economy of people who dabbled temporarily in the sex trade. Because they were not poor, black, or working class, their activities were invisible and not necessarily marked as sex work. These included white women who provided occasional sexual exchanges in houses not registered as brothels. Women who worked out of restaurants, bars, cafés, and hotels were morally suspect but not readily identified as sex workers. Women who did not lead marginal lives were able to negotiate sex for jewellery, theatre tickets, and fine garments in a discreet manner without marking their identity as sex workers. The general lack of employment for women, exclusionary practices in the labour market, and the low wages in most sectors of the gendered

45 Gullón Abao, “Un acercamiento a la prostitución cubana”, p. 503.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 497.

47 Beers, “Murder in San Isidro”, p. 106.

economy led women to provisionally engage in short term sexual arrangements so they could secure a livelihood.

Migration and Prostitution

During this epoch of massive European migration to the Americas, Havana attracted many settlers. For example, between the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries more than half a million Spaniards immigrated to Cuba. In 1850, Spain initiated large-scale trans-Atlantic migration which brought many *Gallegos* (people from the Galician region of Spain) and Canary Islanders to Cuba.⁴⁸ Young, single men went there in search of better opportunities. Women from Spain and the Canary Islands also migrated there. Some went there with the express intent to work in the sex industry or ended up there because they had no other options for employment. They joined trans-Caribbean migrant women arriving from countries such as Mexico, Puerto Rico, New Orleans, Jamaica, and Haiti.⁴⁹ Journalist and travel writer Basil Woon cautioned visitors about meeting up with such women:

It may be as well to warn you here that few of these “beautiful young things”—and they are both beautiful and young—are Cuban. Most of them are from Panama or Chile or Ecuador. But they all speak Spanish and only a few know any English.⁵⁰

Historian Rosalie Schwartz states that “more than a few North American ladies of the evening traveled to Havana to compete with the locals.”⁵¹ For the most part these women made their voyages voluntarily, even though Cuban immigration officials sought to deter the organized “white slave” trade. Some of the women established their pseudonyms based on their foreign identities. For instance, the women writing for the newspaper *La Cebolla* assumed names such as La Madrileña, La Catalana, La Isleña, and La Charo, emphasizing a

48 Alejandro Vázquez González, “Algunos aspectos do transporte do emigración galega a América 1850–1930” in Jesús de Juana and Xavier Castro (eds), *Galicia y América: El papel de la emigración* (Ourense, 1990), pp. 117–134.

49 Gullón Abao, “La prostitución en la Habana en los primeros años”, p. 26; Beers, “Murder in San Isidro”, pp. 97–129; Basil Woon, *When It’s Cocktail Time in Cuba* (New York, 1928), p. 268.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 276.

51 Rosalie Schwartz, *Pleasure Island: Tourism and Temptation in Cuba* (Lincoln, 1997), p. 86.

foreign place of origin. However, xenophobic anxieties, particularly aimed at racial “others”, became a regular part of calls to ban the sale of sex. The racial attitudes of the petite bourgeoisie disparaged immigrants and non-whites and blamed them for the multitude of problems that challenged an over-crowded city filled with new immigrants.

The influx of migrants further cemented class hierarchies in Havana. For the elites of society, the issue of prostitution was thought of either as a problem of immoral immigrants or part of the practices of “depraved” racial groups such as Afro-Cubans and Chinese labourers. As Sippial argues, the origins of sexual vice on the island were thus externalized.⁵² Prominent feminists, doctors, and influential leaders decried the existence of “undesirable” immigration, accusing immigrants and Afro-Cubans of fomenting the sex trade.

Large groups of indentured Chinese labourers began arriving in Cuba in 1847, and an additional 5,000 Chinese emigrated from the United States to avoid the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act.⁵³ These migrants, principally single men, made a perilous and arduous journey to work in the agriculture sector for eight years and then made their way back to Havana from the countryside where they established a Chinese community. In 1872, it was estimated that there were 58,000 men and thirty-two women of Chinese descent in Cuba.⁵⁴ As researchers point out, slavery-like conditions existed in the migration of Chinese people, particularly women: “One such advertisement indicated the sale of a ‘Chinese woman of twenty one years’ and another announced the sale of ‘a Chinese girl.’”⁵⁵ Another example, this time from an advertisement in a Havana-based newspaper, read: “For sale: A Chinese girl with two daughters, one of 12–13 years [of age] and the other of 5–6, useful for whatever you may desire. Also one mule.”⁵⁶ The traffic in Chinese girls emerged in various periods but was not recorded in the official records. Sippial found an interesting case of two Chinese “criminal” females who had been remanded to the San Francisco de Paula hospital in 1856.⁵⁷

We know very little about the racial and national backgrounds of those who worked in the sex industry in Havana. There are few reports from the era, as many documents were destroyed after the US–Spanish War. Nevertheless, we

52 Sippial, *Prostitution, Modernity, and the Cuban Republic*, p. 117.

53 Lisa Yun, *The Coolie Speaks: Chinese Indentured Laborers and African Slaves in Cuba*, (Philadelphia, 2008).

54 Juan Pérez de la Riva, *Demografía de los coolies chinos, 1853–1874* (La Habana, 1996), p. 23.

55 Yun, *The Coolie Speaks*, p. 63.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 64.

57 Sippial, *Prostitution, Modernity, and the Cuban Republic*, p. 27.

can make an approximation. For instance, of the 461 women that were treated in the Hygiene Hospital between 1873 and 1876, 151 were from Spain, 116 were from the Canary Islands, 145 were “almost all” Cubans of colour, and 49 were foreigners.⁵⁸ The note that 145 Cuban women were “*casi todas de color*” (almost all of colour) suggests a racial imperative that would serve to hide the number of white women in the sex trade. Indeed, in his report as secretary of the Commission of Hygiene, Ramón Mariá Alfonso indicated that 77 per cent of the prostitutes were white and he argued that other reports lacked objectivity.⁵⁹ By the end of the 1880s, a report indicated that 77 per cent of registered prostitutes were Cuban and mainly white.⁶⁰ Again, we know little about how these racial classifications were arrived at or what constituted certain categories such as “foreigners.” Historians have pointed out that the wars of independence in Cuba drew large numbers of displaced internal migrants to the capital city as they were looking for employment.⁶¹ Some were newly freed slaves who were quite vulnerable, and exclusionary practices could be temporarily circumvented by selling sex. By the end of the nineteenth century, as in the centuries before, the sex industry offered a livelihood for foreigners and Cubans alike.

The Twentieth Century

In the beginning of the twentieth century, the tumultuous nature of the nineteenth century continued unabated. Havana served as the entry point and destination for many internal migrants who were fleeing displacement resulting from more than thirty years of wars of independence. Emancipated slaves, unemployed rural workers, and international immigrants sought to make the city their home. The US had used the sinking of a boat off the Havana Bay as an excuse to enter the war of independence against Spain and occupy the island of Cuba. Havana therefore was in a transitional period of transformation as Cubans adjusted to their newfound independence from Spain and US occupation.

The occupying regime installed a provisional government and embarked on a process of making the Cuban nation receptive to its capitalist goals. While there were many efforts to “Americanize” the country in this period, the US

58 Barcia Zequeira, “Entre el poder y la crisis”, p. 11.

59 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

60 *Ibid.*

61 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

did not radically change or alter existing laws concerning prostitution. As one commentator expressed in a Cuban newspaper, “The Americans here abolished cockfighting, bullfighting and the lottery. Why did they leave prostitution in the Republic? It does not exist in the United States [...] nor in other civilized nations.”⁶² As historian Laura Briggs points out, “During a brief period during US occupation in Cuba the US military government briefly repealed (1898), then reinstated (1899) prostitution regulation.”⁶³ The policies that were re-established were basically the same; the only difference was that alcohol sales were now prohibited in brothels. US soldiers certainly took advantage of the restored policy. One 17-year-old patient in the Special Hygiene Section told medical personnel that she had sexually serviced forty-one US soldiers in a single day. Many Cubans felt that US policy was a mere extension of Spanish colonial exploitation.

With the endorsement of the occupying government, a regulation ratified in 1902 raised the legal age for registration from 15 to 18 years of age in an attempt to curtail prostitution carried out by young girls. The regulation also clearly defined the geographic parameters of the tolerance zone and hence it decreased the ambiguity of the previous policy. But because no new zones were added and the sex trade persisted in the same space as it had been since 1850, it resulted in over-crowding in the zone, thus increasing rents. Sippial contends that, “Fully aware that their tenants were bound to the tolerance zone, landlords split rental properties into ever-smaller units, for which they charged astronomical prices.”⁶⁴ Years later, an informant told researcher Fernández Robaina, “We had to rush those who were making love in the rooms to be able to service our clients. In houses of six or more rooms, there were as many as fifteen whores.”⁶⁵ The informant added, “That is to say, in the amount of time that before we were with one client, now we had to service two or three.”⁶⁶ Sexual commerce took on an assembly-line approach as women had to work faster to pay the exorbitant rents.

The dense population of Havana was further augmented by US-based tourism. A new law outlawing the sale of alcohol in the US, the Volstead Act of 1919, served to expand the steady flow of North American tourists to Cuba.⁶⁷ With

62 *Diario de la marina*, (Havana, November 22, 1910) as quoted in Fernández Robaina, *Recuerdos secretos de dos mujeres públicas*, p. 42.

63 Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and US Imperialism*, p. 32.

64 Sippial, *Prostitution, Modernity, and the Making of the Cuban Republic*, p. 145.

65 Tomás Fernández Robaina, *Historias de Mujeres Públicas* (La Habana, 1998), p. 45.

66 Fernández Robaina, *Historias de Mujeres Públicas*, p. 46.

67 Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban*, p. 167.

their proximity to Havana—US travellers seeking to escape the long arm of US morality could flee to Cuba for a weekend of partying and indulging in outlawed behaviour. Havana became known as a place where Americans went to do what they were not allowed to do in their own country. In this way, Havana became known solely as a city of depravity.

From 1915 to 1930, Havana had the largest number of foreign visitors in the Caribbean. Mass-marketing campaigns stimulated pleasure-seeking visitors to come to a place that was “so near, yet so foreign”, as one travel poster proclaimed—in essence, a place that was exotic but not too exotic. During a period in which the US outlawed “pleasure” activities such as drinking and prostitution, Havana provided an outlet to satisfy demand. Visitor arrivals steadily grew in the twentieth century. In the heyday of North American tourism, visitor arrivals increased from 180,000 in 1940 to a high of 350,000 in 1957.⁶⁸

Gambling, prostitution, and pornographic theatres propagated an outlaw culture that entertained tourists. Havana became known as the “Brothel of the Caribbean”. As one US men’s publication proclaimed,

Havana is indeed geared to the tourist trade as are few other capital cities in the world. It’s a huckstering holiday town with one main pitch: Come on, you thousands of Americans, throw off your inhibitions and play in an old Spanish city which never heard of the bourgeois squeamishness of American play lands! There’s something for every taste and every pocketbook!⁶⁹

Even tourist guidebooks promoted sex tourism, as the following guide book from 1928 indicates:

For your benefit then, you gay old dog, we’ll append a few brief and easily learned phrases:

“Will you come for a ride?”—“Quierespasaeaconmigo?”

(Keeayryspasayarconmeego?)

“Give me a kiss?”—“Dame un beso, chica?”

(Darmyoonbaysimcheeka?)

“Will you sup with me?”—“Quierescenarconmigo?”

(keeyryssaynarconmeego?)

“I love you very much.”—“Tequiero mucho.” (Taykeeayromoocho.)

“How much?”—“Cuanto es?” (Kwantoays?)⁷⁰

68 Evaristo Villalba Garrido, *Cuba y el turismo* (La Habana, 1993), p. 54.

69 Robert Fortune, “Sin—With A Rhumba Beat!” *Stag*, 1 (1950), pp. 22–23, 58.

70 Basil Woon, *When It’s Cocktail Time in Cuba* (New York, 1928), p. 277.

Guidebooks even remarked on the class stratification of the sexual economy, referring to hidden places with better reputations and this offered not only anonymity from the sex industry, but also refined accommodations located in affluent areas of Havana where embassies were located and privileged sectors of society resided. For instance, the exclusive stratum of *casas de cita* charged higher prices and catered to a clientele consisting of politicians, businessmen, and professionals. Mafia-owned casinos frequented by affluent Cubans and US tourists were well-known as places where sex workers could be contacted. Even the lowest echelons of sexual exchange, the waterfront in Old Havana where sex could be purchased more cheaply, were mentioned in the guidebooks.

The *distrito de tolerancia*, or tolerance zone, had been closed down by the time Basil Woon, a British journalist and author, wrote *When it's Cocktail Time in Cuba*. In his travelogue, Woon remarks how by the 1920s prostitution was no longer segregated into vice areas but had spread throughout the city.⁷¹ He details strip shows where “few of the girls wear any clothes to speak of. This is the ‘naughtiest’ public show in Havana, although downtown there is a theatre which is not allowed to admit women and children, so risqué are its shows.”⁷² His guidebook also mentions “French” motion-picture shows, alluding to pornographic film theatres that were increasing in number in the city. The sex industry was emerging in new sectors and providing employment for a multitude of people.

The heterogeneity of the sex businesses in Havana resulted in many different outcomes for women. A sex worker by the name of Consuelo la Charmé who was interviewed by Fernández Robaina stated that she liked her occupation and was proud of her skills.⁷³ She considered it to be a professional endeavour, and she worked into old age by receiving regular clients at her home. Another woman stated that she had never worked at a brothel or on the streets. Instead, she found clients in a bar where she worked selling over-priced, watered-down drinks. She paid the bar owner 50 per cent of the money she made from the drinks she sold but was able to lie about her proceeds so she could keep more of her earnings. Sex workers employed as waitresses in bars benefited from anonymity and independence from procurers. The testimonies collected by Fernández Robaina indicate that prostitutes were careful and discriminating in what types of sexual activities they performed. One of the sex workers, for example, refused to service over-weight men. Therefore, while there is little information about the different categories of workers or types of experiences,

71 Woon, *When It's Cocktail Time in Cuba*, p. 160.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 164.

73 Fernández Robaina, *Recuerdos secretos*.

the diversity of arrangements made it possible for many women not only to make a living through prostitution but to exercise some agency in their work.

Nevertheless, the testimonies of former sex workers also confirmed the types of oppressive culture in which poor women in particular struggled. The narratives collected by researcher Tomás Fernández Robaina tell the story of two former prostitutes who grew up in poverty.⁷⁴ While we are not given many details or exact dates, the women speak of being forced to pay exorbitant prices for rooms, paying madams 40 to 50 per cent of their wages, and dealing with police harassment and extortion. They weren't arrested for prostitution *per se* but they were incarcerated as the result of periodic sweeps carried against people for "offending" public morals or committing "scandals" in public. Even when brothel owners paid their required registration dues, sex workers were subject to police extortion, or what they called the "legalized mafia"; they had to regularly give bribes such as cigarettes or half a peso to the police watchmen. Police harassment was less severe at other places where women sold sex such as cabarets and bars. In the social hierarchy of prostitution, streetwalkers were consistently the most vulnerable and suffered the greatest abuse. Some of them conducted business fully exposed between parked trucks by the railroad yard, and as such they were unprotected from all kinds of police extortion, violence, and abuse.

The police were not the only ones to exploit sex workers. One of the women interviewed by Fernández Robaina described how pimp violence was a means of manipulating prostitutes. In the twentieth century, procurers also became entangled in the sale of illicit drugs such as cocaine and marijuana. In particular, lower-class pimps were often involved in illegal activities, including burglaries and petty thefts. With the exception of Yarini and references to French pimps, we know little about the identities and social characteristics of the men who worked as intermediaries or procurers in the sex districts of Havana.

In the turbulent political climate of the twentieth century, a young lawyer from a privileged white family launched his political career by using the imagery of sex and sin tourism to call for radical social change and armed revolt on the island. On the way to Colombia in 1948, young Fidel Castro was shocked by the "endless succession of brothels, nightclubs, and other lurid amusements" near the US naval base there. Oddly, he compared these to Havana and not to the US occupation of the Guantanamo military base where Cuban prostitutes servicing US soldiers was also rampant. Castro commented, "The famous Panama Canal Zone was the final destination of women from humble families turned into prostitutes by the Cuban bourgeoisie and its system of corruption,

74 *Ibid.*

unemployment, hunger, and despair.”⁷⁵ He reasoned that this was the only reason why Cuba was so well-known and liked in the world. In his political speeches the suffering prostitute emerged as a symbol of political corruption and US imperialism.⁷⁶ Castro and his followers promised to reform Cuba’s political and moral economy. Indeed, as historian Skwiot claims, the political movement led by Fidel Castro, M-26, prohibited its members from patronizing nightclubs, and “Gambling, whoring, and ‘lavish living’ were strictly against the rules.”⁷⁷

In the 1950s, as *Time* magazine called Havana “one of the world’s fabled fleshpots”,⁷⁸ the sex districts were not only proliferating but also diversifying. Pornographic theatres and sex clubs were expanding in various parts of the city, no longer contained to sex districts.⁷⁹ On an entire city block neighbouring the Plaza del Vapor at the end of Galiano Street, prostitutes were exchanged like any other commodity. Havana embodied the essential characteristics of a playground atmosphere where “anything goes”. In his autobiography, Frank Ragano, an attorney who worked for the mafia in the 1950s, recalled a conversation with mafia boss Santo Trafficante about Havana:

Frank, you’ve got to remember, over here there’s something for everybody. You want opera, they have opera. You want baseball, they have baseball. You want ballroom dancing, they have ballroom dancing. And if you want sex shows, they have live sex shows. That’s what makes this place so great.⁸⁰

The number of brothels and the sex trade in general continued to increase in the early 1950s. Commercial sex included everything from live sex shows to pornography, but it also integrated other businesses as well. Connections to hotels and gambling casinos facilitated the sale of sex as well. A North American magazine advised its readers, “If you brush past the airport and dockside pimps on entering the picturesque old city, you merely dodge the first sinful invitation of the community. Desk clerks in a good half of the town’s hostleries

75 Christine Skwiot, *The Purposes of Paradise: US Tourism and Empire in Cuba and Hawai‘i* (Philadelphia, 2010), p. 157.

76 *Ibid.*, p. 169.

77 *Ibid.*, p. 191.

78 *Ibid.*, p. 155.

79 Peréz, *On Becoming Cuban*, p. 23.

80 Ragano and Raab in John Jenkins, *Travelers’ Tales of Old Cuba* (Melbourne, 2002) as quoted in Amalia Cabezas, *Economies of Desire* (Philadelphia, 2009).

are likely to ask if you would like to meet a young lady tonight. Or would tomorrow be soon enough?"⁸¹

By the late 1950s there were about 270 brothels operating in Havana, with more than 11,500 women working as prostitutes.⁸² But by the end of the decade, the abolition of brothels and prostitution became a regular part of discourses that justified revolutionary social change.

Revolutionary Cuba

I cannot believe that there are no madams; that there are no brothels and cabarets where women have to be on the lookout for customers to have money for a bite to eat; the police are not like before, feared by all. I seem to be living in a dream [...]⁸³

The Cuban Revolution of 1959—which evolved into a Marxist-Leninist regime—did not make false promises about eliminating the sex industry. The new revolutionary government sought to eliminate gambling and prostitution, condemning them as vices connected to US imperialism and to the regime of Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista. The new regime abolished street prostitution, brothels, pornographic theatres, and *casas de cita*; in short, all businesses related to sexualized entertainment were banned. This was followed by a government programme that sought to “rehabilitate” sex workers through alternative forms of employment and education. Women were trained and given jobs at various kinds of factories, laboratories, and offices.⁸⁴ Pimping was punished by heavy fines. Many men and women, however, refused to be placed in the rehabilitation centres and some fled the country. The reforms, nevertheless, were successful in the eradication of visible commercial sex. Only a small number of prostitutes were said to be practicing in Havana by the time of the economic collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

The alliance between Cuba and the former communist regimes in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union facilitated the growth and development of the island. As during earlier periods, Havana continued to be prioritized as the capital and cultural centre of Cuba. In the post-Soviet period, Havana continued to

81 Fortune, “Sin—With a Rhumba Beat!”, p. 58.

82 Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban*, p. 193.

83 Fernández Robaina, *Recuerdos secretos*, p. 85.

84 Rosa del Olmo, “The Cuban Revolution and the Struggle against Prostitution”, *Crime and Social Justice*, 12 (1979), pp. 34–40.

provide more economic and social prospects than other parts of the country. As the government moved to attract western capitalism by entering into joint ventures with transnational tourism corporations, Havana was prioritized for development because of its existing touristic infrastructure and its easy access to air and marine transportation. A mass exodus of people occurred from the countryside and the eastern part of the island as people sought to make a living by becoming involved in the tourist economy as it rapidly developed in the city.

The cessation of Soviet subsidies sent the economy into a rapid downward spiral, and female workers, including professionals such as doctors, economists, and lawyers, became involved with tourism in the capital, the only dynamic sector of the economy. Hotel workers and freelancers working in areas near tourist areas facilitated contact with foreign tourists. Their relationships with foreigners involved the selling of goods such as rum and cigars as well as tour guide services and sex. Initially understood to be hustling or a necessary intervention for survival, sex was not the main feature that defined Cuban-foreigner relationships. The changing interpretations of these relationships became evident in the jargon used to describe them. Instead of prostitute, a pejorative term associated with pre-Revolutionary Cuba and stigmatized identities, a new term came into existence, *jinetear*. *Jinetear* involved relationships that involved the sale of goods, service activities, companionship, and sex. By the end of the twentieth century, the term *jinetear* became a pejorative and racialized term that stigmatized Afro-Cubans as prostitutes and made white Cubans invisible in the sex trade. A new term emerged, *luchadora*, and it has been used to de-emphasize the sexual aspect of tourist-related relationships to encompass many forms of illicit activities and to de-stigmatize relationships involving tourists.

What the new jargon initially emphasized was a form of agency (*jinete* means a “jockey”), a lack of social disapproval, and a shared understanding of the struggles that people faced. The difficulties of survival and creating other ways of getting by were understood by the women I interviewed as a means of calling upon affective and sexual exchanges without reinforcing an entrenched sex worker identity. What I term “tactical sex” captures the sporadic use of sex and affect to fulfil economic necessity. Without an established sex industry and with high levels of human capital formation, identities remain flexible and it is difficult to distinguish between market and non-market transactions. Tactical sex, therefore, makes it possible for relationships to evolve over time into more legitimate arrangements.

In the late twentieth century, state responses to prostitution, which had increased and become more visible, were contradictory. From ignoring the

problem to curtailing it, the state responded by identifying women as prostitutes and ignoring males, either as clients or as sex workers. In the 1990s, the government began to regulate and penalize many activities connected to foreigners, although the sale of sex is not directly prohibited. Under Cuban law, a person deemed to have a proclivity to commit an offense in contradiction with the norms of socialist principles may be arrested under quite variable circumstances and conditions. Since prostitution is not illegal, the state uses a law in which it defines a “state of dangerousness” to incarcerate women. As in the early sixties, rehabilitation centres were established with the assistance of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), Cuba’s state-sponsored women’s organization. Judicial authorities placed so-called “dangerous women” in rehabilitation camps for up to four years. The length of stay at the rehabilitation centre depended on the degree of risk to society that the women supposedly posed and the likelihood they would be rehabilitated. Once a woman was incarcerated, she had to prove by her attitude and behaviour that she had been rehabilitated. Radhika Coomaraswamy, the United Nations special rapporteur on violence against women and the first UN human rights official to be invited by the Cuban government to visit the island, questioned the arbitrariness of leaving a sentence open until officials determined that the person no longer poses a social threat.⁸⁵ In her report Coomaraswamy noted, “Anti-social behavior and causing disturbances to the community are considered manifestations of such dangerousness.”⁸⁶ When someone is determined to be dangerous in accordance with this provision, the penal code permits the imposition of pre-criminal measures resulting in re-education. Coomaraswamy emphasized that this leaves room for abuse and subjective treatment and is inconsistent with fair judicial procedures.⁸⁷

Women found hanging out with tourists or engaging in any other form of behaviour that is deemed to be anti-social can be arrested and the government can issue a *carta de advertencia*, or a letter of warning. If a woman receives three such warnings she is then incarcerated in a rehabilitation centre for up to four years. The state’s crusade targets rural migrants, working class women, and *mulatas*, subjecting them to gynaecological exams, surveillance, arrest, incarceration, and forced labour. Reminiscent of earlier efforts such as the *Casa de Recogidas* and the legal regulation of women selling sex, state policies continue to target women, stigmatizing and subjecting them to rehabilitation.

85 Commission on Human Rights, Fifty-sixth Session, Item 12(a) of the Provisional Agenda E/CN.4/2000/68 Add.2, 8 February. Report, United Nations (New York, 2000), p. 13.

86 *Ibid.*

87 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

Men hustling in tourist spaces, particularly black men, are also harassed and routinely stopped for identity checks; they are often fined and incarcerated for minor violations. Generally, however, men as clients or sex workers are not taken up in rehabilitation efforts.

The goal of the FMC in instituting the rehabilitation camps was to redirect women away from selling sex to foreigners by providing them with training in other more “appropriate” work such as hairstyling. As in many cases of social hysteria, once the panic subsided, so did interest in maintaining the camps. One communist party official whom I interviewed said that they were too expensive to run and that they never did contain the problem. Repressive policies have continued with periodic police sweeps of the city streets. They have also instigated a move for male control of the sex trade, facilitating new brokers who arrange encounters between male tourists and Cuban women. A young doctor/choreographer whom I interviewed is a case in point. During the day he worked as a medical doctor, but in the evening he served as director and choreographer for a nightclub dance revue at a hotel cabaret. His business scheme called for dancers to pose for a photo album that he presented to prospective clients—men he met at the nightclub. He coordinated the rendezvous and often took a gratuity from the men and a cut of the dancers’ earnings. Although he claimed to have received invitations to travel to Europe to work as a choreographer, he was content to make money by providing foreigners with access to the women of his dance troupe.

Another new form of commercial sex has arisen through the use of the internet and the spread of cybercafés all around the city as they have facilitated sexual interactions between Cubans and foreigners. Since 2003, these new opportunities have made it easier to develop friendships, find marriage partners overseas, and sell sex. Many women and men visit chat rooms or post photographs on Internet websites looking for romance, travel, and friendships. Others use the services of intermediaries. Compared to previous periods in Cuban history, there is more indeterminacy and ambiguity in these relationships. The exchange of money for sex is veiled and does not necessarily confirm a sex-worker identity. The internet also provides some protection from police harassment and extortion.

Unlike in previous historical periods in Havana, there is no longer a vice district. Gambling, pornography, and drugs are strictly prohibited. The sale of sex, while unstructured, takes place on the streets, in parks, and through tourism companies. In contrast to other times, women in Cuba have high levels of education and high levels of participation in the workforce. Since education in Cuba is universal and free, lack of literacy skills or advanced training is not an impediment for earning a livelihood. Rather, it is due to the lack of well-paid

jobs, racial discrimination, and lack of social mobility. Sex work not only pays better, it also offers more opportunities for leisure and travel than other forms of labour.

Conclusion

The city of Havana, traditionally the largest city of the Caribbean, remains the most populous and economically developed urban space in Cuba, and as the capital of the nation, it has always held a privileged place in Cuban society. The city has been home to conquerors, pirates, immigrants, slaves, and internal migrants. Among these were the freed slave women who made their way from plantations to Havana to survive. Havana offered many advantages, the most important of which was that it was a place of economic growth and urbanity, in contrast to other parts of the island that to this day remain underdeveloped. New technologies have regularly reshaped sexual commerce, but there are more continuities in the last five hundred years of prostitution in Havana than there are disruptions in the structure of the sex trade.

From *mujeres de mal vivir* to *mujeres públicas*, *prostitutas*, *jineteras*, and *luchadoras*, the lexicon has denoted women and aspects of sexual exchange. Sexual commerce created possibilities for independence, agency, and progress even while it entangled some women in dangerous exploitative relationships. Whether as a provisional approach to earning a livelihood or the elaboration of a worker identity as we saw with *La Cebolla*, the sale of sex has been an economic recourse in the history of the city. The role of the state has seldom been kind in this regard. Persecution, violence, extortion, incarceration, regulation, prohibition, rehabilitation, stigma, and shame are some of the approaches that have been used by the authorities. In different historical periods a combination of these approaches have been tried with the aim of deterring the sex trade, but none have worked for very long.

From its very inception, Havana has had structures in place that offer sexual services to those who reach its shores. There was a short period of time in its five-hundred-year history when prostitution was prohibited, but for the most part it has been part of the landscape of the city by the bay. Even though sex work has existed at the margins of society, its divergent historical potentialities have benefitted society and culture at large. Sexual services have made it possible for many people to make a living, not just sex workers, and it has facilitated sexualized entertainment for many others as it has been a way to find care, love, and sexual pleasure for over five hundred centuries.

Facing a Double Standard: Prostitution in Mexico City, 1521–2006

Fernanda Nuñez and Pamela Fuentes

The Emergence of a Social “Problem”: Prostitution in Mexico City

Background

Given the absence of reliable historical information, we do not want to reproduce what the academic *doxa* insists on repeating, that is, descriptions of pre-Hispanic societies using documents produced during the sixteenth-century Spanish conquest and redefined by the nationalist anthropology of the late twentieth and the early twenty-first centuries. We know very little about the extinct pre-Hispanic world and their sexuality, nor do we know much about the ways by which the pre-Hispanic people fulfilled their erotic fantasies and sexual physicality, and even less about the existence of what we now call prostitution.

The beautiful statuettes exhibited at anthropology museums all over the country bear silent witness to the greatness of a society whose interpretative clues are still quite unknown to us. Osseous remains showing successful surgical procedures, ceramic figures of detailed bodies that are scarified, tattooed, and painted are all evidence of bodies that are different from western ones, bodies which were not led by the notion of sin and therefore had guiltless sex. It is difficult for us to think, as some researchers have suggested,¹ that pre-Hispanic societies had also adopted patriarchy and its well-known “double morality” practised since early Christian times as a “necessary evil”, ensuring that some women were sexually available through some kind of compensation to men, whose nature was considered to be untamed, violent, and impossible to contain, so they wouldn’t rape their wives and daughters.²

1 María J. Rodríguez Shadow, *La mujer azteca* (Mexico City, 1977).

2 Since the 1940s, a Mexican historiographical school of thought, which we do not share, has insisted on describing a presumed pre-Hispanic sexual morality. But it has done so through the filter of the feudal Catholic morality that carried out the descriptions of this ancient world that disappeared in the sixteenth century. They therefore claim that these cultures

Prostitution in the Colonial Era

What we do know is that western cities developed various forms of prostitution; hence, since very early times, both the municipal authorities and the Catholic Church tried to control it. The durability of Saint Augustine's statement "if prostitution were to be suppressed, capricious lusts would then overthrow society" proves how difficult it has been for western culture to restrain male sexuality and this is a testament to its need to route it to specific places where women served men's sexual desires.

Because New Spain entered very early into the same Judeo-Christian cultural model as its metropolis and as the various society-regulating institutions were established, the crown granted the municipal authority of Mexico City a permit to open and control the first "concubinary house" in 1538. It was thought that the existence of these houses, if properly supervised and controlled by the authorities, would be useful for the kingdom's morale, health, and well-being, just as it had been since the Middle Ages in Spain, in spite of the church's continuous disapproval and condemnation of lust and fornication.³

Although we do not know for sure if that state-authorised brothel ever actually opened, that does not mean venal love did not proliferate in the incipient colonial society of New Spain. It was inevitable given that society consisted largely of white males, most of whom were celibate and little inclined to marriage. The destruction of the existing society, as well as several epidemics, facilitated white men's sexual access to indigenous women and to the few white women who had migrated there alone.

The conquest was a male enterprise led by men who left their women and children behind and who sought to reinvent themselves by setting sail to

shared the Catholic rejection of prostitution, homosexuality, and abortion, as well as what western societies consider "sins of the flesh".

3 Mexico City, the capital of Mexico, is located in a large valley at the centre of the country. In this area the Aztecs founded Mexico Tenochtitlan in 1325, which was almost completely destroyed during the Spanish conquest. After 1521, the former capital of the Aztec empire was rebuilt according to the Spanish standards of urbanization. Over a decade later, the Spanish crown established several viceroyalties to govern its possessions in the Americas. During those years, Mexico City was named as such by the colonial authorities and became the capital of New Spain. This viceroyalty comprised what is now Mexico, Central America, nearly all of the southwestern United States, Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and several Pacific Islands. After three centuries of colonization, Mexico declared its independence and created the Federal District. In daily life the inhabitants of the country have used both names, Federal District and Mexico City, interchangeably. After a political reform in 2016, it officially ceased to be named the Federal District, and currently both politicians and citizens are engaged in a major political debate regarding the first constitution of the city.

America. In spite of royal orders issued on the matter, during the early period of the conquest very few married women joined their husbands, leading to a unique society. Although colonial legislation was in essence the same as in Spain, its practice was more lenient in New Spain. The carnal relations between white males and indigenous women or women from the various castes⁴ that emerged, whether stable or not, were an acceptable standard. Widows and orphans, as well as women who were alone, poor, or had been abandoned, lacked job opportunities and hence found a means to support themselves by selling sex.

In order to safeguard “the honour” of such impoverished white women and to prevent others from falling again prey to prostitution, charity institutions known as *recogimientos* (“seclusion institutions”) were established. It is known that by the end of the seventeenth century, Recogimiento Jesus de la Penitencia for instance sheltered a hundred “Spanish” women and rejected many others due to lack of space; this can give us a glimpse of the extent of the problem faced by white women who didn’t have a male figure to look after them.⁵ Women from the lower castes could not access these types of establishments.

Unlawful sexual relations between white men of “high” status and women of the different castes was so common that it affected the priests and even the bailiffs involved in the Inquisition, becoming an informally accepted standard. This standard coexisted with the traditional value of family honour linked to feminine virtue which prevailed throughout the Hispanic world.

One of the difficulties we have in understanding the phenomenon of prostitution as practised in the New World has to do with concepts; as in Spain, the words “prostitute” or “prostitution” were not used until the eighteenth century. Scholars have concluded that there was a certain parallel between women “living in sin”, or concubines, and “public” or “low-life” women or “whores”, as prostitutes were also called. Both could keep long-term relationships with their lovers or clients, received money or means of sustenance in exchange for sexual favours, and they even had children with their male partners.⁶

Another problem has been that the sources have not proved to be very eloquent in detailing what prostitution was like, which and how many women practised it, who their clients were, and if there were any intermediaries acting

4 In New Spain this system of social representation was an attempt to categorize and stratify the racial mix into white, indigenous, and black people. However, the fact that individuals were able to escape from one caste and construct strategies for survival in another demonstrates the limited social and political utility of this attempt to control a population that became more and more mixed over time.

5 Josefina Muriel, *Los Recogimientos de Mujeres* (Mexico City, 1974).

6 Ana María Atondo Rodríguez, “El amor venal y la condición femenina en el México colonial” (Unpublished Ph.D., Sorbonne University, 1986), pp. 33–37.

between them. The lack of legal interest in prosecuting these kinds of supposedly deviant behaviour suggests that in reality colonial society was very tolerant of these extra-marital sexual practices.

It seems that “favours” from public women, mainly the few white ones, were generously remunerated by their clients. They bought them clothes, gave them jewellery, and paid them well, so much so that both “honourable” society and the crown dictated measures to halt the “scandals” and “excesses” in which these women participated publicly. They were forbidden from going out in public wearing fine clothing, riding in carriages, and taking cushions and rugs to church, nor were they allowed to be escorted by their maids, as was common among cavaliers’ wives. This gives us an idea of both how booming the business was, and how it drove these women’s social success.

There are criminal and inquisitorial records which make it possible for us to re-think what could have been taking place in such a society, and they point to the existence of a great range of activities that today we could call “prostitutional”. Women of all ethnic categories sold their “charms” according to their own social status in brothels, private houses, inns, pubs, the sweat-chamber baths known as *temazcales*, and even on the streets.

There were black slaves who were forced by their masters, generally traders, to prostitute themselves to compensate for the bad sales of the day. And there was the seductive Bernarda de la Encarnacion, the slave of a judge who bought back her freedom thanks to the proceeds she made through prostitution (which she practised into old age), which made it possible for her to take on the habit in the Recogimiento de San Miguel de Belen, where she passed away at the end of the seventeenth century. It seems that other “licentious” women in that century made the same choice when their good looks were diminished by age.⁷

If we look at the abundant records relating to witchery and superstition during the Inquisition, we find an unexpected window onto the activities of many of these women. These documents reveal that many of the black slaves and mulatto women who were on trial were engaging in prostitution as a way of life; apparently, men appreciated their skills and were willing to pay for them. There is much less information regarding the prostitution of indigenous women, who, because of their subordinated situation, suffered the most sexual violence. In addition, it was no sin for Spaniards to abuse Indians, as was openly declared in several inquisitorial records.⁸

7 Muriel, *Los Recogimientos*, pp. 47–56.

8 Solange Alberro, “La sexualidad manipulada en Nueva España: modalidades de recuperación y de adaptación frente a los tribunales eclesiásticos”, in *Familia y sexualidad en Nueva*

It seems that the Spanish provisions aiming at the repression of prostitution that reached New Spain in the seventeenth century did not affect the practice in Mexico City, because men were still finding solace in the arms of public women from different categories corresponding to their budgets. It was not until the end of the eighteenth century that a more repressive attitude was adopted against these “scandalous” women and the pimps whom they supported with their labours. Some *recogimientos*, which tried to safeguard women from a “life of sin”, were transformed into prisons to punish those practicing public prostitution. Prisons and sweatshops became places where incarcerated madams and pimps coexisted with thieves and other criminals.

However, once again, the few cases of convictions give us an idea about the indulgence of both the crown and the church regarding the “loose” sexual practices which were widespread in society. Well-known cases against female entertainers and women with “loose” lifestyles having relations with high officers, some of them married and not only from the municipality but also from the church, reveal a very *ancien régime* form of sociability that was quite festive and had a taste for ostentation in which women played an important role.

State Regulation in the Nineteenth Century

The phenomenon of prostitution spread throughout Mexico City and endured through the first part of the nineteenth century, which was inaugurated with the War of Independence and decades of political turbulence. It was not until the end of the 1860s that something fundamentally new began to appear: public prostitution stopped being linked to the quite elastic notion of sin and became a medical and public hygiene issue to be handled by the state.

We begin to find in the city archives traces of alarm caused by the propagation of venereal disease spread by the “swarm of public women” linked since then to the “immorality of lower classes”. The necessity of sanitizing and cleaning up a city of 200,000 inhabitants—the largest in Latin America at the time—led social observers to study what was being done in other countries in order to find solutions for Mexico. Many of them were doctors but there were also lawyers, journalists, and writers who left a vast body of documentation which makes it possible for us to point out two clearly differentiated moments in the approach to the “problem” of prostitution.⁹

España, Memoria del Primer Simposio de Historia de las Mentalidades: familia, matrimonio y sexualidad en Nueva España (Mexico City, 1982), pp. 238–257.

9 From the second half of the century onwards, thanks to peace and progress in hygiene but mainly due to migratory flows from all around the republic, the population of the city increased

The first period of official tolerance came about with the implementation of the “French” or regulatory system, which lasted from 1865 until the beginning of the Mexican Revolution in 1910. At this point, “modern” scientists, with clear Lombrosian influences who saw official tolerance as a “license to licentiousness”, began to endorse “abolitionism”. In spite of these discussions, Mexico regulated prostitution until 1940. This section will describe the first period.

Emperor Maximilian of Habsburg brought the French system to Mexico in the ephemeral period known as the Second Empire. On 17 February 1865, the first register of public women in Mexico City was initiated. Once the republic was restored in 1867, a bylaw to standardize its practice was passed, and it was progressively promulgated in several states of the country, undergoing some modifications.

For that system to work as enacted by hygienist Parent du Châtelet in France in the 1830s two institutions had to be founded and they were to be in charge of its implementation. One was a medical examination department which had doctors responsible for recording, classifying, and checking on a weekly basis all the women who were registered, as well as the brothels where they worked. Policemen were responsible for bringing, by force if necessary, all women suspected of prostitution to the medical examination department and to prosecute clandestine prostitutes. The other institution was a special section of the San Juan de Dios Hospital¹⁰ which treated women who had syphilis or other venereal diseases, and they had to stay there, forcefully secluded, “kidnapped” until they were cured. Syphilis was perceived to be a modern plague, a danger that threatened not only the individual but also the human species as a whole; its prevention and eradication was the reason behind the implementation of the regulatory system. Frías y Soto, the head of the municipality of Mexico City and an expert on the subject, explained in 1873 that “prostitution is a wound that cannot be suppressed without damaging the noblest organ of the people, which is family; that is why all enlightened governments try, through tolerance, not to extirpate it, but to regulate it.”¹¹

from 200,000 inhabitants in 1860 to 471,066 in 1910, just before the revolution broke out. Migration was so intensive that in 1880, 47 per cent of the urban population had been born in another state. Ariel Rodríguez Kuri, *La experiencia olvidada: El Ayuntamiento de México, política y gobierno, 1876–1912* (Mexico City, 1996), p. 82.

10 Soon after, it would be called the *Hospital de la Mujer*.

11 Fernanda Núñez Becerra, *La prostitución y su represión en la Ciudad de México, siglo XIX: Prácticas y representaciones* (Barcelona, 2002), p. 64.

It was thought that even benign venereal diseases exercised “an ill-fated action upon the fecundity of marriage”,¹² and the fear of syphilis increased in this period due to the perception that it had the power to annihilate the human race. Prostitutes were seen as the vector of contagion of “decent” families, innocent wives, and children, as they were visited without reservations by ardent youngsters and incontinent husbands, and in the government’s eyes it had to be sanitized and controlled at all costs. The ideal of this system was that all prostitutes would practise their profession at controlled brothels but this soon proved to be an impossible dream. The doctors maintained that there was an increasing number of women practicing prostitution individually who were known as “isolated” or non-registered prostitutes, and they were called “clandestines”.

According to the *Reglamento de la Prostitución* issued in 1872,¹³ a prostitute was a woman over 14 years old who was no longer a virgin and had regular sexual relations with more than one man, and also willingly expressed her desire to engage in this profession. For many doctors, however, “looking like” a prostitute, being caught in “low-life” places that prostitutes frequented or hanging out with various men who did not vouch for them, was proof enough of being a prostitute. Others didn’t even realize there were differences between those who had sexual relations with many men to survive and those who charged for it, which led inspectors to seize women with these characteristics on the streets at night.¹⁴

Women who were willing to enter the prostitution business, whether at brothels or working alone, had to register with the medical inspection department—or be forcefully registered—and they received a passbook (a form of identity) which contained information about their weekly medical examinations. As a protective measure, those who were under the age of 14 had to submit documentation of their parent’s permission and married women had to prove that they had their husbands’ permission in order to be registered. Most of the women registered in 1865 (584 in total) were single and claimed to be between 16 and 22 years old. The doctors were convinced that prostitutes were lying about their age, and because of that women could be registered starting

12 Francisco Güemes, *Algunas consideraciones sobre la prostitución pública en México* (Mexico City, 1888), p. 89.

13 In 1898, the minimum age for a woman to be registered was raised to 16. Since the beginning, doctors thought that girls engaged in prostitution should be controlled even if they were underage. Manuel Alfaro, *Anales de la Asociación Larrey* (Mexico City, 1875).

14 Núñez, *La prostitución*, p. 69.

at the age of 14, although some looked even younger. On the other hand, only one confessed to being 35 years old. The doctors in those times reported that after that age women were considered to be “old” and hence became madams who ran brothels. In several cases, the doctors reported about prostitutes’ pregnancies, deliveries, miscarriages and death; in others, they complained that in spite of the express prohibition against keeping their children in the brothels, many of them continued to do so. We also know that the “isolated” women actually lived in groups in *patios de vecindad* (courtyards)¹⁵ which were also home to midwives,¹⁶ who surely helped them with remedies to solve problems of “menstrual unpunctuality”.

In spite of the general disapproval of the activity of pimps and hoodlums who were known as “vile men”, some of whom were former policemen who made a living by sexually exploiting women, no specific cases against them can be found in the records. Also, we did not discover cases of men selling sex to other men on the streets, yet their “repulsive” existence was referred to. The regulatory discourse mainly dealt with women, and they were generally impoverished young women from other villages or the countryside, evidence of the gender and class ideology that formed Mexican society in the nineteenth century.

Once registered, they were classified by an inspector according to their physical attributes and clothing into first, second, third, and even “lowest” classes. Some doctors even classified them as beautiful, plain, or ugly. This categorization was used to charge a tax that was used to cover the expenses of examination, but many women refused to pay it. Brothels and “assignment houses”¹⁷ were similarly divided into categories.

The hospital played an important role in this idealistic system. Apart from curing prostitutes physically, its intended goal was to cleanse their souls and moralize them. Taking advantage of the long stays that were required, the workers there tried to ingrain in the women principles of Christian and bourgeois morality. Moreover, sick or pregnant prostitutes were used as subjects by medical and obstetric students who could not practise anywhere else. It was thought that because of their profession such women had no modesty and hence could openly be examined by men.

15 These low-cost tenement houses were buildings constructed for workers in that century, consisting of rooms which housed whole families; they had a courtyard in the centre, a water faucet for washing, and common baths.

16 Alfaro, *Anales de la Asociación Larrey*.

17 These were not brothels but more like no-tell hotels, places only frequented for sexual relations.

Mercury treatments for syphilis were very long, and as dangerous as the disease itself; their side effects were serious and painful. Mexican doctors studied the issue, wrote about it, and used the same products that were used at the time in the US and Europe. Doctors wrote about the difficulties of curing women in the hospital. They thought that by constructing a special room for “prominent” women they would convince those of the “better class”—women who could not bear the idea of mixing with the poor—to stay there; although the project was not a success, it is evidence that doctors and their clients reproduced class prejudices that existed in society at that time.

There were several riots in the hospital; furious prostitutes burnt mattresses and destroyed the items in their rooms to protest the conditions which had been imposed upon them. Life in the hospital was not very different from life in prison; in fact, sick prisoners were treated there. Jailbreaks were frequent, and several times requests were made for bars to be put on the windows and means of locking up the women.

All of this, along with a general fear of hospitals, led many women to resist being “subjected” to sanitary control. When they could, both they and the madams of the brothels paid private doctors for the examinations, and they figured out ways to apply make up on their wounds so they could avoid spending long terms in the syphilitic room. That was another weak spot of the system because the authorities never managed to register all the prostitutes, many of whom escaped this system of surveillance, and as such there were always more clandestine or “rebellious” prostitutes than known ones. Also, the authorities were also unable to properly cure women infected with diseases and keep them sexually inactive while infected.

The Prostitute Population

For the first time in the history of Mexico, the first Record of Public Women used photographs for police purposes. These are accessible in the archives and hence we can find out about their names, nicknames, ages, categories, and former occupations, as well as the names of the madams and the addresses of the sixty-six registered brothels in the city. The 584 women in that first record stated that they had the following occupations: 167 seamstresses and 151 domestic servants, while 138 did not declare a profession. The rest took up the job opportunities available to poor women at the time: shoe-shiners, butchers, match girls, cigarette girls, mattress sellers, candy and flower merchants, cooks, newsstand sellers, *rebozo* (shawl) makers, tobacco and tortilla sellers, hemmers, braiders, and shoe makers.

Several reports issued between 1868 and 1909 mentioned the same proportions in the professions of women; more than half of them stated that they were or had been a maid, washerwoman, or seamstress; the rest were engaged in manual labour and the craft activities made available by the city or did not declare a profession.¹⁸

Out of the 584 women registered in 1865, 125 said they were from Mexico City and its surrounding areas, while the rest were from other states in the republic; there was also one woman of German nationality. In later registries there were some foreign women from Spain, Cuba and France but it is quite likely that foreign women, who were more highly valued, could evade the authorities.

There were women who were classified as first-class, and many observers referred to beautiful, well-dressed clandestine prostitutes who lived among “respectable” members of society. Yet, the ones of concern were “the maids, labourers, and married women who brought their lovers into their houses when their husbands left for work”,¹⁹ as they were thought to be the ones spreading disease. Observers also mentioned the loathing and envy that existed among the various classes of prostitutes and the quarrels that broke out when they all gathered for the health examinations. To remedy this, the times and dates of the examinations were set at different times for the various categories of women.

Nineteenth-century Working Women

Indigenous or mestizo women from the lower social classes had always worked, in spite of the social stigma and deviation from the ideal of standard femininity. Given the scarcity of working opportunities for women and the very low wages these opportunities offered, the fact that they had to go out and make a living was seen as proof of their “loose” morals. Nineteenth-century society in Mexico was convinced that a “decent” woman was a wife and a mother, and that she should remain in her “natural” environment, the home. As in other western countries in the same period, gender relations explained the sexual segregation at work and the wage difference between genders.

In the first census of 1811, women represented more than a third of the workforce in Mexico City, most of whom were employed in domestic service. Having maids and not having to work was a distinctive mark of class and social status. The ideal of society was having several maids with specific tasks at home; but even middle and lower class families had at least one maid that did all the work

18 Núñez, *La prostitución*.

19 Güemes, *Algunas consideraciones*, p. 64.

in exchange for shelter, food, and sometimes a small amount of remuneration. In spite of that stigma, throughout the century more “respectable” working opportunities became available to middle-class women at schools and businesses, in stores, in textile production, and, by the end of the period, at offices and in the state bureaucracy.²⁰

When Porfirio Díaz became president in 1876 there was an expansion of industrial production, mainly in the last decade of the century. On its way to modernity, Mexico City underwent major changes in terms of demographics, urban spaces, politics and economics. Although women had always been present on the streets of the city since the colonial era, their public visibility increased as more factories opened their doors to them. Between 1870 and 1920 women comprised one third of the industrial work force. Cigarette factories employed over 1,000 cigarette makers and established differentiated shifts and spaces for each gender with the aim of “safeguarding” women’s honour. For that reason, this was an “ideal” job for working women; even though they earned less than men, it allowed them not only to avoid prostitution, but to maintain their reputation. Also, large clothing and silk factories hired a large percentage of women and reserved special spaces for them. Other women continued working at home, or worked long shifts at small manufacturing workshops; they were also involved in various tasks outside factories, sharing the public space with peddlers and prostitutes, and they occasionally resorted to prostitution in order to complement the meagre earnings of the day.

Social observers linked honour, respectability, and sexual morality with the type of work performed. For them, it was completely “natural” for men to earn more for the same work because they were supposedly the heads of households. The work of women was always seen as complementary, even though women were often responsible for supporting their families or their partners. In spite of the entrance of the female workforce into industrial and manufacturing workplaces, in 1940 one out of three working women still worked in domestic service.²¹ Many of the prostitutes registered between 1865 and 1910 claimed that they worked in domestic service, for which no special training was required; for this reason, the notion that they were illiterate and “uncultured” was constantly emphasized.

Specialists wrote about the “lack of morality” of the “dangerous” classes to which supposedly all prostitutes belonged; they complained about their drinking habits, illiteracy, the low number of legal marriages, “hordes” of

20 Silvia Arrom, *Las mujeres de la Ciudad de México, 1790–1857* (Mexico, 1988), pp. 123–252.

21 Susie Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City: Public Discourses and Material Conditions, 1879–1931* (Tucson, 2003), p. xiii.

illegitimate children, and single mothers living in “promiscuous” circumstances. However, they also noted that some prostitutes wanted to officialise their removal from the registries because, even though the specialists could not believe it, there were men willing to marry those women and to give them any guarantee required. This suggests that honour and respectability were also a matter of class. Even though there were extraordinary cases in which a good-looking prostitute could be chosen as a lover by a man from a higher class, in general prostitutes developed informal relationships or even got married and had children with workers from their own social class.

During this period, the agencies involved in controlling prostitution came into conflict, each blaming the other for the failure of the system. The Higher Council of Public Health and the Medical Examination Department were staffed by doctors whose prestige and power was growing in society, and they were genuinely preoccupied with controlling prostitution, introducing hygiene to the popular classes, stopping syphilis, and lowering mortality rates (while lacking the coercive power to achieve those goals). Both of those institutions accused the government of the federal district of not helping them. Indeed, the political logic of each agency was different, and their lack of interest in tackling issues that had always existed in the city was self-evident. Doctors often accused the government of having arrangements with the prostitutes and “protecting” them, cancelling registrations, letting them be treated by private doctors, or, still worse, of being their clients, lovers, or even their pimps.

By the end of the nineteenth century there were some voices pleading for the end of the atmosphere of tolerance which they argued didn't do any good because there were always more clandestine than registered prostitutes, and syphilis continued to ruin lives. They demanded that prostitution be considered a felony and be prosecuted and punished as such.

Regardless of how “advanced” the abolitionist position might appear—by comparing tolerated prostitution to slavery—most of the doctors kept writing about the ineffectiveness of prohibiting an unavoidably needed activity, at least until men learned to control their impulses and chastely wait for marriage to have sex.²²

Some Conclusions about Registered Prostitution

Our sources indicate that such remarks were true; while in 1865 there were 584 women registered, by 1890 only 287 prostitutes were regularly examined.

22 Eduardo Lavallo Carvajal, *La buena reglamentación de las prostitutas es conveniente y sin peligros* (Mexico, 1911).

The French system could not control the women involved in prostitution nor could it eradicate syphilis. The heads of the agencies themselves complained about this situation in various reports which were sent to the authorities, and in those reports they offered up analyses of this “huge” social problem.

Through discursive analysis we can see that there was a certain amount of compassion and a genuine preoccupation among doctors regarding the fate of these “poor unfortunate” women that were so necessary in society. They thought of ways of protecting them from exploitation at the hands of madams and pimps and devised ways to “rescue” them while preventing pubescent girls from registering.

However, they could not understand that most of those women who resorted to prostitution in that first period of state regulation only did so temporarily. The mobility of those recorded in the initial registry revealed that they stayed briefly at the brothels where they were first registered or at the addresses provided; doctors often noted, “She fled”, and they were never heard from again. The brothels themselves often closed and reopened elsewhere.

Although “registered prostitution” can be linked to limited work opportunities, low wages, and the difficulties poor women and young immigrants faced in finding other jobs outside domestic service, we should not forget this warning issued by the doctors: there was an unknown number of women from higher social classes engaging in the same profession. The doctors commented that the situation resembled a French novel; there were attractive, gallant women who moved from one lover to another because their purpose in life was “to satisfy the desires for luxury and coquetry that are inherent to women.”²³ The outbreak of the Mexican revolution ushered in a new period.

Prostitution in the Twentieth Century

In the twentieth century, Mexico City underwent several transformations that changed the urban landscape completely. The centralization of political power, as well as the concentration of social and cultural life in the capital city from the 1940s onwards, attracted millions of migrants that have made the federal district and its metropolitan area one of the most densely populated regions all over the world.²⁴

The last century also witnessed radical changes in relation to prostitution. The end of the regulation system in combination with other factors such as

23 Güemes, *Algunas consideraciones*, p. 68.

24 María Cristina Sánchez-Mejorada Fernández, *Rezaños de la Modernidad: Memorias de una ciudad presente* (Mexico City, 2005), pp. 171–224.

corruption prompted gender changes in the administration of sexual commerce as well as a rise in the rates of violence against women engaged in sexual commerce. Decades later, feminists and some prostitutes joined forces in a struggle for the recognition of prostitution as work. While some goals were accomplished, sex workers have not been fully recognized as subjects with labour rights and obligations. Moreover, the alarming increase of human trafficking in the country and the horror brought on by criminal organizations involved in sex commerce-related activities have blurred the lines between voluntarism and coercion. As a result, at the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century various social actors are redefining the borders between sexual commerce and forced prostitution. At the same time, a heated debate about the best possible system (abolitionist, prohibitionist, regulationist) that can be used to ameliorate the current situation of sex workers and victims of sexual exploitation is currently taking place.

The Mexican Revolution

General Porfirio Díaz ruled the country between 1876 and 1911 with the aid of a group of consultants who banded together under the motto “order and progress”. This circle of advisors was called “the scientists” because the programme they designed to modernize the country was inspired by positivist ideas, as well as the theories of organicism and social Darwinism.²⁵ This governing elite maintained the rules for supervising prostitution proposed in the French system. It was never considered proper to regulate the behaviour of the men visiting brothels nor to submit them to state medical supervision,²⁶ and there was no questioning about whether they had anything to do with the contagion of social or venereal diseases. Parents and husbands were in charge of making sure that *their* women behaved properly; namely, to stay a virgin until marriage and not engage in inappropriate sexual behaviour.

25 Social Darwinism was a very popular theory in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. According to its main principles, humans, like animals and plants, are subject to the same laws of natural selection that Charles Darwin perceived in nature. Generally, poor people were seen as weak, and the well-off class was in power because their culture and “natural” skills had put them at the top of the evolutionary ladder. Organicism was a term closely related to these ideas. Supporters of both theories saw society as the equivalent of a live organism. In this system poverty, prostitution, and vice were considered social illnesses.

26 Mark Overmyer-Velazquez, “Portraits of a Lady: Visions of Modernity in Porfirian Oaxaca City”, *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*, 23 (2007), pp. 63–100, 65–66.

In keeping with the logic of the nineteenth century, brothels were divided into different classes based on the level of luxury, facilities, contributions paid to the government, and the women working there. In first-class brothels, clients could enjoy private, comfortable, luxuriously decorated rooms, while in low-class ones the prostitutes and their clients had only cots or mats with only old sheets hung up for privacy. Legally, the owners of these places were responsible for containing the spread of the social and venereal diseases that could pose a risk for the general population and the city itself.²⁷

Although the revolutionary movement of 1910 delayed debates about prostitution, some of the main arguments were first outlined in the early years of the twentieth century. Among the most respected abolitionists at the end of the Porfiriato period was Dr Luis Lara y Pardo, a well-known intellectual at the time who wrote a sociological essay in 1908 for the general public entitled *Prostitution in Mexico*. Its main objective was to make information regarding venereal diseases available to the largest number of people possible.²⁸

The arguments of Lara y Pardo were based on sources obtained from courts, hospitals, and official statistics, and he tried to model social criteria based on the ideology of the regime; thus, his ideas were strongly influenced by organicism and positivism. The essay begins with a discussion about what should be understood by “prostitution” and “prostitute”, because, according to the author, the legal definitions of the terms did not embrace the nuances of many women’s sexual activities and excluded women who could also be considered prostitutes based on their behaviour. According to Lara y Pardo, receiving money in exchange for sexual services was an insufficient description and he proposed the following one: “Prostitution is a common act by which a person has indiscriminate transient sexual relations with many persons.”²⁹ Love, selectivity, and fidelity could result in a woman’s sensibilities being offended if a man who was not their partner proposed a romantic or sexual relationship. In this way of thinking, women who had sexual intercourse regardless of monetary exchange, without sentimental connections or simply for pleasure with men they knew nothing or almost nothing about should be considered prostitutes.

The perception that elites had about the madams owning brothels is related to their ability to survive in and even dominate certain sectors of the underworld of the dangerous social classes. These women were defined by Lara y Pardo as prostitutes with experience, women “who had the guts and attitude

27 Katherine E. Bliss, *Compromised Positions: Prostitution, Public Health and Gender Politics in Revolutionary Mexico City* (Pennsylvania, 2001), pp. 31–32.

28 Luis Lara y Pardo, *Estudio de Higiene Social: La prostitución en México* (Mexico, 1908).

29 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

to pass from the exploited class to the exploiting class in that overprotected industry.”³⁰ These women’s ability to stand out from the rest and take the reins of a business permitted by the state was harshly criticized by the author, as they were argued to be the result of a twisted ingenuity used in the fields of vice, perversion, and weakness that characterized prostitution.³¹

The author described madams as “old, cruel, greedy, and despotic”, women in their late 30s, or maybe older, whose best years have long gone and whose only motivation was greed. Cunningness and shrewdness were not only two of the few abilities attributed to madams, but their only sign of intelligence, which was of little value as it was in the service of ambition and social decay.

The sex business in Mexico City in the early twentieth century was mostly in women’s hands. That is not just because of the number of women who traded their bodies—the lack of data on male prostitution does not allow for an accurate comparison—but also because the interaction between prostitutes and the authorities was a task legally assigned to madams. Legislation exclusively targeted the owners of brothels and houses of assignation, and they had to be responsible for their “personnel” in negotiating—either by regarding or disregarding the law—with government agents (public health inspectors, doctors, and police officers).

Nonetheless, in the pages of *Prostitution in Mexico* one can find (although as a very brief reference) details concerning the relationships prostitutes had with the men who lived off their profits. Those men, who several decades later would take control of the sex business as the result of the banning of brothels in the city, can be classified into four categories: agents instructed by the madams to seek out new prostitutes outside the brothel; relatives, for example parents, who depended on the sexual trade of their daughters; *souteneurs* or “fancy men” who had love affair with prostitutes, sometimes the same men who had taken their virginity and lived off the woman’s income; and pimps, who kept an eye on clandestine prostitutes while they worked at hotels or rooms in tenement houses.³²

The interest in the abolition of laws regulating prostitution was not only concerned with the inefficiency of the regulations in the reduction of venereal disease but a desire to put an end to the popularity brothels enjoyed as “social centres” facilitating corruption. However, the start of the revolution in 1910 not only postponed the debates about the regulation of prostitution but

30 *Ibid.*, p. 81.

31 *Ibid.*, pp. 81–83.

32 *Ibid.*, pp. 59, 87, 96.

also strengthened the role of brothels as ideal places for the development of relationships going beyond sexual services.

In spite of the fact that some of the major political leaders of the revolution tried to concentrate brothels as well as gambling houses in restricted areas, the war increased the number of women working in the sex trade, especially those who practised prostitution outside the brothel and without the authorization of the state. For some of those women, prostitution was an opportunity to receive as payment money or goods that had been stolen during the battles by both federal army soldiers and revolutionaries, even though on other occasions they had to “work” for free under the threat of physical violence.³³

During the war, both the physical characteristics of the women working in brothels and the condition of the establishments themselves continued to determine the division of classes. In the poorest neighbourhoods in areas where the government relocated some of the houses of prostitution to create a tolerance zone, prostitutes (the majority of whom did not meet the ideals of beauty and youth) worked with or without authorization on unpaved, mosquito-infested streets with no sewage system and had to deal with neighbours who wanted them far from “honourable homes”.³⁴ In the meantime, in the first-class brothels madams made sure that the most attractive women pleased their influential clientele in elegant houses with all kinds of amenities and services.

The Start of a New Era

The authorities reported that by the late 1910s there were 114 houses of prostitution in the city.³⁵ These brothels were used to plan military conspiracies, and sometimes they served as select clubs where high-ranking military officers gathered to make political alliances which would define their political future. Additionally, during and after the armed stage of the revolution (1910–1917) military members of all ranks invested money in brothels, gambling houses, and cabarets, which contributed to the continuation of the regulated prostitution system for many more years. In 1913, the regulations in effect since 1898 were replaced and in 1918, the Council of the Health Department was created. The task of this council was to plan and implement strategies to fight against venereal diseases, which increased during the war. The last regulations concerning

33 José Luis Trueba Lara, *La vida y la muerte en los tiempos de la Revolución* (Mexico, 2010), p. 208.

34 Bliss, *Compromised Positions*, p. 66.

35 Trueba Lara, *La vida y la muerte*, p. 210.

prostitution were passed in 1926. The legislative changes maintained the main principles of registration, examinations, and incarceration but the state incorporated the idea of rehabilitating prostitutes through labour.

In the late 1930s, when the state emerging from the revolution was in full consolidation, international recognition became a priority for the Mexican government. In 1927, the League of Nations had pointed to Mexico as one of the main destinations for the sexual exploitation of women coming from Europe in the interwar period. In 1938, Mexico signed the International Convention for Suppression of the Traffic in Women of Full Age, approved by the League of Nations in 1933, and in 1940, the laws regulating prostitution were abolished. As a result, exploitation and human trafficking were deemed to be a crime and that triggered an intense campaign to shut down brothels of all types and to arrest people involved in the sex trade, most of them women who were making money from selling the sex of other women.³⁶

Furthermore, in the context of World War II the fight against venereal disease became an issue of national security and of bilateral concern between Mexico and the US. The first campaigns were implemented in the cities of northern Mexico to supposedly stop the increasing number of American soldiers who crossed the border looking for entertainment and pleasure and returned home with syphilis. Actions were taken to close down houses of prostitution, prevent the selling of alcohol, and stop admitting both American and Mexican soldiers to “centres of vice”.³⁷

Out of all these provisions, maybe the most successful one was that of suppressing brothels. In the early 1940s all the governors of the states and territories of the Mexican Republic received a memorandum signed by the president in which he asked them to follow the example of Ciudad Juarez and double their efforts to eliminate houses of prostitution, close zones of tolerance, and eliminate “centres of vice” where dangerous antisocial activities were promoted.³⁸ This memorandum also stated that venereal diseases caused the greatest number of disabilities, which made the state’s task of defending the nation more difficult both in military and in civil life.

36 Ricardo Franco Guzman, “El régimen jurídico de la prostitución en México”, *Revista de la Facultad de Derecho de México*, 85–86 (1972), pp. 99–123.

37 Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico [hereafter AGN], Fondo Presidentes, Manuel Ávila Camacho [187]/Box 381 A, “Carta del General Miguel Flores Villar al Presidente” (1944). Miguel Flores Villar attached to his letter a newspaper clipping related to the US army and venereal diseases in Mexico: “Reynosa Starts a Cleaning Up Drive”, *Valley Evening Monitor*, 16 January 1944.

38 AGN, Fondo Presidentes, Manuel Ávila Camacho, file 462.3155, memorandum signed by Manuel Ávila Camacho, “Recientemente me Dirigí a Todos los Gobiernos” (1942).

While commercial sex in Mexico City was not considered to be a crime and the main goal in closing down brothels was eliminating exploitation, both madams and prostitutes implemented various strategies to stop the disappearance of the organized prostitution system in establishments; one such strategy was to shift business activities to restaurant-bars. After police raids, the “workers” declared to the judge that although they were picked up in what was thought to be a brothel, they were just having drinks with potential clients (sex was had in hotels), and they paid no money to the owner for spending time there. Sometimes prostitutes admitted they had paid some money but they were very careful to assure the judge that it was for lodgings, as they had no place to live and no support from their families.³⁹

The most spectacular strategy used by brothel owners in Mexico City was the formation of a union, which, following the promises of the revolution, would defend their rights as working people. In spite of the assistance of the former attorney general of Mexico City and the secretary general of the Mexican Federation of Work, their claims were dismissed by the authorities. In 1941, the press in Mexico City reported the onerous amounts of money that politicians requested from madams for protection. In this way, the careers of these men in the government came to an end, as did the hope for the comeback of state-regulated prostitution. Few brothels survived this aggressive campaign. One of them was the house of the *Bandida*, the most exclusive and famous brothel in Mexico City in the 1940s and ‘50s.⁴⁰

By 1945, five years after the abolition of regulation, government statistics showed that the number of cases of syphilis had decreased. In fact, this was not because of government actions but because of the introduction and availability of penicillin in the mid-1940s which decreased the rate of venereal diseases. That was not the only change; in those years, both the urban landscape and the dynamics of prostitution differed from the state of affairs in the early twentieth century. The city witnessed an unprecedented population increase, and processes of urbanization displaced prostitutes from areas where prostitution had been most concentrated.⁴¹ The efforts of the Mexican state against pimping focused on closing brothels. For several years the authorities prosecuted madams and the staff that worked for them, but they paid no attention to pimps on the streets. Cabarets, bars, and cheap hotels were not subject to the same measures as brothels. Consequently, many prostitutes started to look

39 This kind of argumentation was repeated over and over during criminal trials for procuring. Historic Archive of Mexico City, Fondo: Cárceles, Sección: Penitenciaría, 1940–1941.

40 Eduardo Muñuzuri, *Memorias de La Bandida* (Mexico, 1967).

41 Bliss, *Compromised Positions*, pp. 153–183.

for clients on the streets and their protection was taken over by pimps who began to strengthen their presence in prostitution.

In 1972, Salvador Novo, one of the most important chroniclers of Mexico City, recalled the days when prostitution was an activity largely controlled by women. In his essay “Brothels and the Decay of Conversation” he compared the brothels and madams of Mexico City with department stores and managers. At the same time, the writer criticized the role that the Mexican government played in the disappearance of brothels from the streets of the nation’s capital.

Novo’s reflections on brothels focused on two main aspects: the zero benefits that the revolution brought for prostitutes and the importance that brothels had as social spaces and private areas that promoted education and conversation, as well as acting as sources of inspiration for writers. According to Novo, while the post-revolutionary state boasted about improvements in labour rights, prostitutes lost all the social guarantees that the government could have offered them as workers, making these women “the disinherited of the Revolution”. The chronicler lamented the situation of sex workers after the ban on brothels in Mexico City and the “sad fate of these self-employed workers who now work without a title and guarantees [...] scattered, persecuted. [...] [T]he noble service which once flourished, fully organized in brothels [is now gone].”⁴²

Social Activism and New Challenges

The 1980s brought a new epidemic that had a direct impact on the dynamics of prostitution. In Mexico, the first AIDS case was recorded in 1983 and in 1988 the government called for the creation of the National Council for the Prevention and Control of AIDS. In the same year, some prostitutes contacted governmental and feminist organizations with the aim of forming working groups that would establish services for information about and the detection of HIV, as well as campaigns to raise awareness about the disease.

Towards the 1990s the physical characteristics of women who could be hired for sex and the condition of their workplaces were marked by social and class differences. Wealthier customers used credit cards to pay for beautiful models or virgin teens chosen from a catalogue. These sexual encounters took place in elegant apartments and a waiter/barman served both as a guard and money

42 Salvador Novo, “Los burdeles y la decadencia de la conversación”, in Salvador Novo, *Las locas, el sexo y los burdeles* (Mexico, 1979), pp. 75–81, 78.

collector. In middle-class areas there could be found street prostitutes who took their clients to hotels, women working in brothels disguised as massage or beauty parlours, and call girls who advertised in the newspapers' classified ads section. Many of the clandestine brothels were located in the poorest areas of the city. There, women with limited resources, usually rural immigrants with basic or no education, worked for men who asked for 50 per cent of their profits. Usually they had to go looking for men in areas close to the brothel, which was nothing more than a large room with spaces divided by curtains.⁴³

Currently, in certain areas of the city the authorities tolerate street prostitution. The people responsible for overseeing sex workers there and negotiating with the authorities are usually men called "representatives" and they are responsible for groups of ten to forty women. The women usually have to have sex with their representatives and some of the representatives are both pimps and the lovers of the women under their control. There are some madams (mostly former prostitutes, although we also find relatives of prostitutes) who exercise control differently; they often force prostitutes to consume goods and services offered by their contacts and friends, thereby ensuring a permanent workforce of women who are in debt to them.⁴⁴

One of the most visible areas of prostitution is La Merced. Dedicated to commercial activities since the early colonial years, La Merced remained the largest marketplace of Mexico City until the 1990s. In this neighbourhood a large number of street solicitors coexist with shopkeepers, hotel owners, peddlers, and inhabitants classified as lower and lower-lower class. According to a census provided by organized groups of sex workers, around 2,000 prostitutes worked in the area in 2006.⁴⁵ Although there are some independent sex workers, most belong to organized groups controlled by men dedicated to human trafficking in complicity with the authorities (some of whom are former police officers). According to several sex workers interviewed by social researchers, these criminal organizations kidnap or deceive young women in order to exploit them. On other occasions their own parents or other relatives sell the girls to these men, a common phenomenon in rural areas where indigenous young girls are the most common victims.⁴⁶ The vast majority of women forced into

43 Marta Lamas, "El fulgor de la noche: Algunos aspectos de la prostitución callejera en la Ciudad de México", *Debate Feminista*, 4 (1993), pp. 103–134, 111–114.

44 *Ibid.*, pp. 114–115.

45 Angélica Bautista López and Elsa Conde Rodríguez, *Comercio sexual en la Merced: Una perspectiva constructivista del sexoservicio* (México, 2006), pp. 18–20.

46 Soledad González Montes, "Violencia contra las mujeres: Derechos y ciudadanía en contextos rurales e indígenas de México", *Convergencia: Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, 50 (2009), pp. 165–185.

prostitution come from other provinces, particularly from impoverished rural areas or small towns and cities.

Sex workers are well aware of the way ageing affects their earnings. Purchasing the virginity of a girl between 10 and 13 years old can cost up to 2,000 dollars, which is delivered to the madam. Procurers look after young girls very closely, because they know they can get the best money with them. In the hours or days following the first sexual intercourse they can charge their clients a little over 200 dollars for every additional sexual encounter. When sex workers are around 15 years old, the price for every act is 30 dollars, while a woman closer to 20 earns from 10 to 20 dollars. Younger sex workers are very selective about their customers because they know they need to save money for the future. They know that with each year that passes their value decreases in the eyes of their costumers and procurers. For instance, women in their 30s, if they are attractive, charge every client up to 10 dollars while older women charge 2 dollars or less.⁴⁷

Some women begin to work in prostitution after the age of 40 because they lost their husbands by separation or death, or because they failed to find another job after facing extreme economic situations. Young women may say that they fled from a very troubled home. In the street, hunger prevails and their bodies become their instrument for survival. Sex workers have told interviewers that they were initiated “by chance” because another friend that already worked in prostitution invited them into the business. Some others declared that they had been deceived by professional pimps and madams.⁴⁸

When street solicitors remember their first days as sex workers, they experience mixed emotions. On the one hand, they say that the street gives them “freedom”, saying, “Here nobody tells you what to do. You can go wherever you want.” On the other hand, they accept that it is extremely difficult to deal with such a hostile environment by themselves without a sense of belonging: “After a while you feel terrible because you sleep wherever you can, and it is cold and you are hungry.”⁴⁹ That is one of the main reasons why women join groups controlled by pimps.

Money is the element that allows sex workers to put their occupations on the same level as other economic activities. In this respect, their self-descriptions shed light on the way they live out the moral contradictions of being involved in prostitution. On the one hand, they speak of a “regular job” and even social clichés are used to define it, such as the phrase “the oldest profession in

47 López and Rodríguez, *Comercio sexual*, pp. 90–94.

48 *Ibid.*, pp. 91–94, 105–108.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 107.

the world.” On the other hand, they talk about the existence of their work as “a necessary evil” that has always involved persecution, using the following adjectives to describe it: “ugly”, “horrible”, “the worst thing in life”, “bad”, and “shameful”.⁵⁰ In addition, they are fully aware that their job is full of risks, not just because of the sexual and physical violence they experience on a regular basis but also because of the threat of contracting venereal diseases.

Despite the efforts of some sex workers to prevent the spread of AIDS among their colleagues through the use of condoms, research has shown that the campaigns were only partially successful. Most clients refuse to use condoms and they offer extra payment to women who are willing to have sex without condoms. According to some reports, the competition between women and the increasing number of transgender individuals working on the streets of the city has made many prostitutes choose to risk their health in order to get more clients.⁵¹

Perhaps the greatest legacy of the 1980s and ‘90s has been an accumulation of knowledge concerning the organization and social mobilization of sex workers, which has allowed some of them to negotiate with government representatives, make alliances with feminists and intellectuals, talk about prostitution as an option for making a living, and speak about prostitutes as women with rights. As a result, an organized group of women established a shelter for more than twenty senior prostitutes in 2006 after several talks with the leftist government of the city.

That same year marked the beginning of the government’s war against drugs in the country. One of the most serious consequences of this complex phenomenon has been the rapid growth of human trafficking in Mexico. Men, women, children, indigenous persons, and undocumented migrants have been (and still are) victims of sex trafficking and forced labour. In this process, geography plays a major role. Lured by false promises of employment or love, and under the threat of having their personal documents taken away or being tipped off to migration officers, Mexicans as well as others (mainly from Central and South America), are exploited by organized criminal groups in Mexico and the United States.⁵²

The number of victims of severe forms of sexual exploitation has significantly increased from 2006 onwards. Federal and local governments have made some efforts to bring themselves into compliance with international

50 *Ibid.*, pp. 96–98.

51 Lamas, *El fulgor de la noche*, pp. 121–122.

52 US Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*, 2013 (Washington, 2013), p. 261.

standards dictated by the United Nations or the US Department of State.⁵³ In 2013, the authorities approved a national anti-trafficking law that increased the legal punishment for trafficking offenders on a federal level. However, Mexico still does not fully comply with the minimum international requirements to eliminate sexual exploitation, which includes forced prostitution. Problems still to be solved include the complicity of the authorities in all levels of the justice system, threats of violence from criminal organizations, poor coordination between local and national agencies, and a lack of adequate attention and protection for victims.⁵⁴

In Mexico City, the authorities as well as NGOs have been engaged in a debate on how to eradicate sexual exploitation in both the capital city and the country. Since 2007, the Criminal Code of the Federal District has stipulated that human trafficking is a criminal offense.⁵⁵ Unlike other states in the country, Mexico City provides some specialized services and has shelters and active campaigns in order to help victims of forced prostitution. Academics, NGOs, international agencies, and foreign governments have joined in active campaigns to raise awareness, particularly among the most vulnerable groups such as young and indigenous people. However, all of these efforts are still under way and there is a lot to do before we can claim that significant results have been achieved.⁵⁶

A major concern is corruption among policemen, judges, and officials who do not apply the law, put victims in danger, and otherwise fail to ensure that adequate legal processes are put into place. There is no official data about the number of victims of sexual exploitation in the city, nor a consensus on the steps that should be followed to remedy the problem. In 2013, the Women's National Institute, in collaboration with the Coalition against Trafficking in Women and Girls in Latin America and the Caribbean, presented an assessment on the structural causes of sexual exploitation in Mexico City and a plan of action. According to this study (which is based on neo-abolitionist ideas), there are around 250,000 women engaged in sexual commerce. Of those, 88 per cent are immigrants, and 99 per cent are exploited by criminal organizations in areas like La Merced.⁵⁷ During the first months of the same year, the

53 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2012* (New York, 2012).

54 US Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*, pp. 261–262.

55 CATWLAC-InMujeresDF, *Diagnóstico de causas estructurales y sociales de la trata de personas en la ciudad de México* (Mexico, 2012), p. 81.

56 US Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*, pp. 262–263.

57 CATWLAC-InMujeresDF, *Diagnóstico de causas estructurales*, pp. 83–85.

authorities in Mexico City launched police raids on establishments offering lap dances, looking for victims of sexual exploitation and closing down such business, but they did not find many culprits.

Several social organizations that work close to the city government share the point of view that most of the women engaged in sexual commerce are victims, either because they were deceived or captured by pimps or criminal organizations or because the existing “patriarchal culture” obliges women to engage in sexual activities for money.⁵⁸ As a consequence of the arrest of some table dancers as well as sex workers, some have protested on the streets, arguing that they are not exploited, nor are they victims of coercion. Some of them have claimed that the figures and arguments presented by some NGOs are inaccurate and that some sex workers have been forced by the authorities to sign written statements against the owners and workers at their former places of employment.⁵⁹

The debate is still ongoing. Several organizations have addressed the harsh life stories told by victims of sexual exploitation and been able to make their voices (as well as victims’ voices) heard in the media, academia, and legislative spaces like never before. However, there is a major risk of erasing their agency in this way, as well as taking a step back from the achievements that some sex workers have made in recent years. Unfortunately, the undeniable horror lived by the victims of forced prostitution is not only casting a shadow on the incipient activism of sex workers but also puts at risk the goal that one day they could be considered as labourers with rights. Based on our historical research and observations of the current debates in academia, mass media, and legislation, we have noticed that several factors are reducing the space of action for those voluntarily engaged in sexual commerce, and their actions are getting lost under the weight of the discussions going on around them, discussions that do not incorporate the possibility of free will in prostitution.

58 *Ibid.*, pp. 45–50.

59 News on the closure of a place called “El Cadillac” that prompted a heated debate as well as protests by street solicitors on Sullivan Street in June, July, and August of 2013 can be found in several online resources, such as: <http://www.animalpolitico.com/2013/07/bailarinas-del-cadillac-denuncian-que-fueron-forzadas-a-firmar-declaracion-contra-el-table/>, <http://www.razon.com.mx/spip.php?article179595&tipo=especial> and <http://razon.com.mx/spip.php?article179365>; last accessed 8 July 2017.

The Future of an Institution from the Past: Accommodating Regulationism in Potosí (Bolivia) from the Nineteenth to Twenty-first Centuries

Pascale Absi

Introduction

This article uses the present tense to discuss an institution from the past: the regulationist approach to prostitution developed in France in the nineteenth century. While this system has gradually disappeared in Europe, its survival in present-day Bolivia means that the similarities and ruptures between current and past methods used in the public and social management of prostitution can be analysed. Most of the research was carried out in Potosí, a mining city founded by the Spanish conquistadores in the heart of the Bolivian Andes. With a population of 170,000 (2012 census), Potosí is a large city in Bolivian terms, attracting rural migrants who make up much of the workforce in the mines, the income from which keeps the brothels going.

Since the end of the 2000s, under the banner of the Bolivian prostitutes' organization (ONAEM)¹ a group of women has been fighting for recognition as sex workers.² All of them work—or used to work—in houses of prostitution (*lenocinio*) that are regulated and controlled by municipal government authorities. Nobody appears to be concerned by the contradiction between the operation of these establishments and the criminal code, which expressly

* An initial version of my analysis of regulationism in Bolivia was published in Pascale Absi, "Femmes de maison: Les avatars boliviens du réglementarisme", *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 198 (2013), pp. 78–93. This text was translated by Sara Shields. I am grateful to the editors of this publication for their comments.

1 Organización Nacional para la Emancipación de la Mujer (National Organization for the Emancipation of Women).

2 Until 2009, ONAEM's leaders were opposed to professionalization. The shift that occurred is largely due to the work they did together with the Danish NGO IBIS-HIVOS, which manages the funds allocated to Bolivia by the Global Fund to fight AIDS and the TraSex Network (Red de mujeres trabajadoras sexuales de América Latina y el Caribe). Since it was set up in 1997 under the auspices of UNAIDS and HIVOS, that network has been campaigning for prostitution to be recognized as a profession.

condemns the running of brothels and the earning of money from another person's prostitution.

The legal framework governing prostitution in Bolivia is an eclectic mix of traditional European-style regulationism and abolitionist laws inspired by United Nations conventions, especially the New York Convention and the Palermo Protocol. In their day-to-day actions the police, health services, and municipal government alternate between using the tools of regulationism and abolitionism to organize prostitution, while at the same time cracking down on its most unacceptable facets (especially when there are minors involved).³ Nobody—either from the state or on the side of the prostitutes and the institutions that work with their sector—currently seems willing to tackle this contradiction in the law. There is nothing to indicate that the situation will change if ONAEM obtains official recognition of sex work.

After describing how regulationism was introduced in Bolivia, I will attempt to describe the reasons for its survival. I will look at how the weakening of coercion and the improvement of working conditions in brothels allowed the system to become even more legitimate. This chapter therefore aims to contribute to a comparative discussion of historical forms of the sex trade by looking at the particular evolution of the classical way of managing prostitution exported by France in the nineteenth century, as well as examining the conditions that have led to certain arrangements being seen as more positive (or less negative) by the people involved in it.

It would not make much sense to go further back in time within the parameters of this study. Very little (practically nothing) has been written about the history of prostitution in Bolivia. That said, it is most likely that prostitution expanded after the Spanish conquest together with the arrival of the market, money, wage labour, industrialization, and the concentration of the workforce in urban areas. References to previous practices of providing sexual services in exchange for goods can be read between the lines in the earliest chronicles that exist.⁴ However, exchanging sex for something is not the same as modern

3 This situation may be somewhat similar to other countries such as Belgium, in which some cities tolerate the existence of establishments of prostitution despite the country's abolitionist legislation. In Antwerp, for example, the *Schipperskwartier* where window prostitution takes place has been strictly controlled by the municipal authorities since the end of the twentieth century. I would like to extend my thanks to Magaly Rodríguez García for bringing this issue to my attention.

4 In the sixteenth century, for example, a scandalized Father Álvarez recounts how women from the *Altiplano* would have sexual relations with coca growers in the Andean foothills in exchange for the highly prized leaf. One wonders, however, whether what the priest calls the "sale" of sex might in fact be the transfer of women—a practice typical of the inter-ethnic

prostitution (understood as a practice not bound by prior social obligations between the parties involved),⁵ and an understanding of what was going on before the conquest cannot be gleaned from these writings.⁶ Likewise, taking up the Spanish courtesans or the indigenous and mestizo women who became prostitutes during the colonial period will not be of much help in understanding the situation today. As we will see, the ways in which ethnic categories influence the practice of prostitution do not even offer a glimpse of a structural inheritance from colonial times. On the contrary, the way in which prostitution is organized today is entirely consistent with the modernizing project of the republican state that followed independence in 1825. If the colonial period has left any trace other than the formation of an urban proletariat that provides today's brothels with their workers, we would have to look for it in the sphere of morals.

Rooting out the worship of idols went hand in hand with reforming the sexuality of the indigenous peoples along with introducing the Catholic institution of monogamous marriage, condemning premarital sex, and polygamy.⁷ This is the context in which the boundary between acceptable and unacceptable female behaviour was drawn, giving rise to the stigmatization of the *puta* (whore) as the opposite of the decent woman. At least since the eighteenth century, the words *ramera* and *puta* have been used in Bolivia to disparage women—including indigenous women—who are of dubious character.⁸ In more contemporary terms, we are talking about women who in one way or another challenge men's patriarchal rights over women and their productive and reproductive capacities.⁹ Today, among the Bolivian working classes those women who work outside the home, thereby threatening male hegemony by generating their own income outside the family sphere, are particularly

alliances in the prehispanic Andean region. Bartolomé Álvarez, *De las costumbres y conversión de los indios del Perú: Memorial a Felipe II (1588)* (Madrid, 1998), pp. 337–338, 608.

5 Paola Tabet, *La grande arnaque: Sexualité des femmes et échange économique-sexuel* (Paris, 2004), p. 207.

6 In what is now Peru, Garcilaso de la Vega mentioned the existence of “public women” called *pampairunas* who lived in hovels outside villages during Inca times. Unfortunately little is known about where these women came from or what they actually did. Garcilaso Inca de la Vega, *Comentarios reales de los Incas (1609)* (Madrid, 2004), p. 320.

7 Fernando Armas Asín, “Religión, género y construcción de una sexualidad en los Andes (ss. XVI y XVII)”, *Revista de Indias*, 61 (2001), pp. 673–700.

8 Ward Stavig, *Amor y violencia sexual: Valores indígenas en la sociedad colonial* (Lima, 1995), pp. 57, 93.

9 Tabet, *La grande arnaque*, p. 207. See also Gail Pheterson, *The Whore Stigma: Female Dishonor and Male Unworthiness* (La Haye, 1986), p. 116.

exposed to being classified as *putas*. In fact, selling their bodies or making themselves available to the public for sex is not the worst thing that prostitutes perceive about their activity. Instead of talking about the sanctity of the body or monogamous marriage, they constantly refer back to their domination of male clients and their money. It is considered the very epitome of women's naked ambition to refuse to accept low incomes in work traditionally done by women and/or bestowed on a woman by her husband.¹⁰ These same women reject being called *prostitutas* and prefer to be known as *meretrices* or more recently as "sex workers". They consider "prostitutes" to be women who have the bad habit of sleeping around without being paid. As they tell their clients, "The *puta* is your wife who has sex with other men while you're working."

The qualitative data in this study was taken from a classic ethnographic study carried out between 2005 and 2009 in legal brothels in Bolivian cities, particularly the mining city of Potosí. Because I was living in Bolivia at the time, I was able to visit the brothels almost every week. I began by making contacts in the health centres where the women go for their weekly medical check-ups. Over time, I was accepted by the brothel owners, their clients, and the women who worked there (or perhaps they just became resigned to my presence). As a result, I was able to conduct more formal interviews with over a hundred women in their rooms and houses, as well as in my own residence. The quantitative data in the section on the women's social background are taken from a study done with the geographers Hubert Mazurek and Noemi Chipana.¹¹

From French-style Regulationism to Its Bolivian Avatar

As is the case in many abolitionist countries, Bolivian law is silent about prostitution itself. The 1972 Criminal Code (updated in 2010) is limited to condemning procuring, trafficking, and the corruption of minors, and this condemnation is expressed in terms inspired by the abolitionist United Nations conventions to which Bolivia is a signatory, the New York Convention (1949, ratified in 1983), and the Palermo Protocol to combat trafficking (2000, ratified in 2001). If these moves reflected a real desire to change things, they have come up against the inertia of custom.

10 Pascale Absi, "La professionnalisation de la prostitution: Le travail des femmes (aussi) en question", *L'Homme et la société*, 176–177 (2010), pp. 193–212.

11 Pascale Absi, Hubert Mazurek, and Noemi Chipana, "La categoría 'prostituta' a prueba de las estadísticas en Bolivia", *Migración y desarrollo*, 10 (2012), pp. 5–39.

Municipal by-laws easily coexist today with the 1949 convention's provision ordering states not to regulate prostitution and to punish those who profit from it (that would include brothel owners and Bolivia's public administration in terms of operating licences, fines, and—until recently—obligatory payments to health services and the police). And while Article 321 of the Criminal Code condemns “anyone who, on their own account or on behalf of someone else, openly or secretly runs a house of prostitution or meeting place for lewd purposes”, municipal governments continue to issue operating licences to establishments classified as *lenocinios*. A parliamentary proposal to restrict the exploitation of prostitution is currently completely blocked due to the health-oriented rationale of regulationism. Instead of being considered procurers, the owners of the establishments are seen as playing an essential role in ensuring that the women go for their medical check-ups. Consequently, it is no surprise that in 2011 the Bolivian police registered just twenty-two cases of alleged procuring and only nine in 2010.¹² These figures are paltry in comparison with the number of officially recognized establishments—ranging from a dozen to more than fifty in each of the country's large cities—not to mention the clandestine ones.

The law against trafficking enacted in 2006 is likewise inapplicable in this context. In keeping with the Palermo Protocol, Article 281 of this law condemns anyone who, “by means of deception, coercion, threats, the use of force, or the abuse of a position of vulnerability, even with the consent of the victim, directly or through a third party brings about, carries out, or promotes the transport or recruitment, deprivation of liberty, harbouring, or receipt of human beings within or outside the territory of this country”, particularly for the purposes of prostitution. Similar to the condemnation of all forms of intermediation, ruling out the idea that a person may consent to be recruited for prostitution makes no sense here. The existence of the health card is proof of the official recognition of voluntary prostitution dependent on a third party. When the health card is first issued, there is no interview to assess the beginner's motives, whether or not she gave her consent, or the way in which she was recruited. Determining whether she was in a vulnerable position would also be complicated to say the least. Despite its abolitionist orientation, in its application Bolivian law therefore accepts the existence of non-criminal procuring and recruitment. Indeed, a review of press reports shows that, similar

12 David Chacón Mendoza, “Modificación al art: 281bis del código-penal-boliviano”, available at: <http://www.monografias.com/trabajos93/modificacion-al-art-281-bis-del-codigo-penal-boliviano/modificacion-al-art-281-bis-del-codigo-penal-boliviano6.shtml>; last accessed 8 July 2017.

to the condemnation of procuring, the possibility of consent is only ruled out when the procuring and recruitment practices defined in the regulations too evidently come into conflict with morals and are compounded by other crimes (the corrupting of minors or the presence of undocumented foreigners). But recourse to the law mainly takes place when there is a failure to comply with the health checks on prostitutes.

Thus, the practice of prostitution appears trapped between official abolitionism and de facto regulationism, with national laws doing nothing to disturb the operations of brothels. Furthermore, most of the municipal by-laws that regulate these establishments have not been updated for more than a hundred years. They stipulate the locations of brothels and the health-related obligations of their residents, as well as the role of public officials and medical services, abiding by the same concerns with hygiene and morals as the regulations in France¹³ which they parallel chapter and verse.¹⁴

According to Paredes Candia,¹⁵ the first brothel in the modern sense of the word opened in 1870 in the city of La Paz. Less than one hundred years after independence, the prevailing concerns of eugenicists at the time confused the future of the country with the reproductive capacity of women, and prostitution became a political concern from the beginning of the twentieth century.¹⁶ With growing urbanization and the rise to power of the proletariat of indigenous and mestizo origins,¹⁷ one can assume that legislation was designed to take back power from the working classes in a situation in which recent unionization and social mobilization destabilized the old order of class and sexes.

As with the 1906 "Regulation Regarding *lenocinios* in La Paz,"¹⁸ the first municipal by-laws regulated the confinement of women (called *asiladas*), mandated gynaecological check-ups, prohibited minors below the age of seventeen from entering prostitution, and placed the sick in a *lazaretto*. The women had to register with the local government, the madams presented their new recruits to the police, and the doctor kept a register of his patients. In 1938, the Ministry of Hygiene and Health and the municipality were placed in charge of

13 Alain Corbin, *Les Filles de nocés: Misère sexuelle et prostitution au XIX^e siècle* (Paris, 1982), p. 470.

14 Probably via the regulations introduced in Argentina in 1875 (see Schettini, this volume, Buenos Aires).

15 Antonio Paredes Candia, *De rameras, burdeles y proxenetas* (La Paz, 1998), pp. 28, 114.

16 Ann Zulawski, *Unequal Cures: Public Health and Political Change in Bolivia, 1900–1950* (Durham, 2007), pp. 119, 141, 264.

17 Herbert S. Klein, *Historia de Bolivia* (La Paz, 1987), pp. 233, 361.

18 Paredes Candia, *De rameras, burdeles y proxenetas*, pp. 87–108, 114.

overseeing these regulations.¹⁹ In 1957, a Supreme Decree opened the doors of the brothels to the national police force and put them in charge of enforcing the law that prohibited minors from entering and staying in brothels.²⁰ In 1962, the police's jurisdiction was expanded with the creation of the *matrículas* office which registers prostitutes and oversees their places of work.²¹

Up until the early 2000s, life in the brothels was organized by a system of confinement. As in the previous century, the *asiladas* could not leave the brothel, move from one brothel to another, or move to another city without a pass issued by the police. Registered women had to get a stamp every week and pay to be registered and for their check-ups. The principal way for a woman to remove her name from the register of prostitutes was for her to get married.

Brothels must still register with the municipal government today. It issues the licences that authorize establishments of prostitution, discotheques, and any other type of premises that serves alcoholic drinks to operate. These permits are sent to the Environmental Health Office, which is responsible for ensuring compliance with hygiene regulations. Its officers make regular checks on these establishments. Meanwhile, the Public Entertainments Department is in charge of enforcing compliance with operating hours (usually between 8 PM and 4 AM). In an establishment that is also a place where people live, this is complicated to say the least. During the day, the ballroom and the bar are closed, but the women's bedrooms are not, and they continue to receive their clients there. But keeping the operating licence depends above all on the women and the male waiters having an up-to-date health card, and medical officers check this during their visits. Failure to present the cards leads to a fine, and the establishment would normally be closed down were it not for corruption. Each week, everyone must therefore undergo a gynaecological check-up in the health centre that runs the departmental government's STD/AIDS programme.

Relaxing the Rules

The confinement regime has gradually fallen into disuse since the 1990s. Women are now free to move around and change brothels, move to other cities, and alter their way of life. In the past, female residents used to eat, sleep, and spend their leisure time within the four walls of the house, where their children

19 Feliciano Peña Berazaín, *Estudio social y legal de la prostitución en Bolivia* (Unpublished M.A., The Higher University of San Andrés, 2001).

20 Peña Berazaín, *Estudio social y legal de la prostitución*.

21 *Ibid.*

sometimes used to live as well. Door-to-door vendors would call regularly to offer food, clothes, and hygiene products. The only occasion when the women were allowed out was for their visit to the doctor. Otherwise, they had to negotiate permission by paying the police and the brothel owner.

The increase in the number of players involved in the control system (the police, the municipal government, and health services) offered many opportunities for corruption and the abuse of power. The fines and temporary arrests (lasting from twenty-four to seventy-two hours) with which women found outside without permission were threatened could be avoided by offering bribes as well as domestic and sexual services free of charge. The medical officers who came to check the health cards were not slow to take advantage of such opportunities either. Their surprise visits often ended with them sitting at the bar drinking a round of drinks they had been offered by the owner or her *asiladas*. The house itself was far from being a refuge. Everything, including food, showers, television, permission to go out, the sale of articles at inflated prices, and dodgy accounting practices served as a pretext for the owners to make deductions from the women's pay and build up debts that kept them locked in even more securely. Meanwhile, the captive workers also had to put up with pressure regarding the number of services they had to provide. Through a closed working and living space, in which the inmates' day-to-day lives were completely dependent on the good will of the owners, the brothel operated as one of those "total institutions" described by Erving Goffman.²² Despite the opening up of the brothels, the lack of a distinction between private and public life, together with the confusion between personal and working relationships, has left a lasting mark, still visible today in the way prostitutes operate.

Complaints about ill-treatment, abuses of power, corruption, and videos filmed and broadcast by the media without authorization were presented by the women to the *Defensor del Pueblo*²³ (Human Rights Defence Office) during the first meeting of Bolivian sex workers in 1998. Following an investigation, at the end of 2000 the *Defensor del Pueblo* managed to get individual registration abolished and the health card institutionalized at the national level (rather than by locality). The police found that their power was reduced to acting against trafficking—especially involving minors—and the presence of illegal immigrants, as well as punishing public order disturbances near brothels. This victory consolidated the process of organizing Bolivian sex workers, which had been promoted two years earlier by the *Defensor del Pueblo* itself. Today, ONAEM has become the legitimate interlocutor for institutions working

22 Erving Goffman, *Asiles* (Paris, 1968), p. 452.

23 A public institution that mediates between citizens and state institutions.

with the prostitution sector.²⁴ Another achievement occurred in 2004 when medical check-ups were made free of charge.

I have not been able to determine the exact circumstances in which the confinement regime came to an end. “One day I went to *matrículas* [the police registration office] and they just said to me, ‘No, we’re not doing that any more,’” is how Cristina, who was working in Cochabamba at the time, laconically sums it up. The opening up of the brothels does not seem to have been accompanied by a public debate, nor has it given rise to changes in the law. This is understandable because the municipal by-laws I was able to examine (La Paz 1906, La Paz 1927, Potosí 1997) never mention a ban on the women’s freedom of movement. They only stipulate that women are obliged to inform the health services of any change of address and if they quit prostitution. This means that the women’s confinement and control by brothel owners and the police was determined by custom, not the law. In one of my interviews, Betty Pintos, who worked for the Vice-Ministry of Gender Affairs at the time, also described a growing concern with the situation of the *asiladas* as a result of the World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995.

Paradoxically, the AIDS epidemic, which reinforced the legitimacy of the health check-ups, also strengthened criticisms of the confinement regime. Dr. Rengifo, who has been in charge of the medical control of prostitutes in Potosí since 1991, recalls that in those days the health authorities saw promiscuity as a factor in the spread of the disease. After a transition period, during which the women were allowed to go out if they obtained the agreement of the brothel owners, the lifting of the requirement to register with the police put an end to the confinement system in the early 2000s. Today it is possible to work in a brothel without living there, although in practice most women are still residents and restrict their movements for fear of bumping into someone they know. Internalization of the stigma surrounding prostitution has replaced the physical boundaries of regulationism.

Since the establishments have ceased to lock up their staff, the legitimacy of the practice of prostitution no longer concerns the locale and now centres

24 The project for an organization of Bolivian prostitutes arose as a result of the “Second Meeting of Latin American Female Sex Workers in Bolivia” organized in 1998 and supported by USAID, which at the time was funding the health centres where the prostitutes go to have their medical check-ups. By 2005, local organizations had been set up with the support of the Bolivian Trade Union Confederation (Central Obrera Boliviana—COB) in all the large cities. Inspired by the Argentinian precedent, the objective was to set up a national organization of sex workers with a view to their affiliation with the COB. However, the organization never joined the COB (due to personal conflicts).

on the women themselves. For an adult, having an up-to-date health card is all that is needed to practise legitimately anywhere.²⁵ The concerns that justify the continuation of regulationism are no longer so much moral as hygiene-related; in short, the authority of the doctor has replaced that of the police.

A consequence of the end of the confinement regime and the restriction of police powers has been that the sex trade has diversified outside the traditional establishments; now there are newspaper advertisements, massage parlours, karaoke clubs, the internet, escort agencies, and so on. A parallel market has always existed, but now it has been legalized in practice. These days, many women move from one form of prostitution to another, going back and forth between different types of establishment, working as call girls and picking up clients in discotheques. These pathways are evidently guided by the extent to which what the woman can offer (in terms of their physical appearance, age, level of schooling, and background) fits with the prostitution venue's particular specialization. But whether they come from the highlands or the tropical lowlands, they are usually from a low-income background and were recruited by means of similar mechanisms.

Arriving in the Brothel

Trafficking in the strict sense of the term does exist in Bolivia; girls who have suffered abuse have their identity documents taken away and are locked up and threatened in order to force them to prostitute themselves, at least until they pay back—with interest—their travel costs and the advances they were given under the pretext of being offered a job in another occupation, especially the restaurant trade. Nevertheless, even though the recruitment methods identified may coincide with what international abolitionist conventions understand by trafficking, once they have embarked upon prostitution the women are silent about the existence of coercion. Through their discourses they insist that they were not deprived of choices or room for manoeuvring, and they may even go so far as to present their introduction to prostitution as an opportunity. It must be assumed that this is not the case when the coercion is more openly violent, but my random ethnographic surveys and the particular context of official brothels did not allow me to gather testimonies of that type.

Most of the recruiters are informal intermediaries. They work in a brothel themselves or are known to the owner (taxi drivers, for example). They are opportunists rather than professionals. The women they target may be a

25 At least in large cities. In the provinces, brothel workers are often not controlled.

neighbour, an old school-friend, a waitress in the restaurant where they have lunch, or girls they met at a party or a discotheque, in most cases domestic workers going out to have fun on their day off. These intermediaries often—but not always—charge a commission. Many sincerely believe that they are doing the women a favour. Helping an acquaintance or a relative, sometimes even their own sister, to get out of a run of bad luck is also the main motive mentioned by the women from the brothels who, at the end of the day, are their main recruiters. Professional recruiters are less numerous. They know the market well and offer their services to establishments around the country. They may even be the owners of such establishments. They operate mainly in brothels (whose staff they poach) and entertainment venues, but they also hang around in bus stations, where migrants are arriving every day in search of work, and outside employment agencies (where they may also place advertisements). They quickly identify women who appear to be on their own or a little lost (especially young runaways), those who cannot make ends meet until the next month's wages, or those who seem daring.

The revelation that takes place upon arrival at the house of prostitution tends to be brutal for those who were not expecting it. The owners usually try to prolong the illusion created by the recruiter, switching between coercion (scolding, confiscating identity documents, demanding to be paid back for travel and accommodation costs, and so on) and showing what prostitution promises. The new recruit tends to be invited to start as an escort who has a drink with the men, promising her that she will not be obliged to sleep with them. The testimonies reveal an ambivalent process in which the seduction of quick money is an essential driver leading women to perceive the pressure they are under from the owners but also from the other women, who urge them to take the step, as mild. Deceptions and pressure are recounted in an informative, never vengeful tone. Other testimonies indicate that the decision was made more quickly, linked to an urgent need for money due to the loss of a job, the illness of a family member, or debt. Then, once the routine becomes established, and regardless of the degree of coercion that has been exerted over them, the women's accounts coincide in terms of reinterpreting their entry into prostitution in terms of an encounter with a welcome mediator.

Presenting the recruiter as a helper, while concealing coercion in order to highlight freedom and choice, is a classical idealization process in the life stories I've encountered. The influence of regulationism and its practices probably also restrains the emergence of the figure of the victim introduced by the abolitionist discourse. But neither the legal environment nor the narrative procedures that arise from the speaker's psychological make-up can fully account for this. Instead of mentioning deceit to justify their entry into prostitution,

most of my interviewees systematically placed the emphasis on their decision to continue with it. They state that they could have turned back, but they decided otherwise. Of course, the possibility of escape is made more complicated by the fact that their papers were confiscated or the shame of having had sexual relations in exchange for payment, as well as the pressure from the owners to pay back advances. The younger women, especially the underage girls, often do not have the resources—both psychological and financial—to resist their influence. But what about the others, the older ones, who started when they were twenty or older and constitute the vast majority of my interviewees? They usually had a period of latency before they became active, a time when, once they had understood what awaited them, they could have decided to leave. Indeed, some do leave. Health service records show that some women ask medical staff for help to get out. In this way, the obligatory health check-ups curb the ability of the owners of official establishments to keep the women there against their will.

If the description of the processes of enlistment in prostitution in the particular context of Bolivia contributes to thinking about the internalization of coercion which leads to consent, it is because it shows that the process is not unequivocal. Contradictory feelings come and go. We see women resisting, then giving in to pressure before presenting themselves as consenting and, finally, if not exactly happy with it, at least accepting being where they are. Of course, reinterpretations after the fact tend to be appeasing. But we need to admit that the decision to remain in prostitution implies that women do have real room to manoeuvre. The fact that many abandon the work when they have achieved certain objectives (accumulating capital, buying a home, finding a man to support them, etc.) refutes the hypothesis that degradation (physical and psychological) and social exclusion do not allow them to even think about leaving. Indeed, since the brothels were opened up most women live a double life, spending long periods of time with their families and their children, to whom they lie about where their money has come from. Others own a shop or raise livestock. The women's young age, between 20 and 30 on average, also shows that there is life after prostitution. The comings and goings that characterize some career paths (where women return to prostitution following the failure of a business or seek to increase their capital or cope with other expenses) complicate the analysis still further. In these cases, the women undoubtedly knew what they were getting into. Considering the lack of positive professional and economic alternatives, there is clearly a limited degree of consent within the range of options available. But choice is not totally absent and the decision they make is understandable because, once the resistance has been overcome, in the women's eyes the benefits outweigh the losses

(in terms of their day-to-day lives, their view of themselves, and the burden of secrecy). Understanding this means considering what their lives could have been like outside prostitution, as they themselves do. Devoting a few lines to the socio-demographic profile and life paths of the women who work in Bolivian brothels will enable us to understand the position from where prostitution may become an alternative.

Prostitution and Migration Pathways

The statistical data presented here is based on a review of the medical records of 2,474 sex workers registered between 2003 and 2005 in the ten main cities of Bolivia.²⁶ Most of them work in brothels but some work on the streets or advertise their services in the newspaper, and they undergo health checks. Forty-one life stories reconstructed from the information in the ethnographic survey complement the analysis. The typical portrait that emerges from the two approaches is of a young woman who lives in a city, has a secondary school education, and supports family members.

The average age of the people registered in the health centres covered by the study is 23.9. There are few underage girls registered in the legal brothels (they have to keep out of the sight of the health services or falsify their papers), and older “less profitable” women are usually turned away. Almost all of them are women; we only recorded thirty-five men. Along with the transgender individuals who work on specific streets, there are also homosexual waiters in the brothels who will trade sex for cash with men. It is exceedingly rare for transgender individuals to work as prostitutes in the brothels.

Most of the registered sex workers were born in urban areas. 41 per cent came from municipalities with more than 500,000 inhabitants and 70 per cent came from municipalities with a population of over 50,000, cities which are considered large in the Bolivian context. Very few sex workers come from regions distant from the large urban centres. This leads to the conclusion that one factor that influences entry into prostitution is the proximity of a market. For half of the women registered, working as a prostitute implies living somewhere larger than their hometown. This confirms that prostitution is essentially an urban-based profession. It also reveals a key link between migration and

26 Absi, Mazurek, and Chipana, “La categoría ‘prostituta’”, pp. 5–39. The sample does not aim to reflect the number of people working as prostitutes in Bolivia as it is impossible to attempt to quantify that because many people are not registered and some only work intermittently, clandestinely, or in provinces far from the STD/AIDS programme offices.

prostitution: 68 per cent of the women work as prostitutes in a department (regional division) other than the one in which they were born. A further 17.9 per cent were born in the same department but not in the city where they are working.²⁷

Now that the seclusion regime has come to an end, many women adopt a nomadic lifestyle. When business wanes, clients get bored of the same faces, or they long for a change of scenery, they move to other cities in search of better opportunities. Nevertheless, migration tends to be an experience that precedes prostitution. Of the forty-one life pathways documented, thirty-one attest that our interviewees (one of whom is Chilean and another Ecuadorean) were no longer living in the place where they grew up when they began working as prostitutes. They left home to join other relatives or because they got a live-in job as domestic workers with a family or in a restaurant far from their homes. Few had no prior contacts in the place to which they moved. Migration is part of the economic strategies of Bolivian women in general, especially the younger ones. It may be the result of a desire to break away from parents or a difficult family situation, but leaving home is mainly motivated by a search for economic independence. Entering prostitution may be an indication of how difficult women migrants find it to achieve their employment and economic goals. At the same time, it reflects the vulnerability, but also the freedom, of young women who have escaped from parental surveillance. Having migrated beforehand provides the sense of anonymity that is so important for sex work.

This migration is understood to take place principally within Bolivia. In recent years, Bolivian women have migrated abroad in large numbers, especially to Spain, but they do not appear to be a significant group in studies on the European prostitution market.²⁸ Neither is Bolivia today an attractive destination for foreigners looking for work, including in prostitution.

The boom in the Bolivian mining industry at the beginning of the twentieth century attracted an influx of foreign prostitutes. In the 1930s, the mining cities were home to Chilean and Peruvian prostitutes whose male compatriots replaced the Bolivian miners enlisted to fight during the Chaco War against Paraguay.²⁹ These foreign prostitutes were joined by Argentinian and French women who had probably come through Buenos Aires. Nowadays, however, our sample showed that only 8.5 per cent of the prostitutes came from abroad. Over half were Brazilian women working in the border city of Cobija. The rest

27 Bolivia has ten million inhabitants living in nine departments.

28 Laura Oso Casas, "Prostitution et immigration des femmes latino-américaines en Espagne", *Cahiers du genre*, 40 (2006), pp. 91–113.

29 Paredes Candia, *De rameras, burdeles y proxenetas*, pp. 26, 114.

also came from South American countries, especially Argentina, Peru, Ecuador, and Paraguay. Most report having worked as prostitutes before entering Bolivia.

As well as physical appearance, age, and level of schooling, geographical origin and ethnic identity influence the women's career paths in the segregated and hierarchical sex market. Websites, escort agencies, massage parlours, and the most prestigious nightclubs pride themselves on offering young women who meet the criteria of being models, being able to converse easily, and, in the case of the nightclubs, knowing how to perform a striptease routine. They include foreign women and black women (from the small Afro-Bolivian community, and from Ecuador and Colombia). The owners therefore use intermediaries to poach staff from establishments in neighbouring countries, especially Brazil. However, their workers do not include women from an indigenous background wearing the traditional dress of the highlands (the so-called *cholitas*) who work in lower-category establishments.³⁰ But, even though *cholitas* are rarely present in the fantasies of more well-to-do men and those from the lowlands, they are highly sought after in the rich mining regions of the highlands as indicated by the fact that some women there will dress like *cholitas* to attract clients. They are known as *transformers*.

Education, Career Pathways, and Family Lives

Prostitution is not the first choice of occupation. Testimonies reveal women who started to work when they were very young, at 12 or 13 years old, which is still common in Bolivia. Many experienced poverty when they were children. Their parents generally worked in the informal sector as small traders, often on the street, or had a workshop or, less frequently, were farmers or miners. Two thirds of the women interviewed reported having worked as a live-in maid with a family or in a restaurant. These employment opportunities are highly sought after because they require no funding or special skills, and migrants receive lodging and support (including cash advances and gifts) from their employers. These conditions are similar to those offered in the brothels, which facilitates the move from domestic employment to prostitution.

32 per cent of the sex workers covered by our study only attended primary school, which is the same rate for all Bolivian women. Over 50 per cent attended

30 There are also indigenous women from the lowlands who work as prostitutes in the cities in eastern Bolivia. However, these women account for a very small percentage of the prostitutes working in the country.

secondary school. The same levels can be found for further education, proving that there is no significant difference between the education level of prostitutes and the overall female population of the same age group. This disproves the general view that the level of education is a factor that conditions women's entry into prostitution.

Almost half of the women interviewed became prostitutes before their youngest child turned three. These are very young mothers who were often underage when they became pregnant for the first time. In addition to not being supported by the father of the child, many were rejected by their families because they were pregnant, at least to begin with. Because they did not have the money to pay a nanny, they had to leave their jobs (although maternal grandparents often take charge of raising the children after the mother's entry into prostitution). To be able to live with their children under the same roof and earn money quickly to pay somebody else to look after them is an advantage that prostitution offers whereas live-in domestic service often does not.

Once women become prostitutes, they usually work full time. Their spending habits reflect the first objective of their entry into prostitution. Their first wages are certainly not spent on luxury items. They often buy goods that they lacked previously and that mark their independence such as clothes, beds, wardrobes, televisions, or cookers. Being able to pay someone to do housework is another luxury for women who are more used to being servants than employers. Once they have satisfied their basic needs they look towards improving their family's house and/or buying a piece of land and setting up a business of their own. Many of the women yearn to find a stable partner and (re)build a family, although few consider it to be a good idea to look for a husband among their clients.

The Place of Prostitution in the Women's Life Stories

The small number of women working as prostitutes who come from the poorest areas of the country contradicts the hypothesis that prostitution goes hand in hand with extreme poverty. Our study shows that background and, even less so, level of education have little to do with a person's decision to become a prostitute. Coming from a poor family or not having studied beyond primary school do not have a knock-on effect, as seen by the fact that the majority of female prostitutes grew up in cities and have a similar level of education with the national averages. Prostitution seems to arise as a backlash against social frustration (the labour market cannot cope with the expectations created by achieving a higher level of education and migration) rather than poverty, and

it does not lead to the constitution of a marginalized population (meaning that it can be recognized by the social characteristics taken into account in our study).

Difficult family situations, a succession of poorly paid short-term jobs, migration in search of better prospects, the lure of independence and leisure activities for young people, an early pregnancy—all of these are recurrent links in the chain of events involved in prostitution pathways. Nevertheless, the women rarely identify these factors as having motivated them to take the first step towards prostitution. Instead, the fact that they needed money and a roof over their heads was more often cited. The lure of the big city, such as the promise of money and increased social position, also plays an important role.

Prostitution may make it possible to achieve a life project rarely accessible from the kinds of jobs traditionally reserved for women with their social characteristics. Having started working from an early age, the women in the brothels are well aware of their position in the labour market. Although the income from prostitution is unreliable—varying from day to day and dependent on how dynamic the city's economy is—it is quite a lot more than the wages received by a domestic worker (less than €100 per month), and the dream of “a good night's takings” constantly renews the women's motivation. Thanks to their work they also meet men—sometimes comfortably-off men—who are willing to give them a helping hand or even to maintain them. And, in a country where assistance from the state (in terms of childcare, support for single mothers, and welfare benefits in general) is more than deficient, people can only depend on the market to achieve their objectives.

Thus, when I spoke of the women having a certain attachment, this should not be understood as an attachment to prostitution itself so much as to the possibilities it offers for achieving a type of social ascent that would hardly be viable in other circumstances. As Paola Tabet argues, comparing “degrees of coercion or the women's level of autonomy in the different forms of relationships has a specific purpose: to respect, try to understand, and analyse the choices the women themselves make, even if all these choices remain within systems of male domination and do not allow them to escape from these.”³¹ In a world with limited opportunities, at the end of the day the women are exchanging one form of domination—that of the coercion involved in prostitution work—for another, that of resigning themselves to spending their entire lives being subaltern employees or depending on a spouse. Once they enter a relationship, women from working-class backgrounds in Bolivia are generally

31 Tabet, *La grande arnaque*, pp. 116, 118.

excluded from the labour market by the men whose role as provider ensures their domination over women. This economic dependence is the main cause of domestic violence against women. The money they earn from prostitution, in contrast, allows them to pay for their children's schooling, buy a house, invest in a business, and renegotiate their place in society and within the family. Thus, some girls have regained the respect of their parents—with whom they had quarrelled—by paying for things they need. Yuli, a mature woman who entered prostitution relatively late in life, eloquently compares the violence she suffered as a wife with her new position: “Before I started this work, my husband never stopped calling me ‘puta’. Now the clients say to me: ‘Hello princess, I fancy you, would you like a drink?’” The women's stories are rife with sexual, physical, and emotional abuses and emotional and economic deprivations, but these did not begin when they entered prostitution. In fact, many remark that they feel less invisible and marginalized than when they were domestic workers and enjoy manipulating men who are from the same social class as their former employers.

There are many types of brothels. Some are more expensive than others, or more luxurious. Many operate at the same time as bars, some offer shows, and others look like dingy dives (most of the field work was carried out in these). Finally, in others the women work without leaving their rooms, receiving one client after another. A base rate (€3 to €10 on average) is negotiated with the client and approximately €1 is withheld to be paid to the owner of the establishment for providing the room reserved for sexual relations. Because they are considered to be “unnatural”, anal and oral sex cost more. When a client is taking too long, a waiter will knock on the door, allowing the prostitute to charge a second time. Clients may also request company outside the establishment for several hours or for the night, paying the owner and the woman for the time spent outside. The women also receive a commission for the drinks consumed by their clients while they are talking and dancing.

In return for complying with fixed working hours (five to seven hours per night, six days a week), women may benefit from being allowed to use a shared room inside the establishment. There they can keep their belongings, sleep, cook, or receive certain privileged clients. Most of the younger women still practise this custom inherited from the days of the seclusion regime. But the opening up of the brothels has led to the emergence of a new type of prostitute: one who lives elsewhere and decides whether or not to come to work, and when. This is the best position to be in if the aim is to prepare for a change of course. Living outside the four walls of the brothel allows women to have a family life, sometimes another job, or to continue studying—something that is impossible for those who have to stay up and end up getting drunk almost

every night. It also favours a more distanced relationship with the establishments' owners and administrators.

“Mamas Grandes”, Owners, and Administrators

In the brothels, the women work under the supervision of an administrator (who may be the owner of the establishment him or herself, a relative of theirs, or an employee). From behind the counter, the administrator takes the payments, keeps track of the drinks consumed as well as the use of the rooms set aside for sexual relations, and hands out the bracelets that indicate the commission due to the women for the drinks they have sold. These will be exchanged for cash the following day. Owners and administrators are careful to keep order day and night. Inside, a system of fines regulates the work; women are fined when they arrive late, get into fights, or fail to attend meetings held to deal with routine matters. Outside, the administrators ensure that good relations are maintained with the police, health services, municipal authorities, and so on. A few male waiters, likewise paid on a commission basis, also work in the establishments.

In lower-class brothels, the owners are usually women, probably because of time-honoured rules (the regulations from the last century only mention madams, calling them *regentas*). The majority are ex-prostitutes who have climbed the social ladder but in the more upmarket establishments in the large cities the owners are generally men, sometimes with connections to the drug trade and mafia networks.

Administrators or owners are invariably addressed as “Don” and “Doña” followed by their first name, and are spoken to with the respect which they say is necessary to ensure order which is constantly under threat by drunken clients. Their authority is maintained primarily through their manipulation—not necessarily cynical in nature—of affections in their relationship with their residents. Their behaviour is typical of procurers, alternating between displays of maternalism (or paternalism) and enforcing discipline, as well as meting out punishments and rewards (financial and emotional), which evokes the mechanisms of the mistress/maid relationship in the Latin American context of domestic labour. This is what the madams' nickname *mama grande* refers to. In counterpoint to this figure—and what she/he represents in terms of the infantilization of the women, typical of regulationism—they are always referred to as *las chicas* (the girls), even by public officials.

Thus, the brothel functions as a surrogate family around the *mama grande* (or another maternal figure, such as a long-standing trusted worker), especially

for the younger women. The position of the madam is linked to her capacity to create debts, both financial and affective. She takes charge of the arrival and sometimes the travel costs of new recruits and gives them cash advances. Later, she dispenses her favours by providing money, a private room, a night off, permission to take a client to the prostitute's room, special help in cases of sickness or pregnancy, and so on. She also gives advice on various subjects such as relations with men, organised theft, or how to bring up children. On bank holidays the owners or madams will organize an outing, such as a barbecue. Some of the women choose to cement this relationship by designating them as the godparent of their children.

All this does not prevent conflicts, of course. The women's main complaints hardly ever concern the existence of the owners, who are not seen as pimps. They mainly complain about not being paid on time or being cheated in the accounts, unsanitary conditions, and extra charges for electricity, water, television, showers, and so on, as well as extended working hours. They also fear being fired when they are no longer deemed profitable (usually because of their age). However, an establishment that has a lot of workers is much more attractive, and the lack of women is a recurrent problem. This is why, since the opening up of the brothels, the risk of seeing their workers run away obliges administrators to treat the women with more respect and be more honest with the accounts. "If you don't like it, you grab your card [identity documents] and you leave", explains Carlos, a homosexual waiter who occasionally works as a prostitute. For this same reason, the women tend to be allowed to refuse certain sexual services and clients. The appearance of the prostitutes' organizations raises the possibility that conflicts with management will no longer be resolved solely between individuals. After their initial opposition, the proprietors have resigned themselves to the existence of ONAEM. They did not have much choice, as the survival of their business depends on the health institutions that support these organizations. Now that prostitutes are no longer kept locked up to preserve the moral order, the owners' social legitimacy is based solely on their ability to ensure compliance with regulationism's health objectives. They are therefore the first to remind the women to go for their medical check-ups and they obsequiously attend the meetings convened by the health staff. The demands regarding the recognition of sex work are likewise to their advantage. Turning prostitutes into workers would institutionalize their status as micro-entrepreneurs.

Thus, the opening up of the brothels has reconfigured the power relations between the women and the owners without so far having displaced the primacy of the inter-personal dimension in work relationships which, in the absence of written contracts, continue to be governed by custom. The loyalty or

even affection that the women often show toward the owners (“He/she treats us with respect / gives us advice / gives us a helping hand” or “He/she is a good person”) has been interpreted as a sort of Stockholm syndrome, a traumatic bonding created by the alternation between good and bad treatment.³² The interpretation that has been criticized by Dominique Vidal,³³ according to which servants in Latin America are said to be reproducing a traditional model whereby the subaltern submits to the master in exchange for protection, is equally reductionist for prostitutes as well. Of course, some women are emotionally vulnerable and, in a context in which social security is not provided by the state, they all appreciate the assistance they get from the owners. Nevertheless, like the simplistic image of the heteronomous victim, these explanations ignore the economic project involved in prostitution and the weight it carries in the way women experience their presence in the brothel. Indeed, when the behaviour of the owners—their honesty, how quickly they pay, their solidarity—does not serve the women’s objective of social ascent, they do not hesitate to go elsewhere, even when the madam is godmother to their children.

Clients and Prostitutes

In the lower-class establishments where the ethnographic study was carried out, the women and their clients come from the same social background, while higher-class clients have been taken up by the increasing number of alternative venues such as karaoke bars, together with small ads placed in the press. This favours the establishment of individual relationships orchestrated by the women who try to neutralize the power of the clients and their money through what they call their domination over the men.³⁴

Domination, as the prostitutes understand it, involves obliging clients to spend their money by whatever means necessary and it also includes theft. As a result, this constructs the sexual-financial exchange as an unlimited debt

32 Donald Dutton and Suzanne Painter, “Traumatic Bonding: The Development of Emotional Attachments in Battered Women and Other Relationships of Intermittent Abuse”, *Victimology: An International Journal*, 6 (1981), pp. 139–155.

33 Dominique Vidal, *Les bonnes de Rio: Emploi domestique et société démocratique au Brésil* (Lille, 2007).

34 Pascale Absi, “De la subversion à la transgression: La valeur de l’argent dans les maisons closes de Bolivie”, in Christophe Broqua and Catherine Deschamps (eds.) *L’échange économique-sexuel* (Paris, 2014), pp. 61–88.

which cancels out the idea of a price. Domination also consists of humiliating the clients. It is enough for a man to enter a brothel alone or be a little shy for him to find himself the butt of jokes about his appearance, his clothes, or his way of speaking. Laughter is an incredibly powerful weapon that can be used to annihilate the power that men attribute to their money. They must never think that they are doing the prostitute a favour. Men always have to take the first step and the women see it as their prerogative to be able to negotiate their price loudly or send the client packing: "A discount? Are you kidding me? Anyway, with a dick that size you must be looking for a miracle. You'd be better off going to church!" By being bawdy with their clients, the women rebel not only against traditional gender stereotypes but also against society's concept of a submissive, seductive prostitute willing to do anything for money. The group effect is clearly in operation here; when they are on their own, the women are often more relaxed and can act the seducer (or let themselves be seduced). Even so, this is not the ideal basis on which to conduct the relationship with clients.

The women's behaviour is facilitated by the way in which the brothels are organized; the owner's constant surveillance allows them to pile on the provocations and abuses fearlessly (the more prestigious establishments are probably not quite as tolerant). Unlike methods used to control situations physically and emotionally (restraining a drunk or potentially violent client, hiding certain emotions, etc.), the interactions described previously also imply a tacit acceptance on the part of the men who recognize that they do not always have the upper hand. This switch in position has a positive effect on the women who become aware that gender roles can be bent. The question of violence on the part of clients, regularly discussed in the press, is met with the automatic response of "You have to know how to make them respect you."

Guided by the norm of domination and regulation of the relationship between prostitute and client also involves the collective use of coercive mechanisms. Those who do not play the game of domination or who put themselves forward (hooking clients too blatantly or lowering prices) are immediately accused of being "easy" women and they run the risk of physical punishment. The main targets for collective beatings are the new recruits. "When you first get here, they all have the right to smash your face", one woman explains. This initiation rite punishes the new women for behaving seductively with the men until they take their place, through charisma or violence, within a hierarchy that distinguishes the novices from the experienced women. These norms that the women themselves impose and enforce serve to fill the gaps left by regulationism, which is only interested in how prostitution relates to society rather than the prostitutes' living and working conditions.

Concluding Remarks

A few years ago, Bolivia's brothels became famous for being the target of a wave of violence on the part of local residents in the city of El Alto.³⁵ Less violently, people in other cities have been asking repeatedly for the establishments to be moved further away from residential neighbourhoods. But they are not demanding that they be closed down. There is a consensus about the current system among the state, society and NGOs, as well as international funders³⁶ and the prostitutes themselves. The demand for recognition as professionals has not changed the prostitutes' campaign objectives, which are aimed at safeguarding or improving the practice of prostitution without questioning regulationism or the existence of the owners of houses of prostitution. Although some of the organization's leaders have expressed mild criticism of the health card, most grassroots members continue to be in favour of it. This card, which functions like a work permit, is resignified as a professional licence that formalizes what the women see as their particular skills and their role in society. Thus, on ONAEM's website the online newsletter *Emancipación* announced: "Sex Workers are combating the STD/AIDS epidemic openly and head-on, both in our role as activists and promoters of condom use, and in our day-to-day dealings with clients."³⁷ The women are therefore showing that they are willing to act as the guarantors of the system, providing that the pact with the authorities is not broken. When a conflict arises with a public authority, they invariably threaten to stop complying with the health check-ups and to carry on working as prostitutes clandestinely, using the press as their witness. This blackmail is a reminder of how much regulationism depends for its survival

35 In October 2007, locals (including artisans, traders, and low-ranking civil servants), both male and female, looted over twenty establishments (legal and illegal) and justified their actions by saying they were a result of the crimes and displays of public disorder generated by the establishments. The belongings of those working in those establishments were burnt and some people were physically harassed, although not to a great extent. The police waited for several hours to intervene, once again proving the workers' vulnerability to local people's increasing tendency to take justice into their own hands given the state's lack of response to growing demands for increased citizen security.

36 Only a feminist collective, *Mujeres Creando*, is calling strongly for an end to compulsory health check-ups. Meanwhile, although the international policies of the WHO, UNAIDS and the Global Fund to fight AIDS criticize the issuance of the health card by claiming that it is contrary to universal public health and argue that ultimately it is an unproductive prevention measure, these same organizations manage to accommodate it when they provide funding to Bolivia.

37 The quote is from issue 1 (2011), 18. The newsletter is available at: www.onaem.org; last accessed 8 July 2017.

on the goodwill of official prostitutes. At the same time, and although they complain about abuses in the current system, they do not unanimously agree with the idea of becoming workers legally recognized as being governed by the Labour Code. They recognize the importance of having rights as workers, but they fear that having formal employment contracts will restrict the autonomy they enjoy at the moment in terms of the freedom to choose from a range of benefits and working hours, the possibility of moving to another establishment from one day to the next, the ability to refuse clients and services, and so on. This room for manoeuvring that has been available to them since the opening up of the brothels is a contributory factor in prostitution coming to be thought of as an opportunity in a quest for social ascent. Thus, Bolivian regulationism operates today as a joint construction in which regulationism's legacy comes together with the prostitutes' reinterpretations of it to serve their own purposes. The threat to refuse to comply with the health checks is tangible proof of how the women subvert a system whose original aim was to deprive them of their agency as subjects.

Sex Work in Rio de Janeiro: Police Management without Regulation

Thaddeus Blanchette and Cristiana Schettini

Introduction: An Imperfect History

The history of prostitution in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil is the story of police intervention in the organization of sexual commerce, how this gained legitimacy, and how that legitimacy has been questioned and subverted. Originally founded by the French in 1555 as a means of dominating the sea routes of the South Atlantic, Rio de Janeiro was conquered by the Portuguese a decade later, serving as the seat of the Portuguese viceroyalty from 1763, the capital of the independent Empire of Brazil from 1822, and the capital of the Brazilian Republic from 1889 until the founding of Brasília in 1960.

Prostitution was largely accepted during the colonial and imperial eras, but since the birth of Brazil's first republic in 1889 the powers that be in Rio de Janeiro have intensified earlier attempts to concentrate sexual commerce in certain areas. Although these efforts have often enjoyed social approval, they have never been coupled with laws regulating prostitution, as was the case in many Latin American cities. Public policy with regards to prostitution in Rio de Janeiro can thus be understood as an extra-legal form of regulation which concentrates immense discretionary power in the hands of the police and charges them to "control" sexual commerce. On occasion, this has resulted in the indirect management of brothels by the authorities. In spite of these efforts, however, after almost a century and a half of direct police intervention, prostitution in Rio de Janeiro continues to be widespread, sharing spaces and interests with a series of other urban actors.

Prostitution began to interest Brazilian historians as part of a renewal of historiography that took place in the 1980s and which focused on the years between 1870 and 1930, an era considered to have been of fundamental importance in the creation of modern, urban, capitalist Brazil. Historians have placed the first republican initiatives to police prostitution within the context of radical urban reforms which took place in Rio de Janeiro during this era, reforms which attempted to transform the city—then the capital of Brazil—into the

nation's showcase.¹ Unfortunately, almost no historiographic work on prostitution has yet been done on other parts of the twentieth century, Juçara Leite's little-known work on the so-called "República do Mangue"² being a sterling exception to this general rule.

Anthropology and sociology became interested in prostitution in Rio from the late 1980s on and ethnographic studies have created a panorama of sex work in the city over the last thirty years. This has greatly improved our understanding of sex as it is sold in Rio, but unfortunately, like the historians, anthropologists and sociologists have generated relatively little information regarding the period stretching from 1930 to 1990.

Because of this unevenly focused scholarship, the history of prostitution in Rio is unbalanced. We know quite a bit about the years stretching from 1870 to 1930, as well as from the late 1980s on. We still know very little about prostitution before the 1870s or after the inaugural years of Vargas' *Estado Novo*,³ however. What information exists about the sale of sex in Rio from 1930 to 1990 has largely been produced by journalists, medical professionals, and the police, but no-one has yet collated or systematically reviewed this material.

Legal Definitions

Brazilian legislation has concentrated on repressing the exploitation of prostitutes rather than repressing prostitution itself. Laws are written in such a vague fashion, however, that any social relation involving prostitutes can be criminalized, if the authorities so desire. This power has historically been utilized by the police to manage prostitution without instituting formal regulation.

The young medical students who began to study prostitution during the nineteenth century were inspired by what they understood to be the French

1 Luis Carlos Soares, *Rameiras, ilhoas e polacas: a prostituição no Rio de Janeiro do século XIX* (São Paulo, 1992); Magali Engel, *Meretrizes e doutores: O saber médico e a prostituição na cidade do Rio de Janeiro, 1845–1890* (São Paulo, 1990); Rachel Soihet, *Condição feminina e formas de violência: Mulheres pobres e ordem urbana (1890–1920)*, (Rio de Janeiro, 1989).

2 Juçara Luzia Leite, "A República do Mangue: Controle Policial e Prostituição no Rio de Janeiro (1954–1974)", (Unpublished M.A., Fluminense Federal University, 1993).

3 Getulio Dornelles Vargas was the president of Brazil from 1930 to 1945. He inaugurated a period of dictatorship known as "Estado Novo", or "New State" from 1937 to 1945. Ironically, however, the inauguration of the *Estado Novo* coincided with a deterioration of Brazil's relations with the Axis powers and the country entered WWII on the side of the Allies in 1942.

model and they pushed for the regulation of sexual commerce.⁴ These early scholars understood prostitution as going well beyond the simple exchange of money for sexual favours and included in their studies a series of sexual-affective relationships established outside the bounds of matrimony along the borders between sex work and other forms of domestic and sexual/affective labour.

The definition of who was a “prostitute” in nineteenth century Rio de Janeiro depended upon intersections between class, gender, and race in the surrounding society and the eye of the beholder. Medical and legal authorities tended to apply the term to a wide variety of women who were not necessarily charging for sex. In the early 1870s, for example, a medical student included in his list of prostitutes any woman living in an intimate relationship outside the bounds of formal matrimony, a definition that took in the greater part of Brazilian women. This same student also classified as prostitutes those women involved in the city’s incipient nocturnal life, such as “theatre goers” and “women who live in hotels.” Finally, he also appended “flower vendors, fashion designers, seamstresses and cigar sellers” to his list. Few women working in Rio’s service sector escaped being labelled as prostitutes by this gentleman.⁵

This wide definition was not shared by the large majority of cariocas.⁶ It demonstrates, however, that the affective arrangements then common among the city’s working class (which included serial monogamy, often outside the bounds of marriage), were seen as suspect by the city’s lettered men of means. These scholars found the elastic and vague term “clandestine prostitution” to be a useful descriptor for such relationships. As Sueann Caulfield and Juçara Leite point out, this view of sex, work, and marriage continued throughout the first half of the twentieth century.⁷

The Brazilian Imperial Criminal Code of 1830 makes only one reference to prostitutes: reducing the penalty for rape to a maximum of one year if the victim was adjudged to be a “whore”. The First Republic’s penal code (1890), however, was inspired by German legal tradition and incorporated *lenocínio*⁸

4 Herculano Augusto Lassance Cunha, *Dissertação sobre a prostituição, em particular na cidade do Rio de Janeiro* (Rio de Janeiro, 1845); Miguel Antônio Heredia Sá, *Algumas reflexões sobre a cópula, onanismo e prostituição* (Rio de Janeiro, 1945). See also Luis Carlos Soares Rameiras, *Ilhoas ...* and Sérgio Carrara *Tributo a Vênus: A luta contra a sífilis no Brasil, da passagem do século aos anos 40* (Rio de Janeiro, 1996).

5 Soares, *Rameiras, ilhoas e polacas*, pp. 31–32.

6 *Carioca* is the adjective form that refers to people and things from Rio de Janeiro.

7 Sueann Caulfield, “O nascimento do Mangue: Raça, nação e controle da prostituição no Rio de Janeiro, 1850–1942”, *Tempo*, 9 (2000), pp. 43–63; Juçara Luzia Leite, *A República do Mangue*.

8 The act of “maintaining a brothel” but also being a go-between for prostitutes and clients.

as a crime. It thus became illegal in Brazil to “excite, favour, or facilitate the prostitution of another in order to satisfy dishonest desires and lascivious passions”, criminalizing intermediaries such as brothel owners and managers, madams, and other agents, but officially touching neither prostitutes nor their clients.⁹

The 1890 penal code also criminalized inducing women into prostitution, in order to target pimps but affecting broader groups. The new code declared it illegal to give assistance, housing, or aid to prostitutes. These laws placed the owners of the places where prostitutes worked or lived under the gimlet eye of the law and were also used to attack prostitutes’ roommates, family members, and—indeed—potentially anyone who associated with them.

In the first years of the twentieth century, laws were widened in scope in response to international pressure over “white slavery” and the traffic in women. Changes made in 1915 allowed people who rented rooms by the hour (to a public which was not exclusively composed of prostitutes) to be charged with *lenocínio*. Precinct captains took advantage of the new laws to prohibit the establishment of *rendez-vous* along certain streets, especially in the districts targeted by the city’s urban reform plans.¹⁰

The 1940 Penal Code, established by the Vargas dictatorship, defined *lenocínio* according to five different modalities.¹¹ While commercial sex itself was neither regulated nor criminalized, its activities were controlled according to laws which linked prostitution to prohibited forms of labour and habitation. These laws also criminalized a wide spectrum of people who could be charged with benefiting from prostitution. The resultant legal structure continues in place in today and when authorities wish to crack down on prostitutes, they charge the police to enforce the laws pertaining to *lenocínio*. This situation has resulted in the effective regulation of prostitution throughout the twentieth century, a “regulation” without a specific legal mandate but under the aegis of widespread social stigmatization. Meanwhile, the non-criminalization of prostitution itself offers the police a convenient reason to ignore the sale of sex when it occurs within the spaces and times in which it is socially tolerated.

9 Cristiana Schettini, “*Que Tenhas Teu Corpo*”: Uma história social da prostituição no Rio de Janeiro das primeiras décadas republicanas (Rio de Janeiro, 2006), pp. 171–173.

10 *Ibid.*, pp. 195–200.

11 Miguel de Campos Júnior, “Do lenocínio e do tráfico de mulheres”, in *Anais do Primeiro Congresso Nacional do Ministério Público*, 256 vols, (Rio de Janeiro, 1943), IV.

Ethnicity, Class, and the Markets for Prostitution in the Early Twentieth Century

Brazil had finally rid itself of slavery just as the international debate regarding the abolition of regulation intensified at the end of the nineteenth century. Thus, as sexual commerce began to be seen as a problem by local elites, it also became a moral issue that resonated with the struggle to abolish slavery. These resonances can still be found in the rhetoric of Brazil's anti-trafficking movements today. More worrisome to the *fin de siècle* elite of Rio de Janeiro, however, was the visibility of sexual commerce in the city, especially in those regions populated by increasing numbers of African-descended workers and poor European immigrants.

Brazil's immigration policies, which sought to "ease the transition" from slave to free labour, were based upon a peculiar local reading of Social Darwinism. According to so-called "whitening thesis", increasing the flow of European immigrants into Brazil would "racially improve" the national population. However, the prospect of intermixture between the recently arrived "women of all nationalities" and those who "already existed [in Rio], exercising the lowest of professions", especially those women "who are not subject to the rules of hygiene",¹² generated considerable worry among carioca elites.

Over the years, Rio has received large numbers of immigrants: African slaves up to the mid-nineteenth century; Europeans from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century; and, finally, workers from other parts of Brazil throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Prostitution exercised by slaves and their descendants was one of the most noteworthy characteristics of local sexual commerce throughout the nineteenth century. African and African-descended women were prominent in all parts of the city and it was common for carioca men to buy slaves as "prostitutes, lovers, concubines, or companions." Slave prostitution in Rio de Janeiro was therefore part of a greater continuum of activities that included domestic services, concubinage, and street commerce.¹³

It should not be presumed, however, that slave prostitution was the only sort of commercial sex on display in nineteenth-century Rio. Contemporary observers made descriptions of many kinds of sexual labour, identifying

12 Barão do Lavradio, apud Cristiana Schettini, *Que Tenha seu Corpo*, p. 139.

13 Luiz Carlos Soares, *O Povo de Cam na capital do Brasil: A escravidão urbana do Rio de Janeiro do século XIX* (Rio de Janeiro, 2007); Carlos Eugênio Líbano Soares, Flávio dos Santos Gomes and Juliana Barreto Farias, *No labirinto das nações: Africanos e identidades no Rio de Janeiro, século XIX* (Rio de Janeiro, 2005).

hierarchies based upon the origins and racial identities of the women engaged in prostitution. In 1819, Prussian immigrant Theodor Von Leithold described the diversity of the city's prostitutes in the following terms:

Easy women ... are present in great numbers: white, black and of all categories ... At night, from eight to ten, they invade the streets dressed in black taffeta or wool and wrapped in mantles. The ones of the first class also come out by day, accompanied by two slaves. They use their arts to pass for high-quality ladies and they know how to ensnare foreign men in their nets.¹⁴

The arrival of Portuguese prostitutes in the mid-nineteenth century created a visible contrast with the black slaves and native-born free women with whom they shared downtown.¹⁵ Both black and white prostitutes circulated in the city streets, or called to potential clients from the windows and doorways of houses. Often, the places classified by observers as “centres of immoral behaviour and prostitution” (such as the *zungus*) were also in fact centres of cultural resistance for black cariocas.¹⁶

Though French prostitutes had been a fixture in Rio since the early 1800s,¹⁷ the numbers of foreign-born sex workers increased in the late nineteenth century. This resulted in the identification of two types of sex workers which would persist into the twentieth century. On the one hand, there were the women designated as “French”. In contemporary media and literature, these “artists” were portrayed as living in expensive hotels or elegant boarding houses, or living alone. They were high-priced prostitutes who were understood as exercising a civilizing influence upon the city, the counterparts of a local male elite whose identity was informed by an abiding Francophilia. As consumer fetishism grew, the ability to buy “French” sex became an identifying characteristic of the carioca's socially distinct masculinity.¹⁸

At the other extreme were the “Poles”, poor white and generally Jewish immigrants who were associated with the kind of sex work decried by local elites

14 Theodor von Leithold, *O Rio de Janeiro visto por dois prussianos em 1819* (São Paulo, 1966 [1819]).

15 Friederike Strack, *Mulher da Vida—Frauen des Lebens: Brasiliens Prostituierte im Widerstand gegen Stigmatisierung und Repression* (Berlin, 1996), p. 66.

16 Tenements occupied by the city's black population. Carlos Eugenio Libano Soares, *Zungu: Rumor de muitas vozes* (Rio de Janeiro, 1998), p. 30.

17 Karl von Schelichthorst, *O Rio de Janeiro como é* (Rio de Janeiro, 1943 [1825]), pp. 100–101.

18 Jeffrey Needell, *Belle Époque Tropical: Sociedade e cultura de elite no Rio de Janeiro na virada do século (1890–1930)*, (São Paulo, 1993).

as “trafficking in women”. These women shared the same decrepit downtown knocking-shops and street spaces with Rio’s poor black and brown prostitutes. The term “Pole” was thus often applied to cheap prostitutes in general, no matter their colour or origin.¹⁹

In spite of the symbolic importance of the European presence in Rio de Janeiro, contemporary reports indicate that Brazilian prostitutes were always in the majority. A third category of prostitute that began to gain in visibility in the early twentieth century was the *mulatta*. From the 1920s on, carioca magazines poked fun at local men’s ambivalent attraction to women of African descent, a situation which was to persist throughout the twentieth century. The term *mulatta* became associated with sensuality and African-descended beauty, contrasting with the negative associations connected to the word *preta* (black woman), which referenced degraded sexual practices, poverty, and ugliness. In erotic stories published in 1914, *mulattas* were cast as specializing in anal sex and were also understood as easily falling in love with their clients. Meanwhile, European prostitutes were characterized as being oral sex specialists and were renowned for practicing their trade in a disinterested fashion, not allowing “affairs of the heart” to mix with commerce.²⁰

Over time, the terms “French” and “Pole” began to be used as short-hand for two different styles of commercial sex: the first geared towards the sensibilities of the middle- and upper-classes and the second towards the working and lower classes. *Mulattas*, while generally situated towards the lower end of this dichotomous hierarchy could, in fact, be classified as “French-style” (or upper class) prostitutes.²¹ In reality, these two idealized extremes of prostitution were composed of a wide spectrum of colours and nationalities competing for space and clients in the townhouses and streets of central Rio de Janeiro. Photos of elegant boarding houses dating from the second decade of the twentieth century, for example, show that these brothels contained many different “types”. Literary references reveal stories such as that of “Rocking Horse Alice”, a well-known madam of the 1910s who was described as a “great *mulatta*” and who had many important republican politicians among her clientele.²² Likewise, in

19 All quotes from Cristiana Schettini, *Que Tenhas seu Corpo*, p. 138; Beatriz Kushnir, *Baile de Máscaras—mulheres judias e prostituição: As polacas e suas associações de ajuda mútua* (Rio de Janeiro, 1996).

20 Dom Felício, “Na Zona”, *Contos Rápidos* n. 11 (Rio de Janeiro, 1914); Alessandra El Far, *Páginas de Sensação: Literatura popular e pornográfica no Rio de Janeiro* (São Paulo, 2004); Schettini, *Que Tenha seu Corpo*, pp. 231–242.

21 Caulfield, “O nascimento do Mangue”.

22 Orestes Barbosa, *Bambambã* (Rio de Janeiro 1993 [1922]).

Marques Rabelo's novel *Marafá*, first published in 1935, a lower-class boarding house is shown as being inhabited by three Polish prostitutes and a *mulatta*.²³

The result of a long and complicated cultural dialogue between Brazilian modernist intellectuals and popular culture, the *mulatta* became established as the symbolic quintessence of Brazilian sensuality in the interwar period, figuring in romanticized portrayals of bohemian carioca nightlife and prostitution.²⁴ This racialized moral construction of feminine sexuality served as a guide to authorities, denoting which females needed to be watched and policed. African-descended carioca women continued to be described as possessing an “uncivilized, natural” sexuality which needed to be maintained within certain limits. Tiago M. Gomes cites a journalist of the times regarding the racially-marked frontiers of the liberalization of public sexuality during this period:

A kiss in a bedroom is not a crime, nor is the kiss one gives to a hand or a forehead. It's when a guy smooches on Flamengo Beach, for example, and starts sniffing up a mulatta's neck that he ends up in the slammer.²⁵

The *mulatta* was often set in idealized opposition to “family girls” (*moça de família*), understood as white, middle-class, and chaste. This dichotomy has permeated discussions of Brazilian sexuality since the early 1900s.²⁶ During the interwar period, however, the “modern woman” began to interest medical and legal authorities as Rio's nightlife flourished and already blurred lines between “honest” and “dishonest” women were perceived as even more unstable. Cafés, bars, cabarets, theatres, and other entertainment venues multiplied in Rio and behavioural patterns began to take on a new, more liberal and globalized complexion. New fashions and the “feminine invasion” of public space were understood by the city's masculine elite in racialized and sexualized terms. As Gomes reports, when middle-class white girls began to wear their

23 Marques Rabelo, *Marafa* (Rio de Janeiro, 2003 [1935]).

24 Regarding the uses of the imagery of the *mulatta*, see Martha Abreu, “Sobre mulatas orgulhosas e crioulos atrevidos: Conflitos raciais, gênero e nação nas canções populares (Sudeste do Brasil, 1890–1920)”, *Tempo*, 8 (2004), pp. 143–173.

25 Fortunato Padilha, “As Entrevistas Momentosas”, *O Paiz*, 23 October 1925 (Rio de Janeiro, 1925), apud Tiago de Melo Gomes, “Mulatas, massais e meretrizes: Imagens da sexualidade feminina no Rio de Janeiro dos anos 1920”, *Cadernos Pagu*, 23 (2004) pp. 121–147.

26 Thaddeus G. Blanchette and Ana Paula Silva, “Mulheres vulneráveis e meninas más: Uma análise antropológica de narrativas hegemônicas sobre o tráfico de pessoas no Brasil”, in Ferreria *et al.* (eds), *A Experiência migrante: Entre deslocamentos e reconstruções* (Rio de Janeiro, 2010), pp. 325–360, 352.

hair short, drink in public, and dance the Charleston and samba,²⁷ they began to be criticized as indistinguishable from their black and *mulatta* maids.

Young female workers who insisted upon participating in nightlife without giving up their identification as “honest women” soon became involved in a conflict-ridden dialogue with carioca police and lawyers. These gentlemen, in turn, were forced to rethink the unequivocal borders which had been established around feminine honour.²⁸ One of the results of this conflict was a narrowing of the category “prostitute”, which became increasingly applicable only to those women who exchanged sex for money.

Extra-official Regulation

As we discussed above, representations of prostitution in Rio de Janeiro associated sexual styles with national and racial identities in a hierarchical, if ambiguous, fashion. Available data regarding the spatial organization of commercial sex in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, suggests the existence of complex patterns of shifting relationships between sex-working women and their neighbours set against a backdrop of increasing police intervention.

The most common and visible modality of prostitution in the centre of Rio de Janeiro up until the 1920s was “window prostitution”, where women would hang out of townhouses, calling to passers-by. In the late 1890s, the owners of the houses where prostitutes lived and worked were often women of 30-plus years of age, typically Brazilian, Austrian, or Portuguese, who might own two or three houses in the same region. These buildings were subdivided and rented out, with prostitutes paying a much higher rent than was the norm.²⁹

Physical proximity between prostitutes and other downtown workers and residents was a characteristic of Rio de Janeiro in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Sex workers were an integral part of a more general urban commercial scene. In the mid-1890s, however, a few years after the abolition of slavery, a precinct captain launched a “moral sanitation” campaign in downtown Rio, ordering the eviction of the prostitutes. The courts were used to slow down the captain’s measures (which were an early example of the hygienist policies that would be soon enacted) and neighbours often testified in favour

27 Mariza Corrêa, “Sobre a invenção da mulata”, *Cadernos Pagu*, 6/7 (1996), pp. 35–50; Tiago de Melo Gomes, “Mulatas, massais e meretrizes”.

28 Sueann Caulfield, *Em Defesa da honra: Moralidade, modernidade e nação no Rio de Janeiro (1918–1940)*, (Campinas, 2000).

29 Schettini, *Que tenhas seu corpo*, pp. 184–193.



MAP 19.1 *Rio de Janeiro, 2012*

of the women.³⁰ Strenuous efforts were made by police in the following decades to push sex-working women out of downtown, however. The establishment of the “Mangue” (literally “the Marsh”) as a segregated red-light district in the 1920s was the principal result of this tendency. The story of the founding of the Mangue illustrates how Rio’s newly established “extra-official” regulation of prostitution functioned. In 1920, King Albert of Belgium was invited to visit Rio. This was to be the consecrating act of the past two decades of intense urban reform and hygienization. As historian Paulo Donadio puts it, Albert’s visit was “an opportunity to showcase the country in Europe: he would be a perfect representative of civilization who could attest to Brazil’s progress.”³¹

30 *Ibid.*, pp. 29–43.

31 Paulo Donadio, “Tem rei no mar”, *Revista de História*, 7 July 2008.

City Hall never officially decided to confine sex workers to the Mangue as part of the preparations for the King's visit; this policy was enforced extra-officially by the police. According to Sueann Caulfield:

Instructed to “clean up” the areas through which His Highness would pass, the police rounded up lower-class prostitutes on the allegation that they were “bums” and kept them under arrest until the end of the royal visit, later gathering them all together in brothels around the nine streets of the Mangue. Here, a few kilometres away from the shores of Guanabara Bay, far from the modernized centre of town, there began a series of experiments in police administration of prostitution.

Two prostitution-related institutions were founded in the Mangue. In 1922, the São Francisco de Assis hospital opened its doors, specializing in treating venereal diseases.³² The second institution was the 13th Police Precinct, charged with registering and maintaining the records of every prostitute in Rio. In the words of anthropologist Soraya Simões:

These measures made the Mangue appear to be the ideal place for situating carioca prostitution, contributing to the definition of the city's [new] moral spaces and to the hygienist view of the times, as well as to the control of syphilis and the other venereal diseases which haunted the city at the beginning of the twentieth century [...]. The great mobility of the inhabitants of the area was also one of the distinct characteristics which gave it the reputation of being the “natural region” for lower-class prostitution in Rio de Janeiro.³³

Informal regulation resulted in an explosion of clandestine and semi-clandestine forms of prostitution outside of the Mangue, which allowed the majority of sex workers “to hide in plain sight.”³⁴ These women would meet clients in bars, streets, trolley stations, or cafés and would then go to hotels, rooming houses, or the ubiquitous *rendez-vous*. A growing concentration of establishments in the bohemian district of Lapa, west of downtown, was also due to police repression in the newly renovated *centro* (see map 19.1).

32 Carrara, *Tributo à Venus*.

33 Soraya Simões, “Identidade e política: A prostituição e o reconhecimento de um *métier* no Brasil”, *Revista de Antropologia Social dos Alunos do PPGAS-UFSCar*, 2 (2010), pp. 24–46.

34 Caulfield, “O nascimento do Mangue”.

In 1923, the precinct chiefs of Lapa and the Mangue made lists of prostitutes.³⁵ In Lapa, 453 sex-working women were found, of which only 232 were Brazilian. These women were distributed in 179 establishments. Meanwhile, in the Mangue, the police registered 674 women working in 112 houses, with Brazilian women tallying 421 of the region's prostitutes.

Although Lapa concentrated elegant and bohemian establishments and the Mangue specialized in a supposedly more sordid form of prostitution, journalist Ricardo Pinto remarked in 1930 (as anthropologist Ana Paula Silva would observe eight decades later³⁶) that these differences referred more to the profile of the men that frequented the two districts rather than the women working in them. Pinto commented that the Mangue actually generated more money because the women could do window prostitution, as had been the case in downtown. Furthermore, in the elegant boarding houses of Lapa, the women needed to invest more of their earnings in dresses and accessories. The main barrier to working in Lapa was the establishment of the necessary contacts and this was especially difficult for lower-class women.³⁷

The cabaret singers and variety artists who rented rooms in Lapa during their tours of South America had a distinct advantage in this regard, given that they could count upon contacts acquired during their theatrical work. This restricted their movements, pushing them to follow rigid working hours and obliging them to be housed within a specific hotel or boarding house. However, it also guaranteed these "artists" a fixed clientele.³⁸

A glimpse into artistic prostitution during this period can be seen in the documents of the US Embassy dealing with the Baxter and Willard burlesque company's 1917–1918 tour of Brazil. The company had come at the behest of Djalma Moreira, the owner of several nightspots. According to the Embassy authorities, Moreira's clubs attracted "cheap gamblers [...], business travellers, other tourists, young bohemians and the less offensive class of prostitutes", many of whom "lived off the gaming tables when they don't have a temporary protector to pay their bills." After their shows, the troupe's dancers would

35 6C-751A, 1923, GIF1 (Police Papers). Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

36 Ana Paula Silva, "Cosmopolitanismo tropical: Uma análise preliminar do turismo sexual internacional em São Paulo", unpublished paper presented at the seminar "Trânsitos Contemporâneos: Turismo, migrações, gênero, sexo, afetos e dinheiro", UNICAMP, Campinas, 2010.

37 Ricardo Pinto, *Tráfico das brancas: Observações em torno aos câftens franceses que vivem no Rio de Janeiro* (Rio de Janeiro, 1930), p. 25.

38 Cristiana Schettini, "Circuitos de trabalho no mercado de diversões sul americano no começo do século XX", *Cadernos AEL*, 17 (2010).

frequent Moreira's clubs where their sexual favours could be negotiated for a price, a situation which alarmed the American consular officials.³⁹

Attempts to Clean up and Eliminate the Mangue

From the 1940s on, prostitution in Rio de Janeiro can best be characterized by a general official tolerance, punctuated by short but intense campaigns to eliminate sexual commerce or at least restrict it to controlled areas. Inspector Armando Pereira, who studied carioca prostitution for some 30 years, described this cyclical movement in 1967:

Brazil has an abolitionist tradition. During the Republic, we didn't pass laws or measures which would regulate prostitution [...]. However, in practice, we have always adopted a mitigated form of regulation. We tolerate houses of prostitution [...]. There is no continuity in this policy [...], however. There have been periods in which all the houses are closed. Others in which [the police] only fiercely persecute streetwalkers. Still others in which they attack the numerous sex hotels now proliferating across the city.⁴⁰

The organization of prostitution in Rio changed substantively due to one of these abolitionist campaigns. In 1943, Chief of Police Colonel Alcides Gonçalves Etchegoyen decreed the expulsion of prostitution from Glória (a neighbourhood adjacent to Lapa), giving the women thirty days to evacuate. "When this time limit had run out", legal scholar Waldyr Abreu writes, "[Etchegoyan] asked someone, presumably a jurist, [as to what he could do] and was informed that the law had nothing to say about prostitution. So, with characteristic simplicity, [the Colonel] liquidated the problem, *manu militari*" by putting several thousand women onto the streets. He also closed the Mangue and Lapa's commercial sexual venues.⁴¹

39 Thaddeus Blanchette and Ana Paula Silva, "As American Girls: Migração, sexo e status imperial em 1918", *Horizontes Antropológicos*, 15 (2009), pp. 75–99.

40 Pereira, *Sexo e Prostituição*, p. 90.

41 Waldyr Abreu, *O submundo do jogo de azar, prostituição e vadiagem: Aspectos jurídicos, sociais e psicológicos* (Rio de Janeiro, 1984), pp. 130–131. The boundaries between Lapa and Glória were imprecise. "Glória", in this case, almost certainly takes in some of the houses of Lapa. In Leite, *A República do Mangue*.

As occurred during the previous moral crusades, most of the city's prostitutes retreated to clandestine activities during Etchegoyan's reign. According to Armando Pereira, who began to work in the 13th district around this time, the Mangue became an "underground citadel", with many of its women continuing to work in the neighbourhood's streets and tenements. The crack-down was short-lived, however, and in 1945, tolerance returned. The Mangue, although reduced in size, resumed operations.⁴²

By the mid-1950s, the prostitutes of the Mangue were almost all Brazilian, usually women recently arrived from the country's hinterlands: "only the madams were foreign (and then not always): Poles who said they were French and stubborn Jewish women who'd survived the crisis" of the neighbourhood's closure in 1943. In 1967, a census found that the majority of the 600 women in the Mangue were illiterate immigrants from rural Brazil. Meanwhile, only twelve foreign women were left, including 77-year-old Philippine Renoir, born in 1891 in Belgium, the one remaining "French" prostitute in the Mangue, a refugee from "the old days of splendour in Lapa."⁴³

In 1954, the police in charge of the Mangue inaugurated an intervention which attempted to put direct control of the brothels into the hands of the prostitutes by kicking out the madams and pimps. The cops then turned the



In 1920, the visit of King Albert of Belgium to Rio de Janeiro occasioned an attempt to confine all the city's prostitutes to the "Mangue" - or marsh - district (1). This sex work ghetto stretched west from today's Viaduto São Sebastião along R. Julio do Carmo and R. Benedito Hipólito. The São Francisco de Assis Hospital, specializing in the treatment of sexually transmitted disease, is established in the region in 1922 (A).

In 1943, Chief of Police Colonel Alcides Gonçalves Etchegoyen attempts to stamp out prostitution in Rio by closing down the Mangue. During this period, the construction of Av. Presidente Vargas destroys some 500 buildings in this region. When the Mangue opens again in 1945, it's restricted to the smaller rectangle seen here around (2).

From the 1960s on, gentrification pushes the Mangue's establishments farther west. In 1967, Queen Elizabeth's visit to Brazil prompts the city to board up the district so that it could not be seen from the parade route. In 1970, construction begins on the city's new administrative center (B) and a large part of the Mangue moves to the "Mangue II" complex across President Vargas (3). This is leveled later in the decade with the construction of the metro system garages. What is left of the old Mangue is razed to the ground in 1978.

Several of the Mangue's refugees establish themselves here in 1979 in small enclosed neighborhood known as Vila Mimosa (4). Other women take to working the streets surrounding Praça da Bandeira.

MAP 19.2 *Movement of prostitution from the Mangue to Vila Mimosa, 1922–2013*

42 Pereira, *Sexo e prostituição*, pp. 139–140.

43 *Ibid.*, pp. 55, 152, 162–163.

houses over to the women, who held elections to determine their managers on a rotating basis. This new form of cooperative management—nicknamed “the Mangue Republic”—was quickly revealed to be another form of extra-official regulation of sex work, however. Prostitutes were still arrested outside the Mangue. Moreover, they continued to be registered by the 13th Precinct. Without police permission, they could neither work in the Mangue nor move to another house. Women who wanted to quit prostitution, in fact, had to obtain police permission. Working hours (noon to 2 a.m.) were also defined by the cops.

Thus in spite of Brazil’s formal adherence to abolition, police management, supplemented by medical surveillance, continued *de facto* in Rio de Janeiro.⁴⁴ As Inspector Pereira cynically observed, the job of the police was to close down all prostitution venues outside of the Mangue while “not only tolerating, [but] effectively managing” those within the district itself.⁴⁵

With the beginning of the military dictatorship in 1964, however, Rio began to pass through yet another wave of urban renewal. The Mangue was targeted by successive projects that included the construction of subway lines and modern high-rises.⁴⁶ The district’s demolition began in the late 1960s, but picked up speed in December 1970 with the appropriation of twenty-eight properties.⁴⁷ Part of the neighbourhood was bulldozed in 1973 to make way for the subway, but the mortal blow came in November of 1977 with the razing of the rest of the neighbourhood.⁴⁸ The film *Mangue* by Cecilia Resende documents the brutality of the expulsion. The police arrived before dawn and set fire to the neighbourhood’s houses. Many women, faced with the prospect of having nowhere else to go, attempted suicide.⁴⁹

The destruction of the Mangue pushed prostitution into the streets surrounding Praça da Bandeira, a few blocks west of the old red-light district. Here, in 1979, the survivors of the Mangue established a new concentration of 44 small brothels in what became known as Vila Mimosa (VM; see map 19.2). Continued urban redevelopment in the region, particularly the construction

44 Leite, *A república do mangue*, p. 57.

45 Pereira, *Sexo e prostituição*, pp. 152, 160.

46 Leite, *A república do mangue*, pp. 86–87; Strack, *Mulher da Vida*; Pereira, *Sexo e prostituição*; Soraya Simões, “Identidade e política”.

47 Flávio Lenz, *Beijo da rua* (Rio de Janeiro, 1990), p. 10.

48 Strack, *Mulher da vida*, p. 90.

49 Caulfield, “O nascimento do Mangue”; Simões, “Identidade e política”; Abreu, *O submundo do jogo de azar, prostituição e vadiagem*.

of a new City Hall complex (immediately baptized by cariocas as “The Big Whore”), led to yet another expulsion of the sex workers in 1995, this time with indemnification. The money received allowed Vila Mimosa to relocate even farther west to an abandoned warehouse along R. Sotero dos Reis. Today, “VM” contains some 70 bars packed into a block-long strip surrounding the old warehouse, with some 1,000 women working as prostitutes in the region. Sex generally costs from US\$10–20 for 20 minutes in small *cabines* above the bars. The women are generally “independent workers”, but 30 to 50 per cent of the price of the trick goes to the bar owners as “*cabine* rental”.⁵⁰

Vila Mimosa is tolerated as a “controlled” red-light district and, in this sense, many of its relations with power replay those of the earlier Mangue. Police no longer force women to work in the district, but raids against sex workers occur with much greater frequency outside the boundaries of VM. It is a tribute to the durability of Rio’s policy of unofficial regulation of prostitution that the city’s most notorious red-light district has soldiered on despite of the best efforts of two dictatorships to eliminate it.

Praça Mauá, Copacabana, and Downtown

During World War II, prostitution intensified around the Praça Mauá port district (see map 19.2). The region quickly became Rio’s first example of a prostitution district organized around foreign customers.⁵¹ Describing the flows of foreigners through the port during and following the war, Cezar and Viveiros de Castro claim that these men “were the main clientele of the ‘girls’ of Praça Mauá, who often spoke five different languages—or at least dominated the essential vocabulary of their profession in these languages.”⁵² By the late 1960s, however, the port was decaying and street prostitution had become common in the neighbourhood. Following the urban renewal campaigns of the early years of the military dictatorship (1964–1985), the police moved in on Praça Mauá and implemented yet another form of unofficial management, even as they began to close down the Mangue.⁵³

50 Soraya Simões, *Vila Mimosa: Etnografia da cidade cenográfica da prostituição Carioca* (Niterói, 2010).

51 Although foreigners frequented Rio’s houses of ill-repute in earlier decades.

52 Paulo Bastos Cezar and Ana Rosa Viveiros de Castro, *A Praça Mauá* (Rio de Janeiro, 1989), pp. 64–76.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 76.

In 1971, the newspaper *Jornal do Brasil* described how police worked with local club owners (who might have been accused of *lenocínio* under other circumstances) to maintain control of prostitution around Praça Mauá by forcing prostitutes off the streets and into the bars and clubs, where they became the responsibility of—and placed under the control of—club owners. This was seen by police as an anti-crime measure. According to one Inspector Cartola, “we’ve had no robberies of johns in our jurisdiction for quite some time now because the club owners themselves are now selecting the women that they’ll allow into their houses.”⁵⁴

This story highlights several persistent themes in the extra-official regulation of prostitution by the police in Rio de Janeiro. The sale of sex was understood as a professional (if immoral and degraded) activity and not a crime. Nevertheless, it was seen as something that must be tightly disciplined, conducted out of the public view, and wholly separate from the population at large, who should not be “importuned by whores”. In the case of the Mangue in 1954, the prostitutes were organized to provide order under police oversight. In 1971 in Praça Mauá, it was the owners of the nightclubs who were empowered by the police to fulfil this role.

Praça Mauá thus became established as yet another one of Rio’s unofficial police-moderated sex work ghettos where prostitution was tolerated as long as it didn’t interfere with the “morals and good customs” of carioca society. Until very recently, the region still contained many of the clubs established there in the 1940s and was still catering to foreigners who were itinerant seamen, mostly Filipinos, Indians, and Chinese. In 2012, however, Rio began an urban renewal project centred on transforming Praça Mauá into a “festival port”. Large sections of the neighbourhood have subsequently been confiscated and demolished.

Two other directions prostitution moved after World War II was towards downtown and into Rio’s south zone, particularly the residential neighbourhood of Copacabana. One of the effects of the periodic anti-prostitution blitzes during the 1940s and ‘50s was the camouflaging of the sex trade. With the closing of the old *rendez-vous* and boarding houses in Lapa and Glória, sex work moved into hotels and private apartments. According to Inspector Armando Pereira, the number of hotels used specifically for commercial sexual encounters tripled during the 1950s. Prostitutes would make a deal with a hotel owner and bring clients back from the streets or bars, paying a full day’s rent, but only

54 T. Baltar, P.C. Araujo and A. Jacob, “Praça Mauá abriga em 11 boates mercado de sexo para os homens do mar”, *Jornal do Brasil*, 7–8 (1971), p. 40.

using the room for a couple of hours. This modification in sex work practices was facilitated by the liberalization in bourgeois sexual mores, which led to Supreme Court decisions in the 1950s stipulating that hotel owners were not responsible for verifying the marital status of guest couples.⁵⁵

In spite of a police campaign to close down sex hotels in 1959, they continued to proliferate. By 1967, there were over 500 in Rio. After the sexual revolution of the 1970s, sex hotels began to service ever greater numbers of unmarried couples. Today, these hotels are still used by sex workers and non-sex workers alike for temporary trysts.⁵⁶

Other forms of sex work were developed to avoid police repression during the 1950s and '60s. The first bathhouses and saunas began to appear in police records during this period. Pereira labelled them "an invert's [read: homosexual] paradise", but many catered to the heterosexual trade as well. Today, Rio's top-end middle-class commercial heterosexual venues are all saunas. Cheap cabarets and recreational clubs with floor shows and back rooms also became common meeting spots for prostitutes and clients, as did massage parlours and theatres. All of these types of venues soldier on in downtown and south zone Rio today.⁵⁷

Another new form of prostitution was enabled by women's increased liberty. This was the apartment brothel, which began to fill the gap left by the old *rendez-vous* and boarding houses in the late 1950s and early '60s. As Pereira describes them, these venues were two- or three-bedroom apartments rented out to young prostitutes. The women would bring clients home, using the bedrooms for work during the day and a living space at night. The police were often incapable of distinguishing between establishments of this type and apartments rented by the growing numbers of independently living single females who were increasingly part of the city's urban scene.⁵⁸

What particularly frustrated Rio's anti-vice specialists, however, was the fact that these new forms of prostitution were concentrated downtown and in the residential, middle-class south zone of Rio de Janeiro, precisely the regions for which the Mangue was supposed to serve as a social prophylactic. Police attempts to keep prostitution out of the burgeoning new bohemian beach-side neighbourhoods were particularly fierce.

The decadence of Lapa prompted a drift of Rio's bohemians towards the south zone beaches of Copacabana, which came to be associated with Bossa

55 Pereira, *Sexo e Prostituição*, pp. 94–95.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 100.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 104; Blanchette and Silva, "Sexo a um real por minuto".

58 Pereira, *Sexo e prostituição*, pp. 102–103.

Nova and the city's nightlife in the 1950s. The artistic prostitution earlier found in Lapa was part of this migration, with women establishing themselves in places such as the Beco das Garrafas (Bottle Alley, a strip of clubs and bars in Copacabana famous for Bossa Nova).⁵⁹

The new apartment-style mini-brothels were perfect for this scene and were almost impossible to repress, although the police tried. Pereira recounts a story which demonstrates the methods employed in this struggle, which involved extralegal and "arbitrary" measures, combined with "a measured dose of violence" to force the prostitutes and madams to hand over their apartments to the police and leave the neighbourhood for "more liberal parishes" (presumably the Mangue).⁶⁰ Pereira shows how the carioca police operated outside the Mangue in the 1950s and '60s (and, indeed, since the beginning of the Republic): in order to keep prostitutes out of "regular family" areas, they went outside the law and illegally imprisoned and brutalized people they viewed as "pimps" and "madams". This was not to end prostitution, but simply to "convince" it to move elsewhere—most probably to the Mangue or Mauá. Pereira was aware that this sort of operation was illegal, but he was also so convinced of its acceptability that he recounts it in a humorous tone.

Police attempts to keep prostitution out of Copacabana were doomed to failure, however. The neighbourhood's main prostitution strip⁶¹ became a concentrated region of bars, nightclubs, and cabarets in the 1970s and '80s. Fifty-four of 279 commercial sexual venues identified in Rio de Janeiro in 2011⁶² were situated in Copacabana, with twenty-six of these within two blocks of the old strip. These establishments are also far and away the oldest venues in the neighbourhood. Some of them possibly evolved directly out of the bohemian scene of the 1950s.

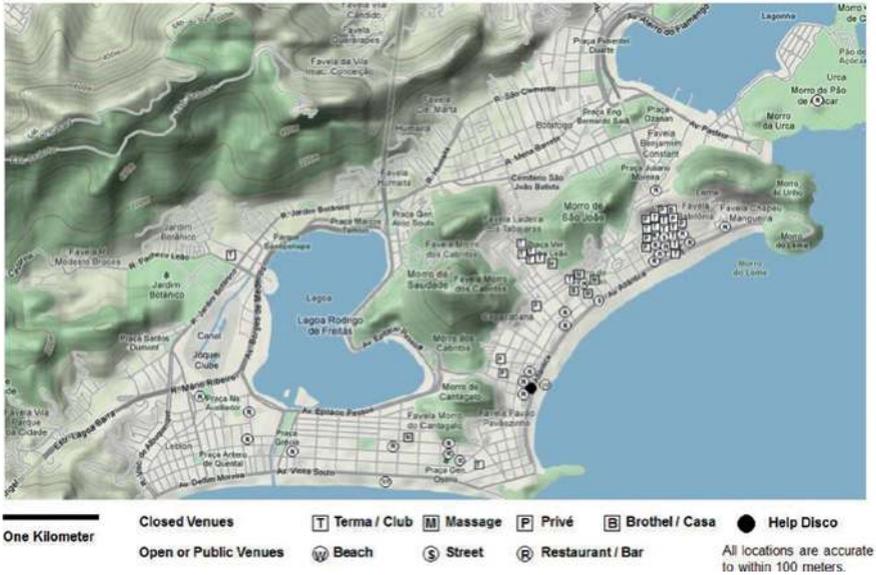
By the late 1970s in Copacabana, as shown in map 19.3, prostitution had increasingly integrated foreign tourists as clients. Today, the majority of Rio's luxurious heterosexual saunas and first-rank night-clubs are in the neighbourhood and, although foreign clients would never be the majority in most of Copacabana's prostitution venues, they would dominate many of the wealthiest.

59 Abreu, *O submundo do jogo de azar, prostituição e vadiagem*, p. 130; Marcello Cerqueira *Beco das garrafas: Uma lembrança* (Rio de Janeiro, 1994).

60 Pereira, *Sexo e prostituição*, p. 102, fn. 1.

61 *Ibid.*

62 Thaddeus G. Blanchette and Ana Paula Silva, "Prostitution in Contemporary Rio de Janeiro", in Susan Dewey and Patty Kelly (eds), *Policing Pleasure: Sex Work, Policy and the State in Global Perspective* (New York, 2011). Blanchette and Silva count each address where prostitution takes place. Vila Mimosa's 78 micro-establishments are thus one "venue".

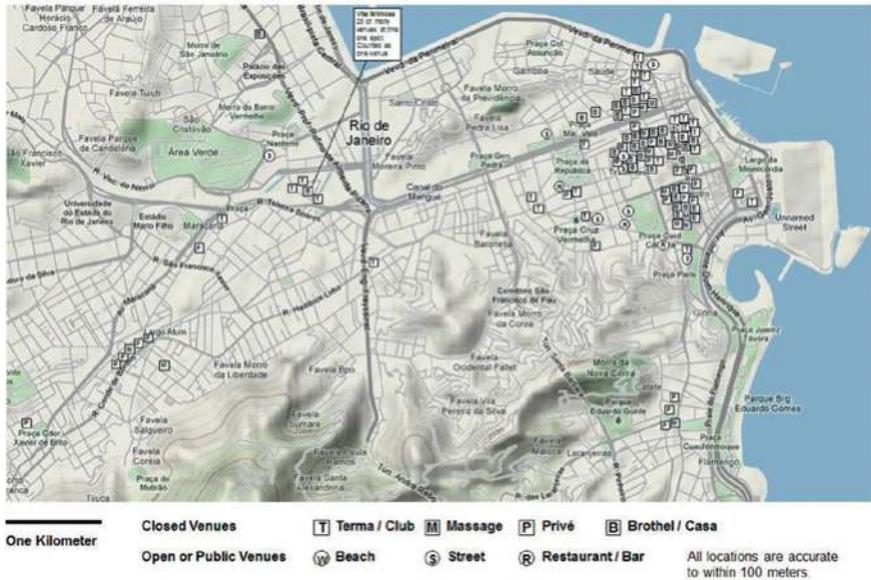


MAP 19.3 *Sex venues in Copacabana, 2011*

In 1984, the famous Help discotheque was established, eventually becoming the main focal point for encounters between foreign tourists and carioca prostitutes. Help was finally confiscated by the state government in 2010 in order to make way for a new museum as part of the general hygienization plans being implemented prior to the World Cup and Olympics.

While Copacabana began to specialize in sexual tourism and the bohemian prostitution that had earlier been Lapa's *métier*, downtown Rio de Janeiro in the 1960s and '70s began to develop a commercial sexual scene geared towards a Brazilian clientele made up of male workers. This process sped up considerably as the Mangue was demolished. Theatre, cabaret, and hotel prostitution, as well as massage parlours, became quite common downtown by the late 1970s. Even a few posh heterosexual saunas became established in the region.

In 2011, there were 92 commercial sexual venues within a five-block radius of the intersection of Ave. Getúlio Vargas and Ave. Rio Branco, visible in map 19.4. Urban renewal for the World Cup and Olympic Games has sparked a wave of real estate speculation downtown, however. As old buildings are renovated, many commercial sexual venues are being evicted. The smaller venues established office-spaces in high rises and known locally as "*privés*" or massage parlours seem to be maintaining a consistent presence in the centre. A typical establishment is set up in an office, subdivided into three or four "*cabines*" with



MAP 19.4 *Sex venues in downtown Rio de Janeiro, 2011*

a half dozen women working. The clientele is principally made up of downtown workers and peak hours come at noon and 5 P.M., when work lets out.⁶³

The *privé/massagem* is an adaptation to Rio's tradition of extra-official regulation. Because they require little in the way of capital investment, they can move to a new address when they encounter police "regulation". The fact that many *privés* manage to go on for years located in the same apartment, however, shows that, in spite of the repeated attempts by the carioca police to segregate prostitution, it is still common for sexual commerce to exist side-by-side with other establishments.

The Carioca Prostitute Today

From the second half of the twentieth century on, the division between "Europeans" and "Brazilians" became less demarcated in Rio de Janeiro as immigration dried up. Internal migration, especially from the north-eastern and northern regions of Brazil, began to have an impact on commercial sex in the city as Rio expanded from 1,500,000 inhabitants in 1930 to some 6,300,000

63 Blanchette and Silva, "Prostitution in Contemporary Rio de Janeiro".

in 2010. During this period, the rural or small-town girl from the interior of Brazil who arrives in the city and works as a prostitute became a stock figure in literature and news.

The growing role of Rio as a destination for international tourism from the 1950s on also brought a new and important male client—the foreign tourist—into the city’s sexual/affective markets. This development combined with long-extant stereotypes of the nation as exceptionally “hot, tropical and sensual” to establish the “Brazilian woman” as a much-appreciated racialized and sexualized feminine type in the global sexscape.⁶⁴ The figure of the *mulatta* has become so associated with this style of femininity that racial admixture, female sensuality, and Brazilianess are now almost synonymous in the international media.

The negative classification of the lower-class *preta* (black woman) still lives on, however, in the association of prostitution with residency in one of the city’s *favela* shantytowns. The urban reforms of the twentieth century failed to resolve Rio’s housing problems and, in fact, intensified them through the bull-dozing of many poor neighbourhoods.⁶⁵ Coupled with the increase in the population, this resulted in the expansion of ad hoc housing solutions on irregularly-occupied lands, often situated on slopes of the city’s mountains. In the carioca popular media, the inhabitants of these *favelas* are racialized as black and are often stereotyped as the creators of much of the city’s disorder. The *favelas* are a source of anxiety for local elites, who classify them as beyond the State’s control. The *preta* prostitute—black, poor, *favelada* and sexually degraded—can still be seen in the popular media and certain NGO and policy-maker portrayals of prostitution.

Recent ethnographic work, however, suggests that many, if not most, of Rio de Janeiro’s prostitutes do not live in the *favelas* and are not particularly poor, nor do they see themselves as black or are seen that way by their clients.⁶⁶

64 By “global sexscape”, we follow Denise Brennan’s lead in applying Arjun Appadurai’s understanding of global flows to the sexual and affective sphere. Denise Brennan, *What’s Love Got to do with It? Transnational Desires and Sex Tourism in the Dominican Republic* (Durham, 2004); Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Culture Economy”, in Mike Featherstone (ed.), *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity* (London, 1990).

65 Maurício Abreu, *A evolução urbana do Rio de Janeiro* (Rio de Janeiro, 2006).

66 Blanchette and Silva, “Prostitution in Contemporary Rio de Janeiro”, pp. 130–145; see also by the same authors “Amor a um real por minuto: A prostituição como atividade econômica no Brasil urbano”, in Sonia Correa and Richard Parker (eds), *Sexualidade e política na América Latina: Histórias, interseções e paradoxos* (Rio de Janeiro, 2011).

Today, there is still a large number of diverse types of sex-working women in Rio de Janeiro. While it is impossible to describe the average carioca prostitute, we can create a Weberian ideal type of the kind of woman found today in pretty much every commercial sexual venue in the city.⁶⁷

She has brown skin and dark hair (often dyed blonde and straightened) and racially classifies herself as mixed. She was born in Rio and lives in the working class suburbs. Her parents are working or lower middle class, with the mother often being a housewife. She has a high-school education, but attended low quality institutions. She probably wouldn't be able to pass the entrance exams for Brazil's free federal and state universities. She began sexual activity between 13 and 16 years of age and often was "married" (typically a non-formalized consensual union) before the age of 18. She is currently in her mid-20s. She is a mother and usually lives with her family. She has held other jobs, usually feminized work in the service economy. She got into prostitution as an adult, generally at the behest of a friend or by answering an ad. Prostitution is the most lucrative form of employment that she has had, paying four to ten times more than any of her prior jobs. She sees sex work as a way to achieve more than survival and plans on attending school, opening a business, building a house, or consuming luxury items otherwise beyond her means. She is not a drug addict. She does drink alcohol, but rarely anything stronger than beer or wine. She isn't controlled by a pimp and is not forced to work, but if she works in a closed venue she is answerable to that venue's manager with regards to how many days and hours a week she works and may be fined if she doesn't show up. There's a good chance that she is an evangelical Christian.

The "ideal typical prostitute" in Rio de Janeiro today is, in short, almost indistinguishable from the non-prostitute female majority. In fact, while the popular media and policy makers still believe in the "high class" and "low class" model of prostitution encoded in the "French/Pole" dichotomy of the early twentieth century, it is very difficult to say today that there are clear physical or social types dominating one or another form of carioca sex work. In the words of anthropologist Ana Paula Silva, "What determines [the] price in a commercial sexual venue in Rio today is not the style or beauty of the women so much as the social class of the male clients."⁶⁸

67 Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (New York, 1997 [1903–1917]), p. 90. This ideal typification is based on interviews conducted by Blanchette and Silva in a wide variety of commercial sex venues, as well as eight years of participant-observation.

68 Silva, "Cosmopolitanismo tropical".

Finally, ethnographic studies⁶⁹ confirm that the dividing lines between prostitution and other forms of sexual-affective relationships are still ambiguous and shifting. Among international sexual tourists, for example, Rio de Janeiro has a reputation of being the place to go for “girlfriend experience”⁷⁰ commercial sex. These same foreign men also claim that it is easy to convince “normal” (i.e. non-prostitute) cariocas to engage in sexual exchanges for money while carioca sex-working women affirm that when it comes to foreign tourists “you get paid more as a girlfriend than as a prostitute.”⁷¹

The Persistent Ambivalence of Prostitution Laws in Rio

In 1915, Police Commissioner Aurelino Leal resumed what he believed had become the dominant tendency in the country with regards to prostitution. Leal claimed that the police were empowered to exercise a preventive role and given a certain degree of leeway in the measures to be employed. These included the power to decide where and when prostitution could be exercised.⁷²

As we have seen, this idea was translated into operations that tried to remove prostitution from this or that part of the city, beginning with the prohibition of prostitution in the downtown area, moving through the attempts to concentrate prostitutes in Lapa and the Mangue, later drives to demolish these two regions, and efforts to “moralize” prostitution in the port and keep it out of Copacabana. Indeed, the same policy can be seen today, as the police seem to consider themselves empowered to eliminate any bar or establishment where prostitution occurs, especially if said venue occupies land needed for “improvements” scheduled for the World Cup and the Olympics.⁷³

69 Thaddeus Blanchette and Ana Paula Silva, “Nossa Senhora da Help: sexo, turismo e deslocamento transnacional em Copacabana”, *Cadernos Pagu*, 25 (2005), pp. 249–280; Adriana Piscitelli, “On ‘Gringos’ and ‘Natives’: Gender and Sexuality in the Context of International Sex Tourism in Fortaleza, Brazil”, *Vibrant*, 1 (2001).

70 According to Elizabeth Bernstein, a commercial sexual experience where what is sold is a manufactured authenticity that tries to simulate reciprocal desire and pleasure. Elizabeth Bernstein, *Temporarily Yours: Intimacy, Authenticity, and the Commerce of Sex* (Chicago, 2007), pp. 125–130.

71 Blanchette and Silva, “Nossa senhora da help”, pp. 277–278.

72 Aurelino Leal, *Polícia e poder de polícia* (Rio de Janeiro, 1918).

73 Julie Ruvolo, “Rio’s Biggest Prostitution Crackdown in a Generation”, *The Atlantic: Cities*, 7 September 2012; available at: <http://www.theatlanticcities.com/jobs-and-economy/2012/09/rios-biggest-prostitution-crackdown-generation/3199/>; last accessed 8 July 2017.

From the end of the military dictatorship on to the present day, the system of extra-official regulation of prostitution in Rio de Janeiro has continued on largely intact, although in a less institutionalized and more personalized form, perhaps, than in the Mangue in the 1920s or '50s. Ethnographic research carried out in Rio in recent years⁷⁴ indicates that it is almost impossible for a prostitution venue to function in the city without “oversight” by the police. Such involvement often takes the form of having a police officer as a silent partner, interceding in day-to-day conflicts with the neighbours or local administrative authorities and guaranteeing the “moralization” of the house by keeping its activities quiet and indoors.

In recent years, however, police involvement in the administration of prostitution has come to be seen as corruption. In early 2012, a coordinated series of raids on Rio’s largest and most well-known commercial sex venues was carried out, resulting in the closure of several houses which had been functioning for some thirty years. These raids were the largest anti-prostitution activities carried out by the carioca police since the expulsion of the remnants of the Mangue in 1979. They were justified by the State Prosecutor’s Office as a blow against police corruption.⁷⁵ With a new wave of urban renewal taking over the city, it seems that Rio is once again on the cusp of a transformation in how its public authorities deal with prostitution; everything indicates that another crackdown, similar in scope and severity to those of 1943, 1959, or 1970–1971, is on the way. Meanwhile, however, it does not appear that Brazil is any more likely to resolve its legal ambivalence regarding prostitution.

In light of the continuing ambiguities in prostitution law, a Congressional Judicial Committee suggested in 2012 that parts of the laws regarding *lenocínio* be overturned. In support of their position, they argued that “In fact, prostitution is not now and never has been a crime in Brazil”:

Punishing the establishment of “houses of prostitution” and “procurement” is nonsensical if the sexual encounters in question are established by consenting adults. We thus propose to [decriminalize these conducts]. What is important is that we only punish sexual exploitation. It does not matter where this occurs or who are the intermediaries.⁷⁶

74 Blanchette and Silva, “Sexo a um real”.

75 Waleska Borges, “Três pessoas são presas na Zona Sul acusadas de incentivar a prostituição”, *O Globo*; available at: <https://oglobo.globo.com/rio/tres-pessoas-sao-presas-na-zona-sul-acusadas-de-incentivar-prostituicao-5213176>; last accessed 7 July 2017; Ruvolo, “Rio’s Biggest Prostitution Crackdown”.

76 Senado Federal, *Relatório final da comissão de juristas para a elaboração de anteprojeto de código penal, criada pelo requerimento n° 756, de 2011* (Brasília, 2012).

While the jurists' proposal does not completely do away with the crime of *lenocínio* (after all, what exactly is "sexual exploitation"?⁷⁷), it does take a step in the direction of recognizing that sex work, freely engaged in by adults, should not be criminalized.

Predictably, the religious right and certain sectors of the feminist left in the Brazilian congress are against the proposed changes and there seems to be little chance that they will be encoded as law. As these groups' political opposition to prostitution has grown, the Federal Health and Labour Ministry—traditionally two of sex workers' stauncher allies in government—have backed away from supporting prostitutes.

Conclusions

The absence of prostitution regulation in Rio de Janeiro cannot be understood as the result of state inaction regarding sex work; rather, it should be construed as a policy of putting the largest amount of control over prostitution in police hands. By not defining prostitution as illegal while repressing the vaguely defined *lenocínio*, the Brazilian state has decided to leave everyday decisions regarding sex work and its conflicts up to individual precinct captains who apply their own personal understandings, prejudices, and interests to the situation in accordance with whatever fashions are current in the surrounding society. However, while this peculiar Brazilian system gives the police a wide scope of action when dealing with prostitutes, it also gives sex workers more space to manoeuvre and negotiate than is perhaps possible in other urban contexts.

Prostitution in Rio de Janeiro can only be understood in light of the tense negotiations that have marked the control of sexual commerce in the city during the last 120 years. Today, however, many sectors of carioca society wish to once again reform the city as a showcase for Brazil during a period of intense international retrenchment with regards to prostitution. As a result, city authorities are increasingly under pressure to remove prostitution from public view, especially in those areas of the city slated for rapid development, in order to accommodate upcoming international megaevents. Almost overnight, long-established prostitution venues have been raided, harassed, and shuttered and the city's sex workers are having to once again reformulate survival and work strategies in an increasingly unfavourable legal and economic environment reinforced by often hysterical popular media reports that associate prostitution

77 The same Judicial Committee suggests that "sexual exploitation" be redefined as "forcing someone to work as a prostitute or impeding them from leaving work as a prostitute."

with the trafficking of drugs and people and the sexual exploitation of children. What the future will bring is uncertain, but one thing is becoming increasingly clear: It is unlikely that faced with these new/old dilemmas regarding sex work, Rio de Janeiro will radically break with its traditional history of regulating prostitution through direct and extra-legal police action.

SECTION 4

Asia-Pacific



Commercial Sex Work in Calcutta: Past and Present

Satarupa Dasgupta

Introduction

It is estimated that India has over 3 million commercial sex workers.¹ Approximately 2.9 million women or 1.1 per cent of the adult women in India are commercial sex workers. The rest of India's sex worker population is comprised of male and transgender sex workers. Female, male, and transgender commercial sex workers in India often ply their trade within the confines of a designated red-light district, or they are "flying" sex workers without a fixed place of operation. A small segment also operates as contractual workers in establishments such as hotels, massage parlours and places providing escort services.

Notwithstanding the large population involved in the profession, commercial sex work in India is illegal and treated as a criminal act. Indian legislation on sex work criminalizes sex workers and their clients and pimps, as well as brothel owners, subjecting them to fines and imprisonment for three to five years. The Immoral Trafficking (Prevention) Act (ITA) of India defines prostitution as "sexual exploitation or abuse of persons for commercial purposes or for consideration of money or in any other kind."² The ITA also criminalizes living off of sex workers' earnings, and as a result, a sex worker's children and family members can be imprisoned for subsisting on his or her income.

Sex workers in India constitute a severely deprived segment of the population which lacks access to services and support from the health sector. Ascribing a criminal status to sex work often results in an increase in violence against Indian sex workers who have little recourse against such acts of aggression.³ The criminalization of sex work also makes it possible for pimps and police to extort money from sex workers for protection from violence or

1 National AIDS Control Organization, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, available at: <http://naco.gov.in/>; last accessed 10 July 2017.

2 Government of India, "The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act 1956", available at: <http://ncpcr.gov.in/showfile.php?lang=1&level=1&&sublinkid=272&lid=719>; last accessed 10 July 2017.

3 Flora Cornish, "Changing the Stigma of Sex Work in India: Material Context and Symbolic Change", *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 16 (2006), pp. 462–471.

imprisonment.⁴ A conviction of the criminal or coercive nature of their trade often precipitates a legal and moral imperative to rescue or rehabilitate the sex workers. The option to rescue and rehabilitate “criminal” or “immoral” sex workers often provides law enforcement agencies, pimps, and brothel owners with more opportunities to carry out violence and extortion against them. Violence against sex workers, as a fallout of criminalization and rescue and rehabilitation propositions, is commonplace and recurrent in India, while the prosecution of perpetrators is rare.⁵

In this chapter I present a historical analysis of the dominant discourses of the delegitimization of sex work in India, specifically in metropolitan Calcutta, and the stigmatization of sex workers as “fallen women” in need of rehabilitation, with the overall aim to obtain a better understanding of the structural position of the workers in contemporary India. I also examine the representation of sex workers in contemporary vernacular print media in Calcutta in order to achieve an understanding of public perceptions of their vocation. For this study I conducted interviews with thirty-seven commercial female sex workers in *Sonagachi*—the red-light district of Calcutta and one of the largest red-light areas in South Asia—so I could assess their opinions concerning the status of commercial sex work, delegitimization, and stigmatization.

The Discourse of the Delegitimization of Sex Work

The discourse of the delegitimization of sex work in India, as prevalent today, was not in force in ancient India. A thousand years ago, sex workers were part of the mainstream populace in India. Their profession was considered to be a legitimate one and sex workers possessed labour rights. This stands in remarkable contrast to present-day India where sex work is conflated with trafficking and is a criminal offence subject to prosecution. This section discusses the transformation of sex work from a legitimate vocation to a criminal activity.

Ancient Indian works of literature such as *Mrichhakatika*, *Kathasaritasagara* and *Kalavilasa* mentioned sex workers as a professional part of mainstream society worthy of and deserving love and respect.⁶ There were about

4 Kate Shannon and Josephine Csete, “Violence, Condom Negotiation and HIV/STI Risk among Sex Workers”, *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 304 (2010), pp. 573–574.

5 A.K. Jayshree, “Searching for Justice for Body and Self in a Coercive Environment: Sex Work in Kerala, India”, *Reproductive Health Matters*, 12 (2004), pp. 58–67.

6 Pradip Bakshi, *A Note on the Reconstruction of the Herstory of Sexuality and Sex Work in Sonagachi, Kolkata, West Bengal, India* (Kolkata, 2005), pp. 7–18.

fifty synonyms for sex workers in Sanskrit and Pali literature composed between a few centuries B.C. and the twelfth century A.D.⁷ Some of the names conveyed reverence, such as *brajayitri* (the woman who provides happiness), *nagarashovini* (the woman who is the grace of the whole town), and *janapadakalyani* (the woman who takes care of the entire settlement).⁸ The Sanskrit texts *Arthashastra* and *Kamasutra*, and the Pali texts *Majjhimnikaya* and *Sanjuttanikaya* noted the practice of state sector employment and state-funded education for sex workers in ancient India. Sex workers paid income taxes and were given pensions on retirement.⁹

In the nineteenth century, India became a British colony. At the time, sex workers were still part of mainstream society and maintained the rights of legitimacy conferred upon them by ancient Hindu India. The rights of sex workers were initially recognized by the ruling colonial courts. Up until 1850, the courts in Calcutta issued summons against clients who didn't pay sex workers: "Though reformation in Europe brought in stricter control of brothels, even their closure, some of the early colonial administrators understood that the life of a professional courtesan in India was not the same as that of a sex worker in England; nor were sex workers here looked down upon by all other sections of society."¹⁰

The Crimean War precipitated significant changes in the fortunes of sex workers in India. In the aftermath of the Crimean War, between 1853 and 1856 the number of British soldiers suffering from venereal diseases increased significantly.¹¹ Subsequently, in 1864 the British Government passed the Contagious Diseases Act, which was enforced in different parts of the empire. The Contagious Diseases Act XIV of 1868 was implemented in India in 1869.¹² The act brought about the compulsory registration and medical examination of Indian sex workers, especially those located in regimental towns and whose clientele included British soldiers. The Contagious Diseases Act marked the designation of Indian sex workers as the colonial subjects of British rule.¹³

In cases of non-registration or absenteeism from medical examinations on the part of a sex worker, a warrant for arrest was issued for her. The family

7 Sukumari Bhattacharya, *Pracheen Bharat: Samaj o sahitya* (Kolkata, 1988), pp. 30–42.

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Ibid.*

10 Bakshi, *A Note on the Reconstruction of the Herstory*, p. 14.

11 S. Basu, *Sambad samayikpatra unish shataker bangali samaj* (Calcutta, 2003), pp. 56–72.

12 Ratnabali Chatterjee, "The Indian Prostitute as a Colonial Subject", *Canadian Women Studies*, 19 (1992), pp. 51–60, 51.

13 Svati Shah, "Prostitution, Sex Work and Violence: Discursive and Political Contexts for Five Texts on Paid Sex", *Gender & History*, 16 (2004), pp. 794–812, 797.

members of the non-compliant sex workers also faced punitive measures and harassment by British law enforcement agencies. Bakshi notes that “through a relentless game of chase and run with the colonial police, the Indian sex worker, once accepted and revered, then scorned yet tolerated, was finally branded as a criminal running away from a ‘beneficial’ law.”¹⁴

Bhandari notes that the British rulers passed the Act not to prevent vice amongst its own soldiers, but rather to “denigrate the body of the prostitute as a receptacle of all that was filthy and impure. Under this Act and the Cantonment rules, the British and other European soldiers in India were not only permitted but promoted to hold native young and good-looking girls as prostitutes for their carnal pleasure. These very ‘white clients’ of the native prostitutes, who spread venereal diseases not only amongst themselves but upon these unfortunate women, would themselves remain untouched and their integrity and respectability untarnished. It would be the Indian girls and women (mostly of poor families) who would be first trapped into a life of sin because the society and colonial government not only disallowed them any opportunity to earn an independent income but encouraged a system which preyed upon their helplessness and lack of better options.”¹⁵

Phillipa Levine notes that British soldiers stationed in colonial India had a limited number of native sex workers to meet their sexual needs. A regiment of three hundred soldiers stationed at Bengal would have around twelve sex workers at their service, around 4% of the client population. These sex workers could offer sexual service to the British soldiers only. They were registered and kept secluded in smaller dwellings within the cantonment area. Subjected to weekly physical examinations at cantonment prison hospitals to check for venereal diseases, these women would be periodically transferred with the regiments to the latter’s destination. The disparity in the number of soldiers and sex workers meant that the latter had to offer sexual services to a sizeable population of soldiers daily. If weekly physical check-ups showed the presence of a venereal disease, the woman’s registration was cancelled, she was expelled, and a “newer and healthier” woman was employed in her place.¹⁶

The native sex workers were tainted with the conflicting colours of criminality and victimhood. Bhandari quotes a British Medical officer posted in Calcutta on sex workers in the city as saying, “Everything about them bears the

14 Bakshi, *A Note on the Reconstruction of the Herstory*, p. 15.

15 Sudhanshu Bhandari, “Prostitution in Colonial India”, *Mainstream*, 26 (2010), available at: <https://www.mainstreamweekly.net/article2142.html>; last accessed 10 July 2017.

16 Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (London, 2003), pp. 185–186.

total absence of religious, moral or social feeling. Here, they swarm not only the by-lanes and back-slums of Calcutta, but also its principal thorough-fares, polluting the atmosphere of our neighbourhood and scandalising the morals of the population.” The European missionary groups that were active in India in the nineteenth century strongly condemned the swelling ranks of sex workers in regimental towns and supported the Act. However, missionary discourses on the Act acquired a distinctive character because they characterized sex workers not as criminals but as victims of moral depravity and socio-economic oppression.¹⁷ Such an emphasis on the victimhood of sex workers prompted missionaries to preach for the salvation and rehabilitation of sex workers.¹⁸

In colonial India sex work among the colonized population offered the scope of a discourse for moral hierarchies of race, nation and gender. As Levine notes, the ample presence of the sex trade among the native populations in India reinforced the British colonial rulers’ perception of moral superiority and convinced the latter of the need for setting boundaries of rule.¹⁹ Bhandari cites Levine and concludes “The east’s problem was its failure to move beyond the primitivism of unchained nature, to contain sex within boundaries that made it productive and purposeful rather than merely sensual and pleasurable. Prostitution’s emphasis on pleasure rather than procreation drove home this divide between the Christian and the heathen, the former claiming sex as a procreative and biblically ordained duty, the latter merely wallowing in its sensuality.”²⁰

There was a significant rise in the number of sex workers in Calcutta in the nineteenth century. Banerjee attributes it to several factors.²¹ There was an increasing migration of single indigenous men to Calcutta in search of jobs. These men who left their families back in villages and yearned for female company boosted up sex trade in the city. An exponential number of Hindu widows formed the ranks of sex workers in Calcutta. Deserted by their families and left with no “respectable” means of earning an income, commercial sex work often offered these women a means of subsistence. Poorer working class women also used sex work to supplement their meagre earnings through sex work irrespective of marital status. “In 1853, Calcutta with a population of about 400,000 people, supported 12,419 prostitutes. Of these more than 10,000

17 Chatterjee, “The Indian Prostitute as a Colonial Subject”, pp. 51–60.

18 Bhattacharya, *Pracheen Bharat*, pp. 30–42.

19 Levine, *Prostitution, Race and Politics*, pp. 193–194.

20 Bhandari, “Prostitution in Colonial India”.

21 Sumanta Banerjee, “Marginalization of Women’s Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Bengal”, *Recasting Women*, 1 (1989), pp. 127–177, 143.

were Hindus, including several daughters of *kulin*²² Brahmins. More than a decade later, in 1867, although the city's total population had come down to some extent, the number of prostitutes rose to more than 30,000. We are told that it was mostly women of the weaver, barber, washermen, milkmen, fishermen and other lower castes who resorted to this profession."²³

Banerjee provides a layout of the differentiation of sex workers in Calcutta into various categories created by the British colonialists. This distinction—based on the latter's perception of caste and class hierarchies, and religious differences among the sex workers in the city—provides a limited profile of the sex workers operating in the city. The first two categories consisted of Brahmin sex workers and other higher caste sex workers. The latter were not Brahmins but hailed from higher levels of the caste hierarchies. Both these categories of sex workers had clients who hailed from their own or superior castes. These clients were mostly well-off and maintained the women financially, consequently these women could maintain their own independent establishments. The third were sex workers who could not maintain their own establishments and used rented properties. They entertained clients of all castes and their clientele generally had limited financial means. The fourth category was the dancing women who were of Hindu and Muslim religious affiliation and entertained clients of any caste, class and religion. The fifth category consisted of Muslim sex workers. The sixth category consisted of women who were Christian and of European origin. The last category formed a small portion of sex workers operating in nineteenth century Calcutta.²⁴

Bhandari provides a breakdown of the sex workers operating in Calcutta in the middle of the nineteenth century. "After the 1868 Contagious Diseases Act, under the category of 'Registered Prostitutes', there were in 1872, 6,871 such prostitutes of whom 5,804 were Hindus, 930 Muslims and the remaining small minority comprised a tremendous heterogeneity belonging to Irish, Polish, Russian, Hungarian, Italian, French and Spanish women".²⁵

The sex workers of Calcutta submitted petitions against the Contagious Diseases Act and held public demonstrations in protest. In 1869, the police arrested 1,527 sex workers in Calcutta and 499 in the city's suburbs for flouting

22 *Kulin* means higher caste in Bengali.

23 Banerjee, "Marginalization of Women's Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Bengal", p. 143.

24 Sumanta Banerjee, *Under the Raj: Prostitution in Colonial Bengal* (London, 2000), pp. 72–103.

25 Bhandari, "Prostitution in Colonial India".

the Act and organizing protests.²⁶ In 1869, there were estimated to be 30,000 female sex workers in Calcutta and most of them were not registered in accordance with the Act. The Act was suspended in 1883 and finally repealed in 1888.²⁷ However, the sex workers of Calcutta remained in a paradoxical situation: “As colonial rule consolidated itself in our country, our sex workers fearful of losing their only source of income, by being officially deregistered, clung to the alien identities of either a criminal or a victim imposed upon them through the dominant colonial and missionary discourses.”²⁸

The Calcutta Suppression of the Immoral Traffic Act was passed in 1923 with the support of the League of Nations Committee on Trafficking in Women and Children. The Act was intended to tackle the issue of trafficking and the sale and purchase of women shipped from Europe to the eastern colonies. The Act criminalized prostitution and conflated trafficking with sex work. As Bakshi has observed, the chief concern of the ruling elites in India was to prevent women from their own racial groups from being channelled into sex work. Incidences of raids on brothels with the aim of “rescuing” sex workers who were not deemed to be “common prostitutes” became more frequent after the passage of this Act.²⁹

In August of 1947, India became independent from British rule. In independent, postcolonial India, the Immoral Trafficking Prevention Act was passed in 1956, and it reiterated the discourses of the Act of 1923 and criminalized sex work and connected the latter with trafficking. The colonial relationships between race, sexuality, and social control in the European colonies in the nineteenth century appeared to have an impact on concerns about sex work and its regulation. Walkowitz has argued that concerns about “white slavery” in the nineteenth century precipitated a moral panic about the potential degradation of female sexuality through sex work.³⁰ This was defined “in relation to fears of young white women being abducted into prostitution.”³¹

Theoretical and dialectic tensions in the debates on the status of sex work and sex workers in the twenty-first century appear to have antecedents in such “early moral panics, fears of ‘white slavery’ and in the nineteenth-century racialization of sexuality within the context of the imperial project itself, which

26 Bakshi, *A Note on the Reconstruction of the Herstory*, pp. 7–18.

27 Basu, *Sambad samayikpatra*, pp. 56–72.

28 Bakshi, *A Note on the Reconstruction of the Herstory*, p. 16.

29 *Ibid.*, pp. 7–18.

30 Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London, 1992), pp. 202–206.

31 Svati Shah, “Prostitution, Sex Work and Violence”, pp. 795.

came to rely on sexuality as an important frame for the articulation of colonial power."³² These tensions may have resonances in the history of postcolonial states' regulation of women engaged in sex work. An understanding of colonial history and its background can be utilized to analyse sex workers' status, regulations on the sex trade, and the hierarchical process of marginalization among commercial female sex workers in India.

In present-day India, sex work is illegal and a criminal activity. The rescue and rehabilitation of sex workers is a matter of national policy. Indian legislation frames sex work as a direct consequence of trafficking, deception, and coercion, and it regards sex workers as being in a state of sexual servitude. I have examined historical data about sex workers around Calcutta to obtain an understanding of the notions of coercion and deception in their choice of profession. *Amritabazar Patrika*, a national Indian English daily no longer in circulation, published a survey of 200 sex workers in Calcutta documenting the reasons behind their choice of profession on 20 February 1868.³³

The survey showed that 64.3 per cent of the women voluntarily opted for the profession. While 26.2 per cent of the surveyed women were daughters of sex workers and their choice of profession was passed down, 9.5 per cent of them were deceived or sold into sex work against their will. Of the 64.3 per cent who voluntarily opted for sex work, 78 per cent were widows. Upon the deaths of their spouses they had no means of economic support or sexual fulfilment, as remarriage for women was a taboo in Indian society in the past. These women noted economic exigencies and sexual deprivation to be a motivating factor behind taking part in sex work. The survey was one of a kind and cannot be said to be representative of the actions and aspirations of all the sex workers of nineteenth century Calcutta. However, it provides a snapshot of the factors that motivated women to opt for sex work during that period.

I also looked into the representation of sex workers in contemporary vernacular print media in Calcutta in order to obtain an understanding of public perceptions of their vocation. I examined articles, editorials, and letters to the editor about the red-light district of Calcutta and its residents in Bengali newspapers; the period I examined was from 1997 to 2009. I found a total of twenty-eight articles and editorials and forty-seven letters to the editor dealing with the issue.

Among the twenty-eight articles and editorials, seventeen highlighted the drawbacks of commercial sex work and eleven emphasized the need to eradicate sex work altogether. Sex work was noted in thirteen articles/editorials to be

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 796.

³³ *Amritabazar Patrika*, "Survey on Sex Workers" (20 February 1868).

a violation of human rights and in eight articles/editorials it was presented as a perpetuation of slavery-like practices. Eleven articles and editorials stressed the importance of improving the lot of sex workers as they were claimed to be a marginalized, oppressed, and impoverished community. Five of the articles and editorials stated that there is a need to legalize sex work to ameliorate the condition of sex workers in India and stem the spread of venereal infections.

Among these articles was one penned by the famous Bengali author and feminist critic Bani Basu. She wrote an op-ed piece on the sex trade in the largest circulating Bengali daily, *Anandabazar Patrika*, on 1 April 2001. She argued that sex work violates human dignity, and she made the claim that sex workers urgently need to be rehabilitated and trained for alternative professions. Basu also questioned the demands of sex workers for the legalization of sex work, opining that such insistence on the part of sex workers stemmed from their direct brainwashing by the agents of patriarchy. She equated the legalization of sex work with the legitimization of human sexual servitude and a direct violation of human rights. She referred to sex workers in the article as *jounodashi* (sex slaves). She expressed concern that condoning sex work could result in the prevalence of the sex trade among the mainstream middle-class populace.

The letters to the editor were published as responses to news articles on the activities of sex workers in *Sonagachi* who are unionized and striving for their profession to be granted legal status. Among a total of forty-seven letters to the editor, thirty-eight were written by the general public and nine by sex workers from *Sonagachi* as responses to previous letters published on the subject. Twenty-nine of the letters had a negative view of sex work and sex workers. In four of the letters sex work was considered to be a direct outcome of trafficking and coercion. Eleven letter-writers considered sex workers to be in a state of servitude and in grave need of rescue and rehabilitation. Five of the letters identified sex workers as vectors of HIV/AIDS and hosts of other infectious diseases. Seven letter-writers argued that sex work is a sin and its legalization would signify the state sanctioning of moral transgression. Eight letter-writers also noted that if sex work was legalized, common middle-class housewives and girls would be encouraged to start offering sex for money. This would result, according to the letter-writers, in an unravelling of the traditional family structure of Indian society.

The articles, editorials and letters to the editors published in Bengali newspapers present a negative perception of sex work in general among the public. Sex work was depicted as an immoral trade that threatens the family values of middle class Indians. The legalization of sex work was not supported in most of the letters, as it was claimed that such legitimization would entail the sanctioning of a criminal offence and had the potential to lure women from the

domestic sphere into the realm of moral transgression. This historical analysis of the process of the delegitimization of sex work in India, and cursory look at the Bengali print media publications, offer a means of assessing the issues underlying the structural inequalities suffered by groups such as commercial female sex workers. Such an analysis is relevant for understanding the historical marginalization of, and attribution of “victimhood” status to, sex workers in an erstwhile colonized nation like India.

It seems that the articulation of sex work frequently invokes a connection between sex work and trafficking, the proposed delegitimization of sex work, and rescue and rehabilitation propositions for sex workers, both in India and globally. The distinction between sex work and trafficking is not a well-defined one, and the conflation of trafficking and sex work can problematize health and social activism among sex workers, and jeopardize intervention projects. The equation of trafficking with sex work has been promoted vigorously by anti-trafficking organizations active in the US and other areas of the world. The common usage of the term “prostitution” for sex work is in itself controversial, as people associated with the profession tend to refer to themselves as sex workers rather than prostitutes. The latter term is widely considered to be stigma-inducing and derogatory: “The core debate is that for many stakeholders, the category of sex workers includes consenting adults who sell sex of their own volition, who are not trafficking victims, and who have called for recognition of their rights as workers.”³⁴

However, the exercise of volition on behalf of sex workers in carrying out their profession is not widely acknowledged in India or globally, and the articulation of sex workers as passive victims of trafficking, abuse, and slavery-like practices is very common. In India, anti-trafficking measures often evolve into combating sex work through rescue and rehabilitation propositions, but such rescue and rehabilitation projects for sex workers can be morally problematic. As Cohen noted in a report published by the *Guttmacher Institute*, a policy research organization working on human sexual and reproductive health,³⁵ the moral imperative to rescue women from brothels is compelling when young girls are involved or there is clear evidence of duress, but “rescuing” adult women from brothels against their will can mean an end to their health care and economic survival. In countries and situations in which basic survival is a daily struggle, the distinction between free agency and oppression may be more a grey area than a bright line.

34 Nicole Frank Masenior and Chris Beyrer, “The US Anti-Prostitution Pledge: First Amendment Challenges and Public Health Priorities”, *PLOS Medicine*, 4 (2007), pp. 1158–1161.

35 Susan Cohen, “Ominous Convergence: Sex Trafficking, Prostitution and International Family Planning”, *The Guttmacher Report on Public Policy*, 8 (2005), pp. 12–14.

In this regard I sought the opinions of sex workers themselves concerning the nature of the trade. I conducted interviews with thirty-seven commercial female sex workers in *Sonagachi*. With a population of more than 50,000 commercial sex workers, *Sonagachi* is one of the largest red-light districts in the region. The sex workers of *Sonagachi* are unionized and carry out peer outreach-based campaigns to increase condom usage compliance and reduce rates of HIV and venereal diseases among their colleagues. The sex workers' union is called the *Durbar Mahila Samanway Committee* (DMSC) and it has offices in the heart of *Sonagachi* itself.

I conducted structured and semi-structured interviews with my subjects at the DMSC offices and at their places of work. My data collection was carried out between 6 December 2010 and 12 January 2011. My project sources included research papers, internal project reports, unpublished manuscripts provided by DMSC members, and best practice synopses that have been published by DMSC. In *Sonagachi*, there are concentrated pockets of sex work zones amid regular neighbourhoods. At the entrance of each neighbourhood, the sex workers, who wear colourful garb and make-up, solicit for clients. This practice is colloquially referred to as "standing at the gates" and signifies the presence of sex work sites within the neighbourhood.

It needs to be noted that all of the interviewees were active members of the DMSC and were also peer outreach workers in the HIV/STI intervention project conducted by the union. Most of the interviewees were heavily involved in the daily operations of the DMSC and various other projects. The subjects I interviewed cannot be said to be representative of all the sex workers plying their trade within the borders of the red-light district of Calcutta. However, their voices offer glimpses of the opinions of sex workers which traditionally go unheard and unrecognized in the public sphere.

Prior permission was obtained from the DMSC central governing committee before the commencement of my research and interviews. This permission was obtained by sending an application letter drafted in Bengali and addressed to the Central Management Committee of the DMSC which is headed by Bharati Dey, its president. Institutional Review Board (IRB) research approval was also received (Protocol # 13456). The narratives of the sex workers as gathered from the interviews will be discussed in the following sections.

Disarticulating Trafficking and Sex Work and Reasons for Entering Sex Work in Sonagachi

All of the thirteen interviewees in *Sonagachi* emphasized the distinction between trafficking and sex work. Eight of the interviewees noted that there is

a conflation of sex work and trafficking in general discourses about sex work. Three of the interviewees also pointed out that sex work is perceived as being the same as trafficking and hence considered a punishable criminal offence by the media and the intelligentsia in India. Sapna excitedly noted, "We are considered to be sex slaves and sold or trafficked into this profession by the media, by all the important people and by the entire society. Why doesn't anybody ask us?"

When questioned whether women are coerced or trafficked into the profession, thirty-six of the thirty-seven interviewees noted that they entered the profession of their own accord and had not been trafficked or sold or coerced into sex work. One of the interviewees, however, stated that she was introduced to sex work against her will by a close family member. She noted that after initial abuse she managed to break ties with an exploitative brothel owner and worked independently by renting rooms in the red-light area. She has continued in the profession since, as she said, it provides her with a steady source of income. She added that her forced introduction into the profession had occurred almost forty years ago, and the current mechanism of self-regulatory boards that the DMSC has installed prevents cases like hers today.

The reason that the *Sonagachi* women engage in sex work appeared to be primarily economic. Nineteen of the interviewees, 54.2 per cent of the sample size, mentioned financial exigencies as a reason for entering the profession. Twelve of the interviewees noted that they could afford a comfortable standard of living through sex work. Nine of the interviewees observed that they had been subjected to violence by a spouse or family member prior to entering sex work. Sapna said, "My ex-husband beat me up to the point of breaking my limbs. I had no support. The red-light area was my refuge for it gave me the income to survive and escape my partner."

Thirteen of the interviewees reported sexual assaults in prior professions, which included domestic help, construction work, brick kiln labour, and secretarial jobs. Krishna, who had previously worked at a secretarial job, recalled how she had been sexually harassed by her employer. She noted, "I was compelled to offer sexual favours to my boss. Yet my salary was a pittance. I was finding it really hard to make ends meet. Well, then I decided I might as well get paid for sex."

Interviewees also noted the existence of mechanisms of sexual harassment in the construction and menial labour industries in India. "To get a job and maintain it in bricklaying, masonry, and construction, you have to sleep with the *rajmistri*,³⁶ his assistant, and respective subordinates. You need to keep them happy and also do back-breaking physical work to earn your meagre

36 *Rajmistri* means "head mason" in Bengali.

salary”, noted Purnima. Her views echoed those of Krishna: “You see, after being exploited by a string of supervisors one generally decides to get paid for sex.” Sapna recounts being raped by her employer while working as a domestic helper. “No more free and forced sex”, she quipped.

A survey was conducted by *Sanlap*, a nongovernmental organization, with 580 sex workers from *Sonagachi* about the reasons why sex workers join the profession. Table 20.1 shows the results of the survey.

In addition to the reasons mentioned by the interviewees, this survey also showed that harassment by in-law families concerning dowry issues and being cheated by lovers were motivating factors for joining the profession. Joining sex work as a family profession and following in the footsteps of a mother was an additional reason for entering the trade. A total of 1.2 per cent of the interviewees were noted to be sold into sex work and 1.5 per cent appeared to have been ensnared by false promises. The total percentage of women supposedly coerced or misled into this profession did not appear to be more than 2.7 per cent according to the survey. The results of the survey are consistent with the testimonies of my interviewees, all but one of whom noted her entry into the profession was voluntary. Poverty and an urgent need to provide for their families appear to be the most important motivating factors for joining the profession.

All of the thirty-seven interviewees emphasized the harmful effects of trafficking and said that there is a pressing need to curb trafficking. Seventeen of

TABLE 20.1 *Reasons for entering sex work, Sonagachi 2010–2011*

Reasons for entering sex work	n(total: 580)	%
Financial (to sustain self and family members)	136	23.4
For a better living	134	23.1
Harassment due to non-payment of dowry	102	17.6
Domestic violence by spouse, in-laws, intimate partners, and extended family	91	15.7
Sexually assaulted in previous professions	47	8.1
Jilted by lover	34	5.9
Sex work is a family profession	15	2.6
Lured by the promise of a job	9	1.5
Sold into sex work	7	1.2
Brought by a spouse or a family member into the profession	5	0.9

the interviewees stated that women are often trafficked into sex work. The porous border between Bangladesh and India was noted as a reason for the easy trafficking of women for the sex trade on the Indian side. The interviewees also noted that women from Nepal are trafficked into India to work in red-light areas in and around eastern India. Sadhana noted:

I will not say that sex workers are not trafficked, as sometimes they are. But many times they are not trafficked against their will. It often happens that they will pay an agent for trafficking them across the border for work. Many girls come in from across the [Indian] border to work in *Sonagachi*. Why do you think they come? It is because they have heard of this place. They know they can earn some money from sex work and feed their family. What is a girl who is extremely poor and has no education and has five or ten mouths to feed [to] work in? She knows sex work can provide her [with] a steady source of income. She needs sex work to survive, to provide for herself and for her family. When it comes to hunger there is no good profession or bad profession.

According to the interviewees, a mechanism for paying traffickers and sneaking across the Indian border appears to be in place in many places in Bangladesh and Nepal. However, these women aid in their own trafficking and come voluntarily, and their motivation is the prospect of earning money through sex work in India and providing for their families in neighbouring countries. The Indian government's attempt to curb trafficking across its borders and stem the flow of sex work seekers has been futile so far, according to Rama:

The government has tried to seal the borders before and it is still trying to do so now. What is the result of that? Has it succeeded in reducing trafficking? No, it has not. Thousands have crossed the border seeking to work in *Sonagachi* in spite of government efforts. Trafficking will not stop and the entry of women into this profession will not stop. Do you know why? It is because there is a huge demand for this profession. And then there is hunger. Who will feed them and their children? The government does not provide food, it only provides laws and bans.

The sex workers' entry into this profession is thus noted to be voluntary and sometimes a result of their own collusion with traffickers. This information is in direct disagreement with current policy research documents on sex work and HIV/AIDS intervention, most of which characterize sex workers as victims of trafficking, coercion, and sexual servitude.

The single interviewee who said she was forced into this profession noted that she did not leave sex work even when she got a chance, as it gave her a steady and secure source of income. Seven of the interviewees stated that sex work was not their primary source of income and they had additional means of making money such as small businesses. Eight of the interviewees did not live within the perimeters of the red-light district and commuted daily or weekly to *Sonagachi*. The presupposition of coercion in sex work and sexual servitude in the profession as assumed by global and Indian policy-makers and legislation appears to be in direct contradiction to the testimonies of the women I interviewed in *Sonagachi*. The sex workers entered the profession of their own volition, as emphasized by Bisakha:

I am here working in this profession out of my own free will. Nobody has forced me into this profession. If I go to work as a domestic help[er] in somebody's house I am going there voluntarily, right? Similarly when I come here to work as a sex worker I come voluntarily. I am not compelled by anyone. Why do people think that sex workers are sex slaves? I think it is because they make [up] their own ideas, they do not care to ask the opinion of sex workers.

The Rescue and Rehabilitation of Sex Workers

My interviews with the sex workers of *Sonagachi* showed that propositions of rescue and rehabilitation were not considered to be feasible options. I found that the interviewees considered the rehabilitation approach to be impracticable for several reasons. One of the points raised against the rescue and rehabilitation option was that such a proposition violated the rights of the sex workers as a legitimate labour group.

Fourteen of the interviewees subscribed to the notion that rescue and rehabilitation entailed the violation of the rights and dignity of sex workers. The interviewees noted that rehabilitation is applicable for the poor and destitute, the homeless and the dispossessed, but sex workers were noted to belong to none of these categories. The interviewees also noted that individuals in dangerous or coercive situations have to be rescued. The sex workers were pursuing their vocation voluntarily, and were not in distressed circumstances. Hence the proposition of rescuing the sex workers was questionable. Santana noted:

Well, if they have to rehabilitate, why don't they rehabilitate the homeless people, the people displaced by floods, the street dwellers who are

starving? We are not starving, we have a job. Why don't they rehabilitate the poor beggars? Does the government classify us as beggars? We are not beggars. We have a job. We can look after ourselves and our families. We don't need rehabilitation.

Most of the interviewees assumed that the rescue and rehabilitation proposition for sex workers had moralistic undertones. Such schemes framed by moralistic motives were noted to be in violation of the dignity of sex workers and their profession.

Another reason for repudiating the rescue/rehabilitation proposition was economic. It was noted by sixteen interviewees that rehabilitation was not feasible for financial reasons, as the income generated by sex work was often more than they could make from proposed alternate professions. The women noted that sex workers were mostly illiterate and lacked educational skills that would enable them to be placed in anything other than minimum-wage jobs. The alternative professions proposed to sex workers by government agencies were generally domestic help jobs and menial labour.

Certain NGOs have also proposed providing sex workers with training in weaving, knitting, and bead-working as alternative vocations. However, as the interviewees pointed out, those vocations generate considerably less remuneration than sex work and payments are also often irregular. The interviewees noted the scope of sexual abuse in the vocations of domestic help and construction labour. Bishakha remarked:

I earn 20,000 rupees a month by sex work. I need that money to live well. If I leave my profession will the government give me 20,000 rupees a month? Well they will tell me to become a domestic help[er] or a nanny or a bead-worker. How much will I earn by that? 3,000 rupees, 4,000 rupees? That is not enough to cover my expenses. Tell me, why should I leave this profession and become a domestic help[er]?

The hazards of the alternative professions were noted by Purnima:

If you work in construction you cannot get a day's job without sleeping with the *rajmistri*. Have you seen those women standing for menial labour jobs on the streets of *Razabajar*? They will not get a *paisa*³⁷ without pleasing the *rajmistri* and his subordinates. You give your sex and then

37 *Paisa* is a unit of Indian currency worth approximately 1/47th of a cent.

they may not give you a job. They may not pay you for it. The rehabilitation people want us to take those jobs? Thank you very much but I like to be paid for sex. And I like a steady income. The rehabilitation people tell me the job I do is not moral. How is it moral to be raped by your employer or a whole gang of labourers? How is it immoral to be paid for sex?

The views of Bishakha and Purnima were echoed by other interviewees. Alternative vocations like handicrafts and domestic labour, which are considered to be “honourable” rehabilitation options for sex workers by aid agencies, the government, and NGOs, are not considered to be financially viable. The interviewees were also extremely wary about the chances of sexual violation in the suggested alternative professions and hence questioned the moral ground of such a rehabilitation proposition.

Another reason for dismissing the rehabilitation proposition was the prospect of sexual violation and exploitation in the process of rehabilitation itself. Eleven of the sex workers noted that such rehabilitation projects had failed previously because rehabilitated sex workers were often sexually harassed by the officials engaged in the process.

Rehabilitated sex workers who were situated in mainstream residential areas were often ostracized by their neighbours once their erstwhile professions became known. They were also forced by the male members of their neighbourhood to engage in sexual relations. Lacking the protection of the red-light district and the sex workers’ union, they found themselves to be victims of sexual abuse and constant harassment. Krishna noted:

The government officials or the NGOs who come to rehabilitate us, we are most wary of them. You know why? It is those officials or the NGO workers who will try to take advantage of us. They will say, we will rehabilitate you, we are your saviours. So you will have to give us sex whenever you want. You are sex workers after all. And we have done you an immense favour. You now return the favour. We want sex anytime. No, this is not rehabilitation. It is called abuse. And we refuse to be abused. You want sex? Okay, you pay for it. We do not need to be saved. We work hard day and night, we earn money. We don’t need any favours. We don’t need any saviours. You see, this is why we need labour rights, to prevent this kind of abuse.

I could not obtain any data on sex workers who were rehabilitated by the government or NGO initiatives to judge the success or the lack of it as regards such rehabilitation projects. Based on the interviewees’ statements it appeared

that such rescue and rehabilitation endeavours were often motivated by ulterior factors and were futile in the end. The interviewees may be motivated by scepticism about external interventions to view such rescue and rehabilitation endeavours with suspicion. Logistical realities such as stigmatization, ostracization, and sexual harassment of rehabilitated sex workers might render such rehabilitation efforts futile. Furthermore, the sexual exploitation of sex workers by rehabilitation workers might be a reality in red-light areas that unravels the impact of such external interventions.

Conclusion

A historical analysis of the evolution of sex work in India shows a remarkable shift in the status of the trade, from a mainstream and legitimate one recognized as a labour right, to an illegal and criminal vocation subject to prosecution. The colonization of India and the colonial relationships between race, sexuality, and social control aggravated the process of the delegitimization of sex work and tightened its regulation in urban centres, including Calcutta. A look at the history of sex work in Calcutta and the contemporary representation of sex work in the vernacular media, offers an opportunity for assessing the issues of structural inequalities suffered by groups like commercial female sex workers. In India and around the world, the underlying equation of trafficking and sex work is persistent and is utilized to delegitimize the latter profession. The delegitimization and criminalization of sex work often threatens the health and safety of sex workers as they are then forced to ply their trade secretly and become victims of sexual assault and violence. Compliance with safe sex practices declines significantly and there is a consequent increase in the spread of HIV and venereal diseases in these cases. The rescue and rehabilitation of sex workers generally fails because alternative vocations to sex work are often not viable options.

My interviews with the commercial female sex workers in the red-light district of Calcutta in *Sonagachi* present a striking picture. A state of "servitude", of women compelled into their professions and incarcerated in the red-light zone as it has been portrayed by legislators, policy makers, and feminist scholars, was not discernible. Almost all of the sex workers I interviewed voluntarily entered the profession; rather, economic exigencies were noted to be the primary reason for entering sex work. Trafficking, however, was noted to be a present and persistent problem by the interviewees. But they also noted it to be a process aided by desperately poor individuals striving to get into a vocation like sex work to support their family members.

While I do not offer the conclusion that sex workers are not trafficked or coerced into their profession, my work shows that not all sex workers are victims of trafficking and sexual servitude. In such a case, the application of legislation that uniformly treats them as victims of trafficking and sexual slavery might well be impractical. The interviews I carried out with the *Sonagachi* women indicated that they chose this profession due to financial duress. Yet the interviewees asked that their choice of livelihood be respected and not subjected to moralistic evaluations. They demand legalization and the decriminalization of their vocation as well as the granting of labour rights guided by international labour regulations.

Prostitution in Colonial Hanoi (1885–1954)

Isabelle Tracol-Huynh

Introduction

The celebration of the millennial anniversary of Hanoi in 2010 reminds us that this city has a very long history.¹ In 1010, the emperor Lý Thái Tổ moved his capital to the Đại La Citadel² and Hanoi was officially born, albeit with the name Thăng Long.³ It remained the capital until 1802, when the Nguyễn dynasty moved it to Huế. Even though Hanoi was an important city and prostitution was not a colonial invention in Vietnam, studying the precolonial period is difficult because sources are quite scarce. In addition, the available sources do not explicitly mention prostitutes but generally discuss songstresses and courtesans. One of the most famous Vietnamese novels, *Kim Vân Kiều*, was written at the turn of the nineteenth century, well before the beginning of French colonization, and its heroine is a courtesan.⁴ The words “prostitution”, “prostitute”, and “brothel” do not occur in this long poem; rather, Kiều was a *ca nhi*, a courtesan, trapped in a *lầu xanh*, a green house.⁵ Yet, the sexual and venal dimension was quite present in her life: “Birds flocked the branch, wind stirred the leaves—she’d speed / some beau at dawn, wait for some spark at dusk / [...] poor body bees and butterflies gorged on.”⁶ Courtesans were the

* I owe a special word of thanks to Mark David Wyers for his help with the complexities of English grammar.

1 William S. Logan, *Hanoi: Biography of a City* (Seattle, 2000); Philippe Papin, *Histoire de Hanoi* (Paris, 2001).

2 The history of Hanoi is in fact older: the site was mentioned in the sixth century and citadels were built there in the seventh and eighth centuries. The importance of the city grew during the ninth century and it became the capital of the Chinese protectorate from 866 until 939. Its name was Đại La.

3 The city was first called Thăng Long, then Đông Đô, Đông Quan, Đông Kinh, and Thăng Long again. The city was renamed Hanoi (Hà Nội) in 1831. This will be the name used here since this study focuses on the French colonial period (1885–1954).

4 The author of the text, Nguyễn Du, died in 1820.

5 Nguyễn Du, *The Tale of Kiều*, trans. Huynh Sanh Thông (New Haven, 1983), line 62 p. 4 and line 809 p. 70.

6 *Ibid.*, lines 1231–1232 and 1238, p. 65. The expression “Bees and butterflies” refers to clients.

elite of prostitutes and the prostitutes of the elite, but they were still viewed as prostitutes. They were morally condemned and relegated to life outside the city. In Hanoi, songstresses lived in Thái Hà district, which is on the southern outskirts of the city.⁷

The same ambiguous distinction between courtesans, songstresses, and prostitutes can be found in Vietnamese imperial law. Article 340 of Gia Long's Code, which was enacted in 1812, referred to both prostitutes and songstresses.⁸ It did not, however, make a clear distinction between those professions. The attitude of the authorities towards prostitution was ambiguous as well. Article 340, and in particular the notes and comments of the legislator, mentioned prostitution as a social category, and yet the same article forbade civil and military servants from interacting with prostitutes and songstresses. Further complicating the issue was article 332, which prohibited prostitution as well as other illicit sexual relations, such as extra-marital sex and homosexual relations.⁹ It should be noted that since China was the suzerain of Vietnam until 1885, Vietnamese law reproduced a Chinese law; Gia Long's Code was based on Qing's Code, which tried to moralize Chinese society by condemning all illicit sexual relations, and after 1723, "the legal space for tolerated sex work entirely disappeared."¹⁰ The same process occurred in Vietnam after 1812, but there was a discrepancy between the law, its application, and reality. In his comment on the Vietnamese law, Philastre stated that "legislators condemned the principle but did not try to punish the fact itself, because they may have considered that to be impossible."¹¹

The colonial period was a turning point in the history of prostitution in Vietnam because it was no longer forbidden but authorized and regulated. In colonial Hanoi (1885–1954), the regulation of prostitution was a concern starting from the establishment of the Hanoi municipality until the end of French rule.¹² Physicians, police, and administrators tried to control the world of prostitution because Hanoi had a significant European population as well

7 Charles-Édouard Hocquard and Philippe Papin (eds), *Une Campagne au Tonkin* (Paris, 1999), pp. 302–303.

8 Paul-Louis-Félix Philastre, *Le Code annamite* (Paris, 1909), pp. 546–548.

9 *Ibid.*, pp. 524–525.

10 Matthew H. Sommer, *Sex, Law and Society in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, 2000), p. 210.

11 Philastre, *Le Code annamite*, p. 548. The same comment can be found in P.J. Silvestre, *Considérations sur l'étude du droit annamite* (Saigon, 1922 [first ed. 1901]), p. 145.

12 Hanoi citadel was attacked by the French first in 1873, which led to the creation of the French concession in 1875, then again in 1882. In 1885, the French protectorate over Tonkin, and therefore over Hanoi, was officially recognized by China, Vietnam's centuries old suzerain.

as troops, and the authorities were concerned about protecting them from venereal diseases. The regulation of prostitution was also implemented to protect morality and, as the city was the capital of Tonkin (northern Vietnam) and of the whole of French Indochina, authorities believed that Hanoi should be a “perfect” colonial city and an example of French colonial success. Colonial authorities used several means such as architecture, hygiene, science, and education to control the population by setting up a process of *dressage* (breaking in) of souls and bodies, which included the regulation of prostitution.¹³

The mission of the municipality was difficult because Hanoi had a unique administrative status. Although it was the capital of the French protectorate, it was not part of the protectorate itself because the city had been granted to France by the Vietnamese emperor in 1888. Hanoi was therefore a French enclave where French law applied, and it was surrounded by the Tonkin protectorate where Vietnamese law still held sway. As it has been noted, “Hanoi’s borders are not just municipal; they are national frontiers.”¹⁴ This situation had consequences for the administration of prostitution. Regulation in Hanoi did not apply outside the city limits and the vice squad police had no authority over suburban areas and the many prostitutes who lived and worked there. It was noted that “a dozen clandestine prostitutes and prostitutes running from the vice squad police are working in a furnished room located right outside the city limit. They scoff at the police since they are protected by the city post which is as powerful as the China border post.”¹⁵ This complex situation lasted until 1943, when the Special Division of Hanoi was created with the aim of controlling prostitution, both inside and outside municipal limits. However, even after 1943, the problem still remained since this inclusion only drove houses of prostitution further away.

The transformation of prostitution during French colonization explains how, for some authors, prostitution was a colonial invention. One of Dr Coppin’s former students (Dr Coppin was the director of the municipal clinic of Hanoi where prostitutes were examined) stated that venereal diseases and prostitution had been brought to Vietnam by the French, and he argued that “before the conquest, they did not exist.”¹⁶ Dr Dang Van Chin, the director of

13 Emmanuelle Saada, *Les Enfants de la colonie: Les métis de l’Empire français entre sujétion et citoyenneté* (Paris, 2007), p. 79.

14 Bernard Joyeux and Henri Virgitti, “Le Péril vénérien dans la zone suburbaine de Hanoi”, *Bulletin de la Société Médico-Chirurgicale de l’Indochine* [hereafter BSMCI] (1937), pp. 73–108, 73. See also Philippe Papin, *Histoire de Hanoi* (Paris, 2001), pp. 43–59.

15 Joyeux and Virgitti, “Le Péril vénérien dans la zone suburbaine”, pp. 75–76.

16 Henri Coppin, “La Prostitution, la police des mœurs et le dispensaire municipal à Hanoi”, *BSMCI* (1925), pp. 243–271, 247.

the municipal clinic of Saigon in the 1940s and '50s, corroborated this idea when he wrote that prostitution had existed in Vietnam for just a century, referring to the beginning of French colonization.¹⁷ The same stance can be seen in some contemporary researchers' work. According to Ngô Vĩnh Long, "prostitution in Vietnam was a nineteenth century phenomenon born out of the impacts of colonialism, imperialism, and war."¹⁸ Although prostitution did exist before French colonization, it is true that because of all the changes that occurred, colonial prostitution radically differed from the precolonial one.¹⁹ In the 1880s in Hanoi, the setting up of the French municipality and the regulation of prostitution marked the beginning of a new era for sold sex, which drew to a close in 1954. After this date, prostitution was strictly forbidden by the Communist Party in North Vietnam, and prostitutes were sent to re-education camps. Nowadays, prostitution remains illegal in Vietnam, but it exists nonetheless. Unfortunately, there is no literature on prostitution in contemporary Hanoi, and the few studies that exist focus mostly on Ho Chi Minh City and more precisely on post-*Đổi Mới* Ho Chi Minh.²⁰ This period is seen as a major turning point in Vietnamese history, especially for gender studies, because there were numerous changes which impacted women's place in society. In these studies, the private, political, and economic spheres are linked together to explore the new governance of the Vietnamese state in the global economy:²¹ "The role of the state and the politics of *đổi mới* or reform are thus gendered projects and the *đổi mới* state uses constructions of gender as a form of state power."²²

17 The colonization of the southern part of Vietnam, Cochinchina, started in the 1850s, thirty years before the conquest of Tonkin and Annam, the northern and central regions of Vietnam.

18 Ngô Vĩnh Long, "Social and Legal Definitions of Prostitution", in Nanette J. Davis (ed.), *Prostitution: an International Handbook on Trends, Problems, and Policies* (Westport, 1993), pp. 327–350, 327.

19 During the colonial period, prostitution was authorized and expanded in both quality and quantity; there were increasing numbers of prostitutes and new forms of sold sex appeared, such as taxi-girls and *entraîneuses*.

20 *Đổi Mới* is the name given to the economic reforms initiated in Vietnam in 1986 by the Communist Party to create a socialist market economy. Philippe Le Failler, "Le renouveau des lentilles d'eau: de la prostitution à Hanoi à la toute fin du XXe siècle", *Moussons* 29, (2017), pp. 127–142.

21 The title of Nguyễn-Võ Thu Hương's Ph.D. thesis illustrates this focus: "Governing the Social: Prostitution and Liberal Governance in Vietnam during Marketization" (Ph.D., University of California, 1998). She published it under another title: *The Ironies of Freedom: Sex, Culture, and Neoliberal Governance in Vietnam*, (Seattle, 2008).

22 Jayne Werner, "Gender Matters: Gender Studies and Việt Nam Studies", in Gisèle Bousquet and Nora Taylor (eds), *Le Việt Nam au féminin Việt Nam: Women's Realities* (Paris, 2005),

This focus on the colonial period is related to the global coherence of the era and the lack of sources and information for the pre- and postcolonial eras. There is a fairly significant amount of archival material about prostitution in Hanoi during the period of colonization since the city was the seat of several administrations, not just the municipality but also the *Résidence supérieure au Tonkin* (the government of Tonkin) and the *Résidence générale de l'Indochine* (the government of Indochina). There were medical associations as well, such as the Medical Society of Indochina and the Prophylactic League of Hanoi. However, the materials available are quite fragmentary because the majority of documents, for example the vice squad police reports and medical texts, have not been preserved at the archives.²³ In short, the existing sources are by no means exhaustive. While it may be easier to obtain information about the regulation of prostitution or about venereal diseases, it is more difficult to find out about prostitutes' lives or glean information about the brothels since the colonial authorities, whether medical, police or administrative, did not pay much attention to such subjects. Their main, if not only, concern was medical; although the most detailed report about prostitution in Hanoi provides a wealth of information about the various kinds of houses of prostitution (brothels, songstresses' houses, *maisons de rendez-vous*, etc., along with their addresses) and the names and amounts of drugs used to treat prostitutes' diseases, there is no information about their ages or social backgrounds, for example.²⁴ The available sources are also biased because they are largely univocal; French men wrote about Vietnamese women with all their incumbent stereotypes about their race and sex. In the 1930s, however, some Vietnamese journalists took interest in the issue of prostitution in Hanoi.²⁵ These works provide an

pp. 19–41, 34. See also Lisa Drummond, "Introduction", in Helle Rydstrom (ed.), *Gender Practices in Contemporary Vietnam* (Singapore, 2004), pp. 1–25.

23 These are preserved at the *Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer* in Aix-en-Provence, France [hereafter ANOM] and, for Hanoi and the Tonkin, in the Vietnamese National Archives' Centre 1 in Hanoi [hereafter VNA1].

24 Bernard Joyeux, "Le Pêril vénérien et la prostitution à Hanoi", *BSMCI* (1930), pp. 453–675. See Isabelle Tracol-Huynh, "The Shadow Theatre of Prostitution in French Colonial Tonkin: Faceless Prostitutes under the Colonial Gaze", *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, 7 (2012), pp. 10–51.

25 Việt Sinh, "Hà Nội Ban Đêm" ["Hanoi by Night"], in *Phóng Sự Việt Nam 1932–1945* (Hanoi, Nhà xuất bản văn học, 2000 [first ed. in the newspaper *Phong Hóa*, 1933]), pp. 685–705; Vũ Trọng Phụng, S., *Lục xì: Prostitution and Venereal Diseases in Colonial Hanoi*, trans. Kinglsey Malarney (Honolulu, 2011); *Làm đĩ* ["Prostitution"] (Haiphong, Nhà xuất bản Hải Phòng, 2001 [1936]); Trọng Lang, "Hà Nội Lầm Than" ["Miserable Hanoi"], in *Phóng Sự Việt Nam 1932–1945* (Hanoi, Nhà xuất bản văn học, 2000 [first ed. in the newspaper *Đời nay*,

abundance of information about prostitutes' lives, but still, they were not written by the prostitutes themselves. The journalists were men and they likely had their own agendas when they wrote news stories about prostitutes. In these articles, prostitutes tend to become the object of a discourse that overtakes them in the sense that the stories were used to denounce either the women's living conditions, the danger that venereal diseases posed for society, or the occidentalization of Vietnamese society.²⁶ Because of the nature of these fragmentary and biased sources, some aspects of the world of prostitution will not be covered in this article.

A Complex Definition of Prostitution

In metropolitan France and in the French empire, prostitution was neither a crime nor an offence, unlike soliciting and procuring. The authorities perceived it to be something immoral but inevitable because they believed that men could not remain chaste, especially when they were soldiers: "Are the colonial troops chaste? It may be a good title for a novel, but this question is too ridiculous to even think about seriously."²⁷ Prostitution was therefore accepted as a natural outlet for masculine needs, but only if strictly regulated. For the authorities, prostitution was a better solution than concubinage, which "was replaced by more restricted sexual access in the politically safe (but medically unsatisfactory) context of prostitution, and, where possible, in the more desirable setting of marriage between 'full-blooded' Europeans."²⁸ The French regulatory system was therefore exported to Vietnam in the early years of the colonial period. The protectorate of Tonkin was officially created in 1885, and, in the same year, the Military Commandment and the Military Health Services laid the foundations of the first prophylactic campaign. The French military authorities were concerned about the physical health of the troops and about the conservation of manpower, since the tropical climate had already taken a toll on their military forces. The first civil regulation regarding prostitution was adopted in 1886 in Haiphong and Hanoi. After this date, the mayors of Hanoi

1938]), pp. 93–243; Thao Thao, "Gái Lục-sì" ["Dispensary's Girls"], *Việt Báo* (February and March 1937).

26 See Isabelle Tracol-Huynh, "Entre ordre colonial et santé publique: la prostitution au Tonkin de 1885 à 1954" (Unpublished Ph.D., Université Lyon, 2013), pp. 366–381.

27 Bernard Joyeux, "Projet de lutte antivénéérienne à Hanoi", *BSMCI* (1934), pp. 901–923, 904.

28 Ann Laura Stoler, "Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in 20th-Century Colonial Cultures", *American Ethnologist* 16 (1989), pp. 634–660, 639.

issued several decrees with the aim of improving the regulation of prostitution, and sold sex was still regulated in the 1950s, even after the replacement of the French municipality by a Vietnamese system in 1949.²⁹ The decree issued in 1951 was a translation of the one enacted in 1915 by the French authorities.

In the first decrees, there was no precise definition of prostitution, as if the authorities believed it to be sufficiently obvious.³⁰ The 1906 decree mentioned women who were “notoriously known for being prostitutes” without explaining what that meant exactly.³¹ The 1907 decree was more precise and, even though it did not provide a clear definition of prostitution, it gave some criteria: A woman was deemed to be a prostitute if she often spent time with other prostitutes, frequented brothels, breached moral standards by soliciting on the streets, if she was diagnosed with a venereal disease, or invited various men into her house.³² Later, a prostitute was defined as “a woman who exchanged her own body for money to all and sundry without choice.”³³ One issue, however, was clear; even in the first succinct decrees, in the authorities’ eyes prostitutes were women and women only.³⁴ However, male prostitution did exist in Hanoi and in Vietnam in general, but it was not regulated even though homosexuality was no longer specified as a crime in France after 1791.³⁵ In Hanoi, male prostitution existed in clandestine brothels which were referred to as *maisons de boys*.³⁶ Despite their well-known existence, male prostitutes were not included in the regulation of prostitution because it went against accepted gender roles in the world of prostitution; prostitutes were thought only to be women, while men were conceptualized as clients by the authorities in charge of the police and members of medical committees of regulation. The discourse about male prostitution in colonial Tonkin was therefore highly moralizing;

29 Michael G. Vann, “White City on a Red River: Race, Power, and Culture in French Colonial Hanoi, 1872–1954” (Unpublished Ph.D., University of California, 1999), p. 302.

30 Paola Tabet, *La grande Arnaque. Sexualité des femmes et échange économique-sexuel* (Paris, 2004), p. 7.

31 Decree of the Hanoi mayor, 24 January 1906, article 1.

32 Decree of the Hanoi mayor, 25 April 1907, article 35.

33 Decree of the resident superior in Tonkin, 3 February 1921, article 34.

34 Words like *femme* (woman) or *fille* (girl) were used in the decrees of 1886, 1888, 1891 and 1906.

35 Régis Revenin, *Homosexualité et prostitution masculines à Paris, 1870–1918* (Paris, 2005), p. 166.

36 Record Group [hereafter RG] Mairie de Hanoi, Serie D638, File 2583, *Correspondances relatives à la prostitution à Hanoi en 1910* (1910), VNA1; Adrien-Charles Le Roy Des Barres, “La Prostitution à Hanoi”, *BSMCI* (1912), pp. 21–28, 27; Joyeux, *Projet de lutte antivénéérienne à Hanoi*, p. 911.

male prostitution, as well as homosexuality in general, was described as an “unnatural and despicable vice”.³⁷ In parallel with this discourse, justifications were made which asserted that European men were “corrupted” by “depraved” Vietnamese boys, opium, the tropical climate, and so on.³⁸ The main goal was to protect the virile image of the European colonizers and, therefore, colonization itself.

Prostitution was defined as an exchange between a woman and a man in which the man paid money for the sexual services provided by a woman, but prostitution was certainly not limited to this legal definition. There were many *situations prostitutionnelles*, and male prostitution was one of them. In her study of prostitution in contemporary Ho Chi Minh City, Kimberly Kay Hoang writes that “women [can] offer a variety of services that go beyond sex, in return for various forms of payment beyond money.”³⁹ This analysis was valid for the colonial period as well, and the French authorities were well aware of the issue. They thus tried to apply the regulation of prostitution to other categories of women, such as songstresses and the concubines of Europeans, as though they were trying to control all women who were in contact with Europeans. Nevertheless, they failed in this attempt and Europeans’ concubines, taxi-girls, and songstresses were not officially treated like prostitutes in Hanoi. The taxi-girls and the songstresses had their own regulation which clearly distinguished them from prostitutes. One of this decree’s articles stated that “prostitution is strictly forbidden at bar-dancing and songstresses houses.”⁴⁰

In this way, the boundaries between prostitutes, taxi-girls and songstresses were more ambiguous, as shown by the example of songstresses.⁴¹ Originally,

37 See, for example, RG: Mairie de Hanoi, Serie D638, File 2583, *Correspondances relatives à la prostitution à Hanoi en 1910* (1910), VNA1.

38 About these justifications, see Jennifer Yee, *Clichés de la femme exotique: Un regard sur la littérature coloniale française entre 1871 et 1914* (Paris, 2000), p. 192; Franck Proschan, “Syphilis, Opiomania, and Pederasty: Colonial Constructions of Vietnamese (and French) Social Diseases”, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 11 (2002), pp. 610–636, 622–625.

39 Kimberly Kay Hoang, “She’s Not a Low-Class Dirty Girl!”: Sex Work in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam”, *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 40 (2011), pp. 367–396, 368–369.

40 Decree of the resident superior in Tonkin, 22 May 1939, article 9.

41 The same process occurred with concubines; the colonial authorities tried their best to control the women living with Europeans, especially soldiers, by forcing them to get cards and be medically examined, like prostitutes. They failed, however, since these measures were illegal as concubines did not fulfil the criteria of the legal definition of prostitute. On this subject, see Vũ Trọng Phụng, *The Industry of Marrying Europeans* (Ithaca, 2006 [1934]) and Tracol-Huynh, “Entre ordre colonial et santé publique”, pp. 43–58. For an example of the authorities’ attempt to include concubines in the regulation of prostitution, see

songstress houses were not brothels but places where men listened to traditional Chinese music.⁴² In the 1920s, these houses began to evolve into regular brothels and the sexual aspect of the relations between prostitutes and their clients tended to prevail, if not become exclusive. This evolution was deeply regretted by some Vietnamese journalists, one of whom noted, “Nowadays, in a century where materialism prevails, songstresses who claim to respect the honourable manners of Ng-Công-Tru and Yên-Dô’s times are nothing but truly established prostitutes.”⁴³ Songstresses were an issue for the French colonial authorities in the whole of Tonkin.⁴⁴ The authorities tried to subject them to regulation, but they were unsuccessful because songstresses did not fall within the scope of the juridical definition of a prostitute.⁴⁵ In 1944, the mayor of Hanoi ordered the police to raid songstress houses and arrest the women working there, with the aim of taking them to the dispensary. After the raids, an arrangement was made; the police would no longer raid songstress houses and the owners would rent a quiet place where their employees would undergo medical examinations. These examinations were part of the regulation of prostitution and therefore a tacit indicator that songstresses were, in fact, prostitutes. The resident superior in Tonkin approved this arrangement but pointed out that “the measures are difficult to reconcile with the 22 May 1939 decree which forbids prostitution in songstress houses and is still in force [...]. This experience should therefore remain unofficial.”⁴⁶

An Ineffective yet Long-lasting Regulation

Officially, prostitution was strictly regulated. The main aspects of the regulation of prostitution were the registration of every prostitute with the vice squad police, a weekly medical examination the results of which had to be noted on the prostitutes’ cards, the automatic confinement of diseased prostitutes at the municipal dispensary or in hospitals, the compulsory placement of a

RG: Mairie de Hanoi, Serie D638, File 2587, *Correspondances relatives à la prophylaxie des maladies vénériennes* (1917), VNA1 or RG: RSTNF, File 00746, *Prostitution pièces de principe* (1938–1940), ANOM.

42 Hocquard, *Une campagne au Tonkin*, p. 303.

43 “Prostitution”, *Annam nouveau*, 6 February 1936. Nguyễn Công Tru and Yên Do were famous Vietnamese poets who lived in the first half of the nineteenth century.

44 Tracol-Huynh, “Entre ordre colonial et santé publique”, pp. 99–110.

45 Decree of the resident superior in Tonkin, 3 February 1921, article 34.

46 RG: Mairie de Hanoi, Serie D638, File 2596 *Interdiction de faire de la prostitution dans les maisons de chanteuses* (1944), VNA1.

washbasin, soap, and prophylactic products in brothels, a permit had to be issued by the district authorities when brothels were opened, and the taxation of brothels. The first decrees were accompanied by the creation of a vice squad and a dispensary, the two indispensable tools for establishing a regulatory system along French lines. In 1886, prostitution was regulated in Hanoi, and archival documentation indicates that in March of 1888 for the first time there was a municipal clinic for prostitutes, and in December of 1888, a vice squad was created.⁴⁷ The police were in charge of implementation of the law, as “all prostitutes [had] to register with the vice squad police.”⁴⁸ After registration, each prostitute was provided with a card which included her photograph and a physical description of her, and she had to show it to policemen whenever they requested to see it.⁴⁹ When she registered with the police, she also had to provide information such as her name, age, place of birth, last address, last occupation, and, more importantly, the address of the brothel in which she would work.⁵⁰

Prostitutes' lives were, in theory, under the constant surveillance of policemen and physicians. In practice, however, regulation failed due to the discrepancy between the regulations and the actual extent of state power. The vice squad was never given the necessary resources to enforce the regulation; in 1912, there was only one policeman responsible for registering prostitutes, guarding the dispensary, watching over the nurses, and so on. He was also charged with finding clandestine prostitutes and brothels throughout the whole city, which meant that he had to do eighty kilometres of rounds on foot, since he had no vehicle at his disposal.⁵¹ The vice squad also lacked the means to keep tabs on all the prostitutes and brothels. In the 1930s, attempts were made to rectify this situation, and the number of police on the vice squad was increased fivefold, but these agents were still unable to monitor the 3,000 to 5,000 prostitutes in Hanoi, a fact confirmed by the director of the local Health Board; he noted, “Due to the qualitative and quantitative deficiency of an inexistent or embryonic vice squad [...] we check 5 per cent of the prostitutes at most.”⁵² In the 1940s, there was one European policeman and an additional twelve

47 Decree of the resident superior in Tonkin, 28 April 1886; RG: RST, Serie S15, File 73684, *Réglementation de la prostitution. Dispensaires de Hanoi, Haiphong et autres (1888–1913)*, VNA; decree of the resident mayor of Hanoi, 21 December 1888, article 1.

48 Decree of the resident superior in Tonkin, 3 February 1921, article 4.

49 *Ibid.*, article 5.

50 *Ibid.*, article 3.

51 Le Roy Des Barres, “La Prostitution à Hanoi”, pp. 26–27.

52 RG: RSTNF, File003856 *Prophylaxie des maladies vénériennes (1917–1940)*, ANOM.

Vietnamese policemen on the squad, but this was still not enough because the number of prostitutes and brothels continued to increase.⁵³ The police were also faced with the fact that brothels were spread throughout the city, which made it almost impossible to control them.⁵⁴ From the very beginning of regulation in the 1890s, the police requested that brothels be gathered together in one red-light district, as they argued that this would make it easier to control them:⁵⁵ “The creation of a red-light district is essential, but this measure will be quite problematic.”⁵⁶ In Hanoi, the question was recurrent throughout the colonial period and the municipality placed this idea on the agenda several times (in 1916, 1917, 1926, 1932, and 1951),⁵⁷ yet it was never implemented. The geography of prostitution in the city did not change much between the 1890s and the 1950s, and as one commentator stated, “The brothels are scattered in the city, as they used to be in the past”,⁵⁸ as seen in map 21.1. The areas where prostitution was carried out remained largely the same; around the Citadel, in the Vietnamese quarter, and in the suburban zone which was known as the “Venus belt” of Hanoi.⁵⁹

The primary role of the vice squad was to identify and register all prostitutes and to make them visible to the authorities, but this goal was rather utopian:

There are more than 2,000 prostitutes in Hanoi [in 1915]. Among them, only 909 are registered and among those 909 prostitutes, only 82 are regularly examined at the dispensary. The surveillance which is carried out by just one vice squad officer is extremely inadequate because only a few

53 RG: Mairie de Hanoi, Serie S03, File 5769, *Rapport annuel sur le fonctionnement du service municipal d'hygiène de Hanoi en 1942 (1942)*, VNA1; RG: Mairie de Hanoi, Serie D638, File 2595, *Rapport sur la prostitution à Hanoi en 1943 (1943)*, VNA1.

54 See, for example, RG: Mairie de Hanoi, File 2585, *Correspondances relatives à la prostitution à Hanoi (1915–1916)*, VNA1.

55 The ideal of a red-light district was first implemented in French Morocco, in Casablanca. See Christelle Teraud, *La Prostitution coloniale Algérie, Tunisie, Maroc (1830–1962)* (Paris, 2003), pp. 81–125.

56 RG: Mairie de Hanoi, Serie D638, File 2580, *Rapport du commissariat de police sur les maisons de tolérance sises à Hanoi (1896)*, VNA1.

57 RG: Mairie de Hanoi, Serie D638, File 2585, *Correspondances relatives à la prostitution à Hanoi (1915–1916)* and File 2587, *Correspondances relatives à la prophylaxie des maladies vénériennes (1917)*, VNA1; RG: RST, File 78667, *Dossiers divers relatifs à la police de la voie publique (1921–1942)*, VNA1; RG: Mairie de Hanoi après 1945, Serie D638, File 294, *Bài trò nạn mãi dâm—Quy chế nhà chứa (1948–1953)*, VNA1.

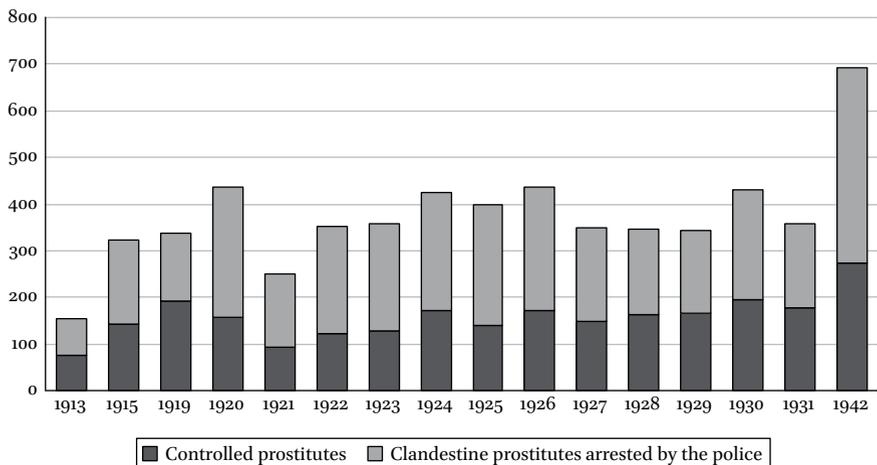
58 RG: RST, File 78667, *Dossiers divers relatifs à la police de la voie publique (1921–1942)*, VNA1.

59 RG: Mairie de Hanoi, Serie D638, File 2593, *Mesures prophylactiques des maladies vénériennes à Hanoi (1936–1938)*, VNA1.

prostitutes are checked. 82 prostitutes are examined but only about 40 receive regular medical examinations.⁶⁰

There were therefore two categories of prostitutes. On the one hand, there were prostitutes who had registered with the police and who obeyed the regulations and were called *filles soumises*; on the other hand, there were all the other prostitutes who were described as *clandestine* and who outnumbered by far those of the first category. The number of clandestine prostitutes indicated in graph 21.1 is far lower than the actual number because it only indicates those that the police were able to arrest, and by no means could they arrest them all.

For the most part, prostitutes did not want to register with the police and be medically examined, so they did everything they could to avoid registration. They also were terrified of being confined at the municipal dispensary, which was likely little more than a prison. Even the municipal doctor criticized the Hanoi dispensary for being too coercive: "This sanitary institution is in fact a prison. The poor girls are confined behind thick wire fences as if they were wild animals. The harshness of this confinement is not even compensated by the quality of the treatment because this treatment is notoriously inadequate, due to a lack of means and staff."⁶¹ In the 1930's, improvements were made and the mayor of Hanoi stated:



GRAPH 21.1 Annual activities of the vice squad police in Hanoi, 1913–1942

SOURCE: ANNUAL REPORTS OF THE MUNICIPAL BUREAU OF HYGIENE, VNAL.

60 RG: Mairie de Hanoi, Serie D638, File 2585, *Correspondances relatives à la prostitution à Hanoi (1915–1916)*, VNAL.

61 RG: RSTNF, File 003856, *Prophylaxie des maladies vénériennes (1917–1940)*, ANOM.

Despite what some people still say, the dispensary is no longer a coercive hospital. It is a true hospital, more pleasant than an ordinary sanitary institution thanks to its garden, its pagoda, and its sources of entertainment. It is coupled with a charitable organization which works for the moral and material improvement of prostitutes, and their results are very promising.⁶²

However, the coercive aspect of the Hanoi dispensary was still denounced by journalists such as Thao for “having all the characteristics of a coercive hospital; nothing can escape from it, thanks to the sky-high walls [and] grey doors, which are always silently closed.”⁶³ Fear of confinement explains why prostitutes, whether registered or clandestine, who had been arrested by the police tried their best to conceal their diseases from the physician and why most prostitutes did not want to register.

Regulation was a blatant failure, even in the eyes of some of the people who had to enforce it.⁶⁴ However, it was never abrogated because it was seen as being the lesser evil. The debate between abolitionists and regulationists which was going on in Europe at that time started in Hanoi only in 1930, but it concluded rather quickly because physicians, policemen, and the authorities all thought that the colony was not ready for abolition and that a system of regulation had to be maintained.⁶⁵

Abolitionism is an elegant solution for a State because it involves a high degree of evolution and organization that only a few States, even among the abolitionist ones, really and totally achieve. If we choose to adopt that solution, we would claim that pauperism does not exist, that censuses are perfectly conducted, that administrative services are serious and thorough, that the civic and juridical education system is satisfactory, that the sanitary facilities are well supplied with staff and medicine, etc., etc. In a word, we would proclaim that we are extremely civilized and meticulously organized. I do not think that Indochina has reached that level yet. [...] In this country, one cannot be regulationist nor abolitionist but opportunist—in other words, evolutionist.⁶⁶

62 Henri Virgitti, *Quelques Œuvres sociales dans la ville de Hanoi* (Hanoi, 1938), p. 61.

63 Thao Thao, “Gái Lụa-Sì”.

64 For example, in the 1930s the director of the municipal clinic, Dr Joyeux, and Mayor Henri Virgitti were very critical of the system.

65 Tracol-Huynh, “Entre ordre colonial et santé publique”, pp. 291–354.

66 RG: Commission Guernut, File 24Bd, ANOM.

The main purpose of the regulation of prostitution was to protect the population from venereal diseases. The end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century constituted “the golden age of the venereal threat.”⁶⁷ Doctors, administrators, journalists, and even novelists seized on the issue and turned venereal diseases into an issue that threatened to bring about the degeneration of the entire race, especially since syphilis was described as being hereditary. This threat was felt in both metropolitan France and the colonies, but it was more feared in the colonies. According to some physicians, the symptoms in the colonies, and especially in Tonkin, were aggravated by the climate. Venereal diseases were therefore described as “endemic” and the statistics provided by civilian and above all military physicians were particularly alarming;⁶⁸ the average venereal morbidity rate was around 30 per cent among colonial troops.⁶⁹

Therefore it was argued that prostitutes had to be controlled as rigorously as possible, and they were seen as the main, if not the only, source of contagion.⁷⁰ The main purpose of regulation was to keep prostitutes healthy, insofar as the available drugs made that possible, in order to prevent men from contracting venereal diseases, especially European men. Prostitutes were not perceived as being morally repulsive because they sold their bodies but because their bodies represented the threat of venereal diseases which could spread to the entire social body. It was for this reason that they were described as being particularly filthy.⁷¹ Furthermore, prostitutes were “well known for being concerned with neither their own health nor that of their partners.”⁷² This, according to physicians, explained the high rates of venereal contamination among prostitutes and more specifically among clandestine prostitutes who did not undergo weekly medical examinations.

A critical reading should be made of graph 21.2. Firstly, clandestine prostitutes were more numerous, so the vice squad police could not arrest them all.

67 Alain Corbin, “Le Péril vénérien au début du siècle, prophylaxie sanitaire et prophylaxie morale”, *Recherches*, 29 (1977), pp. 245–283, 246.

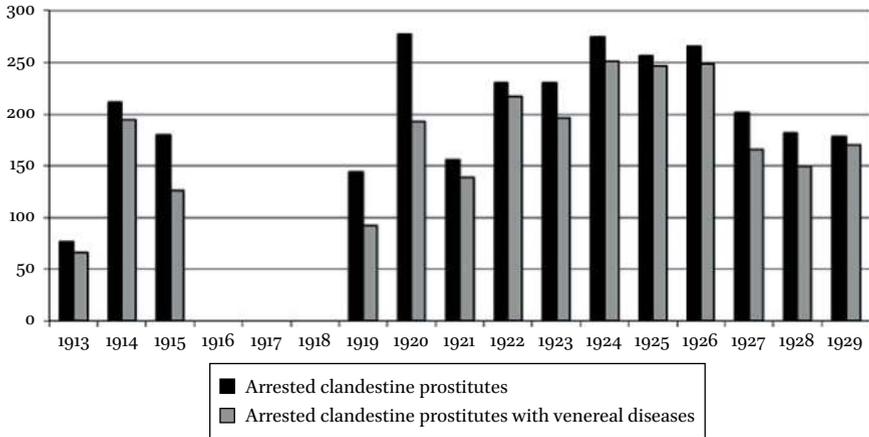
68 RG: RSTNF, File 03856, *Prophylaxie des maladies vénériennes (1917–1940)*, ANOM.

69 Abadie-Bayro, “Morbidity vénérienne des troupes européennes”, p. 31; GAIDE, *Le Péril vénérien en Indochine*, p. 23.

70 Annick Guénel, “Prostitution, maladies vénériennes et médecine coloniale”, in John Kleinen (ed.), *Vietnamese Society in Transition: The Daily Politics of Reform and Change* (Amsterdam, 2001), pp. 233–249; Tracol-Huynh, “Entre ordre colonial et santé publique”, pp. 156–158.

71 Joyeux, “Le Péril vénérien”, p. 570.

72 RG: Mairie de Hanoi, Serie D638, File 2593, *Mesures prophylactiques des maladies vénériennes à Hanoi (1936–1938)*, VNAI.



GRAPH 21.2 *Arrested clandestine prostitutes, Hanoi 1913–1929*

SOURCE: BULLETIN DE LA SOCIÉTÉ MÉDICO-CHIRURGICALE DE L'INDOCHINE.

Secondly, and more importantly, the figures are distorted by the fact that the arrests of prostitutes and the subsequent reporting of their diseases were often the result of clients denouncing them to the police after they themselves had contracted a venereal disease. This explains the high rate of contamination among arrested prostitutes in the figure. Clandestine prostitutes were, without a doubt, neither more nor less affected by venereal diseases than registered prostitutes. Reports always emphasized the health dangers posed by clandestine prostitutes and this type of argument was invoked wherever the authorities attempted to ensure that prostitutes underwent medical examinations. Vũ Trọng Phụng, Thao, and other Vietnamese journalists shared the French authorities' anxieties about the venereal danger and, therefore, their ideas about prostitution and its regulation.⁷³ Vũ Trọng Phụng, for example, gave a scathing description of the prostitutes being held at the dispensary. According to him, prostitutes were “fetid bodies [...] ugly, filthy ghosts whose flesh reeks of nauseating cheap perfume, [and they have] saggy breasts, the skin of their thighs is inflamed with scabies or ringworm or marked with scattered black circles, the historical vestiges of the syphilis germ.”⁷⁴ Thao entitled one of his pieces

73 For example: “No one has ever doubted the existence of the venereal danger in Indochina's big cities, in Hanoi and in the suburban zone. The Vietnamese were unanimous when they asked the authorities to urgently find a solution to that very dangerous situation.” “Les conceptions modernes de la lutte contre le péril vénérien”, *Annam nouveau* (1938).

74 Vũ Trọng Phụng, *Lục xì*, p. 74.

“Society of Germs” and warned that the entire population of Hanoi would soon be infected.⁷⁵

There was a consensus on the necessity of regulation; the idea was that it had to be maintained but it also had to be improved. Police monitoring could not prevail because the vice squad did not have the means to fulfil its duty. Chasing after clandestine prostitutes was no longer seen as the right way to protect the population from venereal diseases, especially since there were now new medicines that were more effective than the previous ones.⁷⁶ It was argued that prostitutes should go willingly to the dispensary to be medically treated and they should not fear going there. That was one of the reasons why improvements were made to the Hanoi municipal dispensary in the 1930s:⁷⁷

All things considered, the dispensary is a hospitable prison where poor girls are incarcerated despite the fact that they committed no crime. They are only suffering from one or several venereal diseases which were given to them by men. No one has ever taken action against these men, and nothing has been done. In order to conceal the harsh truth behind the prostitutes’ detention, the Prophylactic League is endeavouring to create games and distractions [in the dispensary].⁷⁸

Physicians called for the humanization of the way prostitutes were treated, and they tried to develop a more social form of practicing medicine; special consultations for venereal patients in regular hospitals were organized, and *visiteuses sociales* (social nurses) were sent to the brothels, whether regulated or clandestine, in order to teach basic hygiene to prostitutes.⁷⁹ Despite all these

75 “Xã hội ... vi trùng” and “Dân thành-phố Hanoi sẽ trở nên những dân ‘ốm’ cả”, Thao Thao, “Gái Lụa-sì”, *Việt Báo*, 26 February 1937.

76 Laurence Monnais, “From Colonial Medicines to Global Phamarceuticals? The Introduction of Sulfa Drugs in French Vietnam”, *East Asian Science, Technology and Society: an International Journal*, 3 (2009), pp. 257–285.

77 Henri Virgitti was the perfect example of the shift in the French colonial authorities’ conception of the management of prostitution. He was the mayor of Hanoi in the 1930s and also the director of the Prophylactic League which tried to improve the regulation of prostitution and make it more humane. In his book *Quelques œuvres sociales dans la ville de Hanoi* (the title sums it up) he described the changes he made at the dispensary.

78 Joyeux and Virgitti, “Le Pêril vénérien dans la zone suburbaine”, p. 121.

79 Starting in 1937, physicians began asking for nurses but they only appeared in the reports in 1942. See RG: Mairie de Hanoi, Serie S03, File 5769, *Rapport annuel sur le fonctionnement du service municipal d’hygiène de Hanoi en 1942 (1942)*, VNA1. However, the reports starting from 1938 and going up to and including 1951 are missing from the archives.

changes, the regulation of prostitution remained coercive and the dispensary was still feared by prostitutes.

Prostitution in the City

In February 1914, the Hanoi vice squad arrested twenty-six clandestine prostitutes. The report issued on this occasion provides information about these prostitutes, such as their place of origin.⁸⁰

Most of them were from various rural provinces around Hanoi and from small villages, and they had no education. In a newspaper article, N. T., a Vietnamese journalist, reported that a prostitute told him, “I am just a country girl, with no instruction, with nothing [...]. I am wandering around the city with an empty stomach and an empty head.”⁸¹ Urbanization was on the rise throughout the French colonial period; in 1907, there were 51,000 people living in Hanoi, 86,000 in 1913, and 145,000 in 1937.⁸² The growth of prostitution was

TABLE 21.1 *Place of origin of some Hanoi prostitutes in 1914*

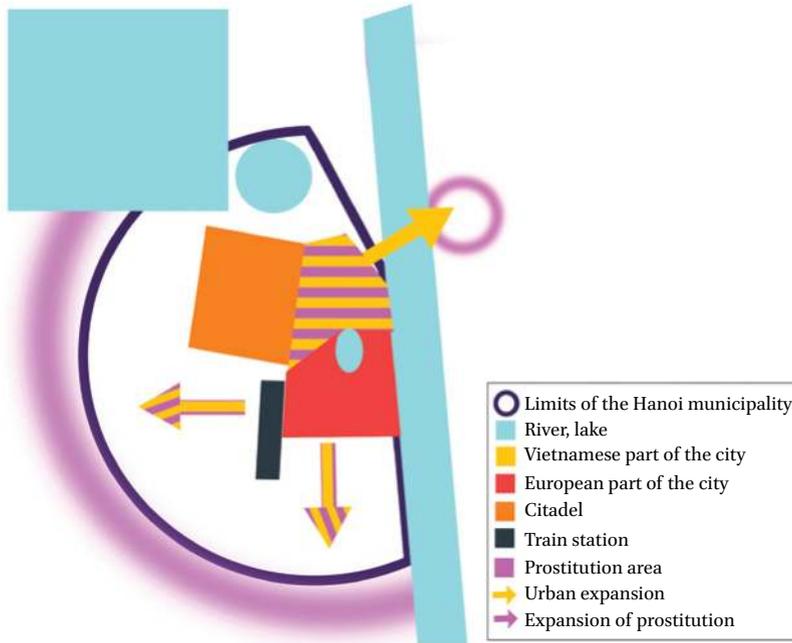
Province of origin	Number of prostitutes	Distance from Hanoi (km)
Hanoi	7 (3 from the city itself)	–
Hà Đông	9	15
Hưng Yên	2	40
Phủ Lý	1	60
Hà Nam	1	60
Nam Định	5	75
Haiphong	2 (1 from the main city)	105
Kiến An	1	105
Thái Bình	2	110

SOURCE: RG: MAIRIE DE HANOI, SERIE D638, FILE 2584, *RAPPORTS DE POLICE ET LETTRES DIVERSES AU SUJET DE LA POLICE DES MŒURS (1913–1916)*, VNAI.

80 RG: Mairie de Hanoi, Serie D638, File 2584, *Rapports de police et lettres diverses au sujet de la police des mœurs (1913–1916)*, VNAI.

81 N. T., “Deux heures avec une prostituée”, *Annam nouveau* (15 March 1936).

82 Henri Brenier, *Essai d'atlas statistique de l'Indochine française* (Hanoi, 1914), p. 48; Le Roy Des Barres, “Rapport annuel sur le fonctionnement du Bureau d'Hygiène de la ville de Hanoi, année 1920”, *BSMCI* (1921), pp. 29–50, 29; RG: GGI, File 53655, *Commission d'enquête dans les territoires d'Outre-Mer. Recensement de la population du Tonkin (1937)*, ANOM.



MAP 21.2 *Growth of the city and expansion of prostitution in Hanoi*

SOURCE: TRACOL-HUYNH, "ENTRE ORDRE COLONIAL ET SANTÉ PUBLIQUE", P. 505.

closely linked to the expansion of the city, as indicated by the fact that some legal brothels in the 1930s and '40s were located around the train station and in the newly built area in the south and west of the city, as seen in map 21.2.

This was the cause and consequence of a migratory movement that drove many young women to leave the overpopulated countryside and try their luck in the city. Life there was reputed to be easier than in the countryside, and working as a prostitute might have seemed to be more lucrative than working in the rice paddies. As shown by the 1914 report, most of the prostitutes were young (77 per cent of those arrested were younger than 25), and they had no education and might not have known anyone in Hanoi.

Those young girls from the countryside often tried to get by in the city by selling fruit at the markets and often ended up working as prostitutes, like Lành, a prostitute who was interviewed by journalist Vũ Trọng Phụng.⁸³ Most of the jobs open to young women were not well paid; in 1910, a woman earned only 3 *piastres* (hereafter \$) per month working at one of the cotton factories

83 Vũ Trọng Phụng, *Lục xì*, p. 128.

of Nam Dinh; \$3 was the monthly salary for a housemaid in Haiphong in 1914, but in 1925, the pay was only \$1.⁸⁴ It is difficult to know how much a prostitute earned per sexual encounter since the archives provide very little information. The price varied depending on the clients (whether they were coolies or soldiers for example, or Vietnamese or European), or it depended on the prostitutes themselves. The Japanese prostitutes who worked there were well-known for being more expensive than the Vietnamese or even the Chinese prostitutes.⁸⁵ In 1930, coolies paid from \$0.20 to \$0.30 for a Vietnamese prostitute; Vietnamese soldiers paid \$0.25; Vietnamese officers and European soldiers had to pay \$0.50; and European civilians paid from \$3 to \$5.⁸⁶

Telling the story of a prostitute's life in Saigon, Haydon Cherry wrote:⁸⁷

There were few jobs open to Vietnamese women in Saigon and Cholon in the early twentieth century. Some women worked as itinerant merchants who walked the streets, a pole across their shoulders, selling fruits and vegetables. Others hawked bowls of noodles or plates of rice for a few sou on the pavement. In the marketplace, women sold spun goods and small handicrafts that they had made at home, but Luong Thi Lam had run away from home. A few women became midwives or fortune tellers. The homes of the French and the rich Vietnamese also provided jobs as cooks, cleaners, and nannies. For such work they might have received their room and keep and a small sum each week. But Luong Thi Lam came without references and she was not known in the city. Vietnamese nuns worked in the hospitals and orphanages of the colony, but they had often been raised Catholic as orphans themselves. This left the cafés, opium dens, and brothels among the few places open to Luong Thi Lam, and of these, a brothel provided not only a wage, but also a place to sleep.

84 RG: RST, Serie F76, File 55381, *Traite des enfants et des femmes annamites (1906–1908)*, VNAI; RG: Tribunal de Haiphong, File 677, *Délit de mise en gage de mineur et d'excitation de mineure à la débauche (Art. 334, 59, 60, 344 CP) (1914)*, VNAI; RG: Tribunal de Haiphong, File 1831, *Délits d'excitation de mineure à la débauche commis par Nguyen Thi Hai, Nguyen Thi Thuan ... à Haiphong (1925)*, VNAI.

85 Frédéric Roustan, "Mousmés and French Colonial Culture: Making Japanese Women's Bodies Available in Indochina", *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, 7 (2012), p. 70.

86 Joyeux, "Le Péril vénérien", p. 480. For more details about prices, see Tracol-Huynh, "Entre ordre colonial et santé publique", pp. 434–435.

87 Haydon Cherry, *The Woman who Ran Away* (Unpublished paper submitted to the VSG Student Paper Prize, 2001).

Those low wages explained why some women had no other choice than to turn to prostitution: “One evening, in Paul Bert Square, an older Vietnamese soldier bought a few pomelo sections and then told her to come with him [...]. Her basket was full, and in her pocket she didn’t have the money to buy even a measure of rice. That was a powerful reason to make her decide.”⁸⁸ In one of his interviews, Việt Sinh asked a madam to arrange a meeting with a young girl working at the market. As he wondered whether or not the meeting would be arranged, his friend reassured him, saying, “A woman earns only a few sous selling goods all day long at the market, but if she decides to come here, she will quickly earn \$3. Who wouldn’t choose that?”⁸⁹ In short, poverty was the main reason a woman would become a prostitute. In the 1930s, the global economic crisis struck Indochina and poverty increased, as well as prostitution. Prostitution had become a social problem, as evidenced by the interest shown by Vietnamese journalists in that decade. All journalists’ news stories shared a common theme: poverty.⁹⁰ The same process occurred in the late 1940s and early ‘50s because of the Indochina war.⁹¹

Whether voluntary or not, these women greatly increased the ranks of prostitutes, especially as there was growing demand. The development of a Vietnamese middle class with disposable income resulted in “an explosion of pleasure-seeking” and an increase in both the forms and sites of pleasure.⁹² Moreover, the presence of colonial troops meant that there were more soldiers, the traditional clientele of brothels, and that was particularly true in Hanoi, a very important garrison town⁹³ especially during the Indochina War

88 Vũ Trọng Phụng, *Lục xì*, p. 128.

89 Việt Sinh, “Hà Nội Ban Đêm”, p. 690.

90 For example, “Cô Xuân, cô Hảo, cô Tuyết ... Còn biết bao nhiêu cô nữa? Mỗi cô là một thảm sử. Những thảm sử trong chất trong nhà Lục-xì. Mà nguyên nhân? Không ngoài sự nghèo túng” [“Miss Xuân, Miss Hảo, Miss Tuyết ... Who knows how many more? Each of them has a tragic story. There are only tragic stories in the dispensary. What is the reason behind all of those stories? Nothing more than poverty”]; Thao Thao, “Gái Lục-xì” (24 February 1937).

91 RG: RSTNF, File 03856, *Prophylaxie des maladies vénériennes (1917–1940)*, ANOM.

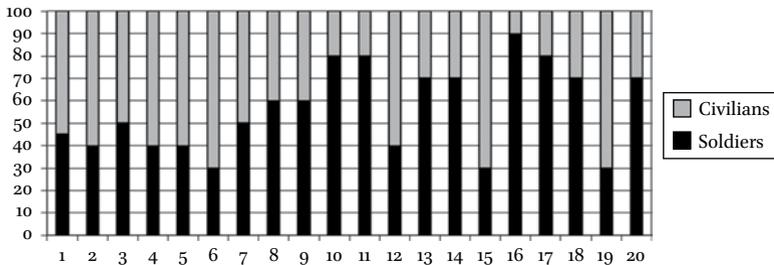
92 Nguyễn Văn Ký, “La Société vietnamienne face à la modernité, le Bắc Bộ de la fin du XIXème siècle à la seconde guerre mondiale” (Ph.D., Université Paris 7, 1992), p. 637 [published version: *La Société vietnamienne face à la modernité, le Tonkin de la fin du XIXème siècle à la seconde guerre mondiale* (Paris, L’Harmattan, 1995)]. See also Vũ Trọng Phụng, *Làm đĩ*, p. 17; Trọng Lang, “Hà Nội Lầm Than”, p. 94.

93 In 1909, there were 2,599 soldiers based in Hanoi and 1,842 in 1914. Adrien-Charles Le Roy Des Barres, “Rapport sur la natalité, la morbidité et la mortalité à Hanoi, année 1909”, *BSMCI* (1910), pp. 179–191, 179; “Rapport sur le fonctionnement du Bureau d’Hygiène de la ville de Hanoi, année 1914”, *BSMCI* (1915), pp. 162–186, 162.

(1946–54). The geography of prostitution in Hanoi illustrates the link between soldiers and prostitutes, because several of the legal brothels were conveniently situated close to the Hanoi citadel. This was even more evident for clandestine houses; a military physician wrote in the 1910s that “the temptation begins right after the barracks’ door, next to the guardroom.”⁹⁴ A few years later, another military physician recalled that he “often saw [clandestine prostitutes] in the evening, on the East street for example, leaning against trees in a suggestive posture, or crouching down in groups of 10 or 15 in a ditch against the walls of the barracks.”⁹⁵ Prostitutes and brothels were easily found around the Hanoi citadel because “it is written that a garrison cannot operate without a brothel.”⁹⁶ Soldiers were not confined within the citadel all the time and they were allowed into the city, so they were able to visit brothels throughout Hanoi. See graph 21.3 for the types of clients that visited the legal brothels of the city.

During the Indochina War, Hanoi was a very strategic city where numerous regiments were stationed, and this also increased the numbers of prostitutes. In the 1940s, the army created military brothels called *Bordel Militaire de Campagne* (BMC), and in 1954, there were ten BMC in Hanoi where a total of around one hundred prostitutes worked.⁹⁷

When they came to Hanoi, many young women ended up working in brothels, and as discussed above, with the introduction of the French regulation of prostitution, brothels were opened in Hanoi. There were twenty five official brothels in Hanoi in 1932 and the most important of these housed twenty



GRAPH 21.3 *Patrons of the 20 authorized brothels of Hanoi in 1930 (%)*

SOURCE: JOYEUX, “LE PÉRIL VÉNÉRIEN”, P. 480.

94 Abadie-Bayro, “Morbidity vénérienne des troupes européennes de l’Annam-Tonkin, moyens prophylactiques proposés”, *BSMCI* (1915), pp. 30–62, 39.

95 Alexandre Gauducheau, *Contre un Fléau* (Paris, Stock, 1923), p. 104.

96 Coppin, “La Prostitution”, p. 246.

97 RG: 10H, File 2099, *Maladies vénériennes (1946–1955); diagnostic et traitement des maladies vénériennes (1952)*, Service Historique de la Défense [Defence Historical Service], Vincennes, France.

prostitutes.⁹⁸ At first, prostitutes had to work inside the brothels, since this was the only authorized form of prostitution. Later, they were also allowed to work out of their own homes, but brothels remained the ideal for the colonial authorities because surveillance was easier; the vice squad could enter the brothel at any hour of the night in the line of their duty.⁹⁹ Brothels had to be clearly identifiable so that men could find them easily and decent people wouldn't mistakenly enter them. At the same time, they also had to be as hidden as possible for the sake of public morality. At brothels, there was a red-light above the door and the street number was clearly indicated, and thus they were easily identifiable.¹⁰⁰ Houses of prostitution had previously been called "green houses", but during the colonial period, they came to be known as *nhà số đỏ* [red houses] because of this light.¹⁰¹ Brothel owners had to keep their doors and windows shut at all times and prostitutes were not to be seen from the outside and they had to behave decently.¹⁰² Outdoor soliciting was an offense; in short, although prostitution was legal, it was not to be visible. However, some streets such as Hàng Bông Street and Khâm Thiên Street were well-known areas of prostitution and were quite lively at night. In October of 1910, a vice squad agent wrote a report about clandestine prostitutes on Hàng Bông Street, noting the lively evenings where some women showed off their legs, sometimes even above the knee, and he wrote about one woman who strolled in front of her house in a red dressing gown with her hair loose as she smoked cigarettes, and another one accosted the police agent, saying: "Come on, honey!"¹⁰³ Prostitution, despite all the authorities' attempts to render it unseen, was quite visible in the city.

The World of Prostitution

The world of prostitution was a world of violence. On account of their young age, prostitutes were often at the mercy of madams and pimps, even more

98 RG: Mairie de Hanoi, Serie T12, File 4920, *Ville de Hanoi: Liste des maisons de tolérance en 1932 en vue de l'établissement du rôle des patentes (1932)*, VNA1.

99 Decree of the General Governor in Indochina, 29 November 1924, article 2.

100 RG: RST, File 80983, *Arrêtés des Résuper au Tonkin régissant les maisons de tolérance 1901*, VNA1.

101 See for example Việt Sinh, "Hà Nội Ban Đêm", p. 698; Thao Thao, "Gái Lục-sì", 16 February 1937; Vũ Trọng Phụng, *Lục xì*, p. 43.

102 For example see the decree of the Hanoi mayor, 18 May 1915, article 163.

103 RG: Mairie de Hanoi, Serie D638, File 2583, *Correspondances relatives à la prostitution à Hanoi en 1910 (1910)*, VNA1.

so if they were sold to them by their own parents or if they were indebted to them. The lending of clothes and jewels was a practice commonly employed by madams to transform prostitutes into debtors and thereby keep them at their establishment.¹⁰⁴ Although it was illegal for madams to hold prostitutes against their will, certain prostitutes nevertheless had no choice but to try to escape.¹⁰⁵ However, one should not think that all prostitutes were being held by force and compelled to practise prostitution. Prostitution was also a matter of free choice, as the vice squad was also confronted with recidivist clandestine prostitutes. Violence existed outside of brothels as well and extended into the heart of the dispensaries, which were described as being very unwelcoming places; the warden behaved brutally towards prostitutes, and he, and even the chief supervisor, extorted money from them.¹⁰⁶ Violence and extortion could also be found in the relationship between prostitutes and the police.

The second characteristic of the world of prostitution in Hanoi was its racial diversity. Prostitution in colonial Hanoi was a multiracial world in which Vietnamese prostitutes outnumbered by far those of other origins, including Chinese, Japanese, European, and Eurasian prostitutes. The Chinese and Japanese prostitutes came from poor provinces of China and Japan and could be found in other Southeast Asian cities at the time, such as Saigon and even more in Singapore.¹⁰⁷ In Hanoi, there were few Chinese prostitutes compared to Haiphong, for example, and they were mostly songstresses, at least officially. There were no more than 100 Japanese prostitutes but they were quite visible since they were easily recognizable by their kimonos and wooden clogs. Their hairstyle, a very elaborate chignon, was also specific and made it possible to distinguish Japanese prostitutes from their Vietnamese and Chinese counterparts. The Japanese were therefore a visible alien element of Indochina and easily classifiable in French exotic stereotypes.¹⁰⁸ Colonial discourses depicted Vietnamese prostitutes as being dirty and dangerous in terms of the transmission of diseases, whereas Japanese prostitutes were regarded as being safer,

104 *Ibid.*

105 Decree of the resident superior in Tonkin, 3 February 1921, article 30.

106 RG: Mairie de Hanoi, Serie D638, File 2584, *Rapports de police et lettres diverses au sujet de la police des mœurs (1913–1916)*, VNA1.

107 James Francis Warren, *Ah Ku and Karayuki-san. Prostitution in Singapore 1870–1940* (Singapore, 2003 [1993]).

108 Frédéric Roustan, “Moumés and French Colonial Culture Moumés: Making Japanese Women’s Bodies Available in Indochina”, *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, 7 (2012), pp. 52–105.

medically speaking.¹⁰⁹ Japanese prostitutes did not belong to the same category as the Chinese and Vietnamese, and their higher prices were an obvious distinctive sign of this difference. Their prices were up to ten times higher than those charged by the Vietnamese but they were still cheaper than the European prostitutes who were considered to be the most luxurious. In this racial hierarchy of stereotypes, Chinese prostitutes were located somewhere in the middle, as they were perceived as being not so different from Vietnamese women in the European mind, although they were not colonized. This racial hierarchy could be found in the regulation of prostitution which clearly distinguished between prostitutes, and granted some of them privileges; for example, from 1902 until 1918, European and Japanese prostitutes had a special room at the dispensary.¹¹⁰

Japanese prostitution disappeared in the 1920s when the Japanese government condemned it and asked all prostitutes to return to Japan: "It was a question of national honour and prestige, and of being viewed as a 'civilized' nation in the eyes of the West."¹¹¹ In this way, prostitution challenged the way that the country wanted to be seen by the rest of the world. That was true for Japan in the 1920s and it was also true for France in its colonies. French and European prostitution was a political issue in a colonial setting, and European prostitutes were seen as a threat. As such, there were fewer European prostitutes compared to native prostitutes. However, the colonial order had to be maintained, and this could not be achieved purely through military force. Moreover, as time passed, the memory of the colonial conquest and of the military superiority of the French army waned. The enforced prestige of the "white man" became the main means of ensuring colonial supremacy. Accordingly, Europeans had to maintain an exemplary appearance at all times. Within this context, it is quite clear that European prostitutes were a major problem for two reasons. Firstly, European prostitutes were not a "good" example of correct "white" behaviour. Secondly, Vietnamese men—the colonized—could buy sex from European women if they had enough money. Indeed, there was no racial segregation for clients. The only criterion was money; if a man had enough, regardless of where he was from, he could choose whichever prostitute he wanted. Therefore, since there were no racial distinctions for clients, the only categories that existed were those constructed by the colonial authorities regarding prostitutes. And

109 *Ibid.*, and Michael Vann, "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Variation and Difference in French Racism in Colonial *Indochine*", in Sue Peabody and Tyler Stovall (eds), *The Color of Liberty Histories of Race in France* (Durham, 2003), pp. 187–205.

110 Joyeux, "Le Pêril vénérien", p. 488.

111 Warren, *Ah Ku and Karayuki-san*, p. 161.

these categories were closely linked to racial categories and to political and social domination. European women could not be treated like native women, even if they were prostitutes. A distinction had to be made in order to maintain racial boundaries and, consequently, the colonial order.¹¹²

The first solution for the French colonial authorities was simply to not talk publicly about European prostitutes. The monthly reports of the municipal hygiene service of Hanoi often used the following expression in their reports: “Officially, European prostitution does not exist.”¹¹³ The second was to treat them differently from Asian prostitutes. The European prostitutes were often called *Valaques*. Valachie was part of mediaeval Romania, and the word *Valaque* was used for those European prostitutes supposedly originating from eastern Europe. They had their own regulations in which the word “prostitute” did not appear, and *Valaque* houses were not described as brothels but as more or less respectable cafés. *Valaque* women were gradually incorporated into the general regulation of prostitution, but they were granted privileges:

Art. 2: The medical examinations prescribed in Article 6 of the aforementioned article will take place at the municipal dispensary twice a week. The hours and days will be determined at a later date. However, if they so desire, the girls are allowed to undergo this medical examination at their own homes. In that case, the municipal doctor will have to receive financial compensation from them.¹¹⁴

On the one hand, the police and administrative authorities tried their best to shed light on the world of prostitution by chasing down clandestine prostitutes or looking for clandestine houses of prostitution; on the other hand, they hid European prostitutes. “For many reasons, whether good or bad, Tonkinese colonial authorities did not want to register Europeans as prostitutes.”¹¹⁵

There was another hierarchy among prostitutes which had a major impact on Vũ Trọng Phụng: the social hierarchy. He wondered why “two hundred people are confined because they worked as prostitutes, while at the same

112 Tracol-Huynh, “Entre ordre colonial et santé publique”, pp. 202–210. See also Stoler, “Making Empire Respectable”, p. 636; Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London, 2005 [1998]), p. 135.

113 RG: Mairie de Hanoi, Serie S03, File 5757, *Rapports mensuels sur le fonctionnement du service municipal d'hygiène de Hanoi (1931)*, VNAL.

114 RG: RST, File 1985, *Réglementation des femmes dites “valaques” dans la ville de Hanoi 1906–1910*, VNAL.

115 Joyeux, “Le Péril vénérien”, p. 465.

time numerous other prostitutes are still known as miss, madam, [and] esteemed lady.”¹¹⁶ In their reports about prostitution in 1930s Hanoi, Vietnamese journalists carried out research to determine why a woman would become a prostitute. When he began his interviews, Vũ Trọng Phụng was convinced that prostitutes worked “as prostitutes only because they like it” and he was concerned about the moral dimension of prostitution.¹¹⁷ He gradually changed his mind and, in Chapter 7 of his report, he realized that the reason why some women worked as prostitutes was not moral corruption but destitution. In an earlier text, *Làm đĩ*, he blamed the rapid social changes plaguing Vietnamese society, and he listed those as materialism, romanticism, the absence of sexual education, and westernization. Other journalists blamed arranged marriages, second-rank marriages, and cohabitation, and more generally the condition of women. The prostitute in N. T.’s interview was forced to marry an older wealthy man who already had a wife. The first wife mistreated her and after one rather brutal fight she left her husband and village and went to Hanoi where she ended up working as a prostitute.¹¹⁸

Stories about prostitution were used by journalists to discuss, as well as criticize, society. Even though these journalists had their own particular agenda, they provided information and described prostitutes as being actors in colonial society. It would be true to say that violence and domination were, and still are, central in prostitution. However, prostitutes were not passive objects, and they had agency. In one of Việt Sinh’s articles, prostitutes were described as makers of fashion and a bridge between two civilizations.¹¹⁹ They were deemed to be the first Vietnamese women to discover western civilization and it was said that they had to learn how to dress up to please their European clients. For example, they stopped painting their teeth black, which had been a local tradition, because it repulsed European men. Later in the 1930s, women who thought of themselves as modern did the same, and some of them also wanted to emulate their European counterparts but were afraid they would be called prostitutes.¹²⁰ Việt Sinh wrote that the Vietnamese people should not be surprised if modern girls wear high heels, carry purses, and look at themselves in the mirror and powder their faces while on the street because prostitutes already did that.¹²¹

116 Vũ Trọng Phụng, *Lục xì*, p. 86.

117 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

118 N. T., “Deux heures avec une prostituée”.

119 Việt Sinh, “Hà Nội Ban Đêm”, pp. 695–696.

120 Nguyễn Văn Ký, “La Société vietnamienne face à la modernité”, p. 552.

121 See also Vũ Trọng Phụng, *Lục xì*, pp. 88, 102–103.

The materials in the archives do not explain how prostitutes left prostitution, nor do the news stories. Prostitutes could ask to have their names removed from the prostitution record, but the formalities were difficult since they had to prove that they had enough resources to live on their own.¹²² They could leave prostitution by marrying a long-term client but the authorities deliberately made this process difficult:

Therefore, getting married is easy; getting divorced is also easy, and after only a little while we again see that the woman who has made the turn must again go back toward the road of prostitution. [...] If it's too easy for them, then in only a few months the man will abandon his wife and the woman will return to debauchery, if she hasn't been forced by her husband to go back to prostitution to take care of her gigolo.¹²³

As shown by the 1914 report, prostitutes were young because, after around 30 years of age, they were no longer attractive for clients, who, in Asia, preferred young girls. Even though the legal age to be registered as a prostitute was 18 years old, there was a large number of underage prostitutes working at the brothels, even at the legal ones. Lành, one of the prostitutes interviewed by Vũ Trọng Phụng, started at the age of 15.¹²⁴ But what happened to the prostitutes who did not marry and did not die from disease, venereal or otherwise?¹²⁵ Some went back, perhaps, to their native villages after having made some money in the city, and others opened their own businesses. The archives are silent on this issue, however, as if prostitutes were no longer interesting once they retired from the occupation.

Conclusion

During the entire colonial period, regulation remained the same; prostitutes had to register with the police and undergo medical examinations at the dispensary, two requirements with which they were not eager to comply. From the very beginning up through the end of colonization, regulation was,

122 Decree of the Hanoi mayor, 18 May 1915, article 161.

123 Vũ Trọng Phụng, *Lục xì*, pp. 142, 144.

124 *Ibid.*, p. 125.

125 In 1926, 6 of the 621 prostitutes registered in Hanoi died at the hospital. RG: RST, Serie D64, File 78667, *Municipalité de Hanoi—Dossiers divers relatifs à la police de la voie publique 1921–1942*, VNA1.

nonetheless, a failure. However, for physicians, the police, and administrators, whether French or Vietnamese, it was still better than doing nothing to prevent the spread of venereal diseases. Prostitutes' lives were defined by the regulatory system, whether they respected it or hid from its agents. Nevertheless, we must go beyond this institutional framework, for it tells us little about the prostitutes themselves or the world of prostitution. In this complex setting, antagonistic notions were inextricably intertwined, such as visibility and invisibility, and violence and agency, when it came to houses of prostitution and prostitutes themselves. The framework remained the same throughout the colonial period, but changes did occur in that prostitution became more and more visible and increasingly diverse. For the authorities, prostitution was supposed to be a regular occupation; in reality, it was more often a second occupation to which women could turn when they ran out of money. Maintaining control over it was therefore almost impossible; prostitution was, and still is, a phenomenon which cannot be enclosed within a system of regulation, no matter how meticulously planned and strict it may be.

Prostitution in Shanghai

Sue Gronewold

Introduction

Shanghai and Prostitution

This chapter traces the history of sex work in Shanghai over four centuries and views the history of prostitution in Shanghai as one part of the story of a changing city in a radically changing China. Of the countries included in this project, China is of particular interest since it represents a case in which prostitution was historically tolerated and regulated legally and socially by a highly centralized state¹ which went through dramatic transformations in the twentieth century, with policies on prostitution shifting just as extremely.

* In the footnotes, Chinese names are rendered in the western fashion with personal name first and family name last but in the text the traditional Chinese style is maintained.

1 There has been interest in and concern about prostitution throughout Chinese history, and it has long been a subject of literature, drama, and poetry as well as law, with wide-ranging sources, especially since the boom in printing in the late sixteenth century and subsequent rise of vernacular fiction that allowed for much more nuanced and full descriptions of gender models and sexual mores. Giovanni Vitiello, *Libertine's Friend: Homosexuality and Masculinity in Late Imperial China* (Chicago, 2011), pp. 4–5. Another category mined by social historians has been unofficial histories (*yeshi*) which were touted by late Qing reformers as the most useful way to educate the public “to save the nation with fiction.” Quoted in Madeleine Yue Dong, “Unofficial History and Gender Boundary Crossing in the Early Chinese Republic: Shen Peizhen and Xiaofengxian”, in Beata Goodman and Wendy Larson (eds), *Gender in Motion: Divisions of Labor and Cultural Change in Late Imperial China* (Lanham, 2005), pp. 169–188, 184f. For Shanghai, good sources exist from the Qing Dynasty, including literary works and official gazetteers, imperial reign histories, law codes, and court documents. See the discussion in Linda C. Johnson, *Shanghai: From Market Town to Treaty Port 1074–1857* (Stanford, 1995), pp. 17–18, 403. For the period covered in this chapter, the increasing variety of sources include administration and police records about social control as well as medical records tracking health concerns, with perhaps the most useful popular guidebooks and travellers’ accounts, both Chinese and foreign. Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth Century China* (Berkeley, 1997), pp. 14–17; Christian Henriot, *Prostitution and Sexuality in Shanghai: A Social History 1849–1949* (trans. Noel Castelino) (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 69–70. By the nineteenth century, sensational stories about prostitutes appeared frequently in popular newspapers and modern periodicals like *Shenbao* that boomed during

Early in the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), the system of court-run brothels was gradually abolished (along with the status of “outcast” for prostitutes), and prostitution was exclusively a commercial private enterprise, although regulated by law and controlled by social custom.² Public policy changed dramatically in the course of the twentieth century, with early calls for abolition in Republican China (1911–1949) culminating in its presumable total prohibition under the communist government in 1949. Since 1978, in the aftermath of the most radical phase of the Maoist revolution, prostitution has re-emerged with a vengeance in a liberalizing China (although still legally prohibited), and its relationship with the state continues to be complicated.

this period plus literary sources that include novels, modern plays, cabaret, and film. There is much recent work on prostitution (and sex in general) by sociologists, anthropologists, and students of law and criminal justice. Susan Mann, *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Chinese History* (Cambridge, 2011); Ruan Fangfu, *Sex in China: Studies in Sexology in Chinese Culture* (New York, 1991); Harriet Evans, *Women and Sexuality in China: Female Sexuality and Gender since 1949* (New York, 1997); Min Liu, *Migration, Prostitution, and Human Trafficking: the Voice of Chinese Women* (New Brunswick, 2011); and Tiantian Zheng, *Red Lights: The Lives of Sex Workers in Post-Socialist China* (Minneapolis, 2009). Prostitution and sexuality are also increasingly popular topics for social historians, many of whom maintain feminist approaches to sex work. See Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*; Evans, *Women and Sexuality*; Elaine Jeffreys (ed.), *Sex and Sexuality in China* (London, 2006). Yet historians of women and sexuality still decry the lack of attention in the official record given to prostitution and have to ferret out data from disparate sources; see Ruan, *Sex in China*; Henriot, *Prostitution and Sexuality*. Although it has long been standard in China to explain prostitution on economic grounds, relatively few studies of prostitution regard it primarily as a labour issue, including those looking at labour migration. Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, pp. 388–392, identifies sexologist Pan Suiming as the closest to offering a labour-market analysis. Lastly, the lack of writing and research on prostitution reflects the voice of the prostitute herself—and occasionally himself. Travis S.K. Kong, *Chinese Male Sexualities: Mema, Tongzhi, and Golden Boy* (New York, 2010); Kam Louie, *Theorizing Chinese Masculinities: Society and Gender in China* (Cambridge, 2002), although there is a long tradition of writers conveying the voice of the girl gone astray. Today, with more openness both in public and in academia, a growing number of anthropologists, sociologists, sexologists, and photographers are transcribing the stories and documenting the lives of sex workers up close. Zheng, *Red Lights*; Liu, *Migration*; Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, pp. 3–4.

- 2 At its height during the Tang and Sung Dynasties, government-run brothels included both those under local officials and the imperial government. Prostitutes were included in China's hereditary outcast system along with other rootless people such as actors, barbers, transport workers, and exiled prisoners. Early Qing emperors ended the government-run brothel system and formally abolished hereditary categories, putting in place greater systems of control for the entire population. See Shunu Wang, *Zhongguo Changji Shi [A History of Prostitution in China]* (Beijing, 1934).

Much of what follows could be said for many cities in China, particularly on the eastern seaboard, but there are a few significant differences. One aspect of Shanghai that distinguished it from cities like Hangzhou, Suzhou, and Nanjing in central China and Beijing in the north is that it was always more of a commercial than an administrative centre. In Chinese terms, this meant the predominance of merchants, markets, and guildhalls thriving among the jumble of docks, warehouses, and shipyards in the surrounding suburbs and dominating the temples and gardens in the city centre.³ As for the entertainment districts in the city centre, entertainers for the most part catered more to merchants than to scholar/official elites as in many other cities in the region. And as an important commercial centre perfectly located at the confluence of river access to the interior and northern and southern coastal routes, Shanghai always attracted men looking for sexual services—as well as women in the city and environs trying to make a livelihood by providing them—but it did not offer the fine courtesan culture of Hangzhou or Suzhou. And its trajectory across the modern era was also distinct; Shanghai today, like treaty-port Shanghai, still attracts a disproportionate amount of businessmen, merchants, and entrepreneurial outsiders.

Five Distinct Eras

For the period from 1600 to the present, I have identified five distinct eras of prostitution. The last dynasty, the Manchu Qing Dynasty, which was established in 1644, is the start date, and the first phase covers nearly two centuries of rule by energetic emperors, when the entertainment culture of the previous high Ming became more regulated. The second phase, from 1830 to 1911, covers the period when Shanghai was designated a treaty port by the British after the Opium War (from 1843). During that era, Shanghai's treaty port development, combined with an influx of economic and political refugees fleeing political uprisings and extreme economic impoverishment, largely reshaped its population, politics, and power balances. During the third period of Republican China (1912–1949), after the fall of the last imperial dynasty, Shanghai was overrun with drugs, prostitutes, gangs, and gambling. Although it was not the political capital (nearby Nanjing had that distinction), it became in this period a cultural capital strongly identified with the Chinese Enlightenment of May 4 1919. Near the end of this period, from 1937 to 1945, Shanghai experienced life as a “lonely island” under Japanese control, with the end of the war bringing civil war and Communist victory, although practically without bloodshed in Shanghai. Next, under Mao and the consolidation of the socialist revolution

3 Johnson, *Shanghai*, Ch. 4.

from 1949–1976 in the People’s Republic of China (PRC), the city was allowed to languish, as it was too closely identified with capitalist commerce. But since 1978 in the current Reform Era, the fifth period, Shanghai’s commercial character has revived and taken off again—along with an exploding demand for sexual services.

Definitions

From early imperial times⁴ until the present, prostitution has been addressed in both civil and criminal law and defined generally as “the exchange of sexual services for money or other material recompense”, although the very terms used for it have been much debated.⁵ Contemporary sexologist Pan Suiming suggests that, due to widespread official corruption, China has a special form of prostitution today through which sex is traded for privileges.⁶ For most of Chinese history, prostitution was not illegal in itself, but activities surrounding it were restricted, particularly trafficking and the disruption of public order. And the main concern has always been to protect “good” women (*liangmin*) in order to maintain patriarchal family honour and ensure it remained distant from “illicit” sex, which was outside the family and occurred with socially unacceptable partners.⁷

Throughout Chinese history, prostitution was loosely monitored by the imperial and/or local state, and it was at times licensed, registered, monitored, and/or taxed. Although there were and are state-wide laws on the books, most administrative regulations were and are still local, with each city and administrative entity having its own variations of categories of prostitutes, affiliated people, and activities that are regulated. And throughout history there have been regular debates about whom to include among their ranks. High-level

4 By convention, since 73 B.C. during the great Han Dynasty. Ruan, *Sex in China*, p. 69; Matthew Sommers, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, 2000).

5 For insights into this debate, see Hershatler, *Dangerous Pleasures*, p. 329; Elaine Jeffreys, “Feminist Prostitution Debates: Are There any Sex Workers in China?” in Ann E McLaren (ed.), *Chinese Women: Living and Working* (London, 2004), pp. 83–105, 98. In pre-1949 Chinese, the general term used for prostitute (which is still common) was *jinu*. Only recently has the government used the term *maiyin funu* (woman who sells sex), while feminists and international NGOs increasingly use terms like *xing gongzhe*, a direct translation of “worker in sex trades”. See China Sex Work Organization Network Forum “Research on the Impact of 2010 Crackdown on Sex Work and HIV Intervention in China” (Shanghai, 2011), p. 3.

6 Suming Pan, “Jinchang: Wei shui fuwu?” [“The Prohibition of Prostitution: Whom does it Serve?”] in *Aizibing: shehui, lunli, he falu wenti zhuanjia yantaohui* [Report on the Expert Workshop on HIV and Prostitution: Social, Ethical, and Legal Issues] (Beijing, 1996), pp. 19–21, 20–21.

7 Mann, *Gender and Sexuality*, Ch. 1.

courtesan-entertainers from the late Ming period on had much social and literary clout, refusing to be included under the umbrella of prostitution, like many high-class entertainers today.

Although prostitution was almost exclusively defined in laws as a female phenomenon, there is also an extensive tradition of male prostitution, often linked to actors who almost exclusively serviced other men (see discussion below of other sexualities). But the emphasis throughout Chinese history, especially since the early Qing, on the family as the key social unit and on sex for reproduction, has kept discussions of homosexual prostitution muted.⁸

Throughout history, sex work tended to be episodic for many, and that certainly applies to much contemporary prostitution. In fact, many young women exchanging sex for material benefits today would not consider themselves to be prostitutes. Episodic prostitution also includes needy husbands and their families pawning wives, and some scholars suggest that perhaps half of all prostitutes in the past had been pawned. Interviews with poor women today suggest the practice has not disappeared.⁹

The Labour Market for Prostitution

Push/Pull Factors and Transformations in Shanghai

To understand the labour market for prostitution in Shanghai, we must first look more closely at the changes in Shanghai over the centuries. It had long been one of a number of “gateway cities”¹⁰ to the rich Yangzi Valley with rich agricultural and manufacturing potential, albeit with more commercial than

8 Susan Mann argues there was an inherent contradiction in state policy with homosexuality continuing as an elite literati practice yet at the same time criminalized in 1740 and the state backing the family as the key social unit, which it has continued to do since, with sex within marriage the overwhelming ideal. *Ibid.*, pp. 142–158.

9 Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, p. 197. Matt Sommers argues that polyandry was so widespread, with contractual arrangements and an extensive language for renting out wives for sex work or bringing in another man to work and share the marital bed as “part of a portfolio of strategies that enable a family to get by” (p. 33), that both forms of polyandry should be an integral part of any discussion about marriage in China. “Making Sex Work: Polyandry as a Survival Strategy in Qing Dynasty China”, in Goodman and Larson, (eds), *Gender in Motion*, pp. 29–54.

10 The title of Mary Gamewell’s 1916 book on Shanghai was *The Gateway to China: Pictures of Shanghai* (New York, 1916; 2012 reprint); Marie Claire Bergere uses the term in her seminal article, “The Other China: Shanghai from 1919–1949”, in Christopher Howe (ed.), *Shanghai: Revolution and Development in an Asian Metropolis* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 1–34.

administrative activities in contrast to the other Jiangnan (south of the Yangzi) cities.¹¹ The early Qing period marked the completion of a cotton revolution in the region, making Shanghai a major commercial centre (70 per cent of arable land was planted in cotton by the mid-seventeenth century)¹² and by then¹³ Shanghai was a key port, especially for trade with Japan and South and Southeast Asia. Its rising economic importance led merchants to go to Shanghai from all over the empire where they congregated in hostels linked to their hometowns (*huiguan*), and these were quite important in the economic and social life of the city.

Over time, these factors together reshaped the population and thus the customers for its entertainment quarters. Capitalist development also produced people with great wealth who could afford more public displays of consumption, which often included multiple wives and visits to courtesans.

The key turning point came in the mid-nineteenth century with a huge influx of Chinese from the hinterlands fleeing political and economic turmoil, especially the calamitous Taiping civil war (1851–64) followed by the Small Swords Uprising (Xiaodao) that occupied Shanghai from 1853 to 1855 and forced many people, including the Jiangnan elite, to move to Shanghai and its protective foreign enclaves.¹⁴ Aggressive foreigners whose imperialist policies created political, economic, and social turmoil as well as international rivalries for empire exacerbated these upheavals from 1846 to 1853.¹⁵ These dislocations led to more needy women becoming sex workers and to more men of all

It continues to be used into the twenty-first century such as in Edward Denison and Yu Ren Guang's *Building Shanghai: The Story of China's Gateway* (New York, 2006).

- 11 Shanghai was first designated a market town in 1074 and a market city, *shi*, in 1159, finally reaching the administrative status of a county seat (*xian*) in 1292 (the lowest political unit in the Chinese state with a magistrate appointed by the central government), with its own *xian* college in 1294 for aspirants for the civil service examination and posts (Johnson, *Shanghai*, Ch. 1). Its role as a port in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties vacillated with changing rivers, silting harbours, and, in the Ming era (1388–1644) with prohibitions on maritime trade, was replaced up to the early Qing era by a major cotton revolution in the region. Its success can again be measured in its promotion to higher administrative status; by 1740 it was styled a circuit (*dao*). These changes had various implications for sex work.
- 12 Johnson, *Shanghai*, p. 58.
- 13 Zhang Zhongmin, *Shanghai cong kaifa zouxiang kaifang, 1368–1842* [*Shanghai from Inception to Opening*] (Kunming, 1990), p. 178; Bergere, *Other China*, p. 24.
- 14 Frederic Wakeman Jr. and Wen-hsin Yeh (eds), *Shanghai Sojourners* (Berkeley, 1993).
- 15 A period Johnson calls the “internationalization of Shanghai.” Johnson, *Shanghai*, Ch. 9.

classes and provenances seeking sexual services. The designation of Shanghai as a treaty port also led to its bifurcation into a Chinese city and foreign city, with parallel administrations in the International Settlement (primarily British), the French Concession, and the Chinese city proper and extensive surrounding suburbs. Prostitutes, gangs, and political activists all manipulated the different regulations, populations, and institutions in these separate administrative areas. Thus, by the early twentieth century, Shanghai became, in common parlance, the “brothel of Asia”.¹⁶

Trafficking in girls and women was endemic in twentieth-century Republican China, as it had been throughout Chinese history, with females available among the poorest strata everywhere, particularly in the increasingly impoverished countryside. Recruiters in Shanghai were either local abductors, transporters who located and conveyed women back from the hinterlands usually from regions suffering from famine or other catastrophes, or they were local brokers, called “white ants” who were often themselves women.¹⁷ Girls and women of all ages were pulled into what Matthew Sommers calls “the pervasive market for women’s sexual and reproductive labor”,¹⁸ often with some degree of choice but parents or husbands making economic decisions for the women themselves, calculating their (often dire) options. Gail Hershatter argues that sex work as a choice, involving some kind of economic calculation, was perhaps more prevalent than coercion, given the continued contact between most prostitutes and their families.¹⁹

By the twentieth century, Shanghai was a booming entrepot for both products from the interior leaving its port and for the manufacture and sale of many goods, particularly textiles. By the 1920s its factories had been modernized and predominately employed women.²⁰ Warlord violence in the 1920s and Japanese control from 1937 to 1945 meant there was a constant influx of migrants and refugees into Shanghai, resulting in crowded conditions and fierce competition for work that left many women vulnerable to prostitution. Not all women in Shanghai could find other employment, and job security was

16 Henriot, *Prostitution and Sexuality*, p. 6.

17 *Bai maiyi*. See Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, p. 7.

18 Sommers, *Gender in Motion*, p. 51; Sue Gronewold, *Beautiful Merchandise: Prostitution in China 1860–1937* (New York, 1984), Ch. 3; Henriot, *Prostitution and Sexuality*, Ch. 7.

19 Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, p. 182.

20 Marie Claire Bergere, *The Golden Age of the Chinese Bourgeoisie* (Cambridge, 1989); Emily Honig, *Sisters and Stranger: Women in the Shanghai Cotton Mills, 1919–1949* (Stanford, 1986).

uneven at best, so many women (married or not) moved in and out of prostitution to supplement their income. Shanghai was also the centre of other kinds of production and services, with an underworld involved in opium, gambling, and pornography, much of it intertwined with prostitution.²¹

Distinct about Shanghai (and China more generally) are the swings of political fortunes and their implications for women and prostitution. During the Maoist period, prostitution was linked to the imperial and “feudal” past, and it was harshly punished and forcefully condemned. After a period of strong repression, it was claimed that prostitution had been totally eradicated by 1958.²² Banned sexual practices therefore took place furtively, with almost nothing written about them except for some mention in literature and films.²³

Since 1978, the migration of large numbers of young male (and female) workers to Shanghai from the countryside has contributed to a booming commercial sex industry. Under Mao a rigidly enforced new residential registration system (*hukou*) tied the entire population to fixed places of residency, but this system has been considerably relaxed since 1978, creating a mobile national labour force,²⁴ and there are perhaps 150 million migrants in China today.²⁵ Migration results in men and women being more tenuously attached to traditional families and social norms, and their greater freedom in sexual activities is literally remaking social mores. Both male migrants and local males take advantage of available, vulnerable young women, sometimes involving

21 Fred Wakeman described the liminal area of the extra-boundary “Badlands”, the less-patrolled western end of the foreign concessions, where poorer women carried out sex work in a threatening climate of violence and criminality. Frederic Wakeman, Jr, *Shanghai Badlands: Wartime Terrorism and Urban Crime* (Cambridge, 1996).

22 Evans, *Women and Sexuality in China*, p. 175.

23 For example, sexual violence against youth “sent down” in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution in 1966–1976. See Guangnai Shan, *Zhongguo changji—guoquo he xianzai* [*Chinese Prostitution Past and Present*], (Beijing 1995), p. 3; Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, p. 332; see also two films about “sent down” youth during the Cultural Revolution: “Wild Mountain” (Ye shan), and “Xiu: Sent Down Girl”, plus Yuan-Tsung Chen, *Dragon’s Village: An Autobiographical Novel about Revolutionary China* (New York, 1981) about 1950s land reform and the challenges it faced.

24 Arianne Gaetano and Tamara Jacka, “Introduction”, in *On the Move: Women in Rural to Urban Migration in Contemporary China* (New York, 2004), pp. 14–20. For Shanghai’s changing *hukou* policies, see *Ibid.*, p. 34, 49f, 51f.

25 Liu, *Migration, Prostitution*, p. 3, quoting 2007 China Labor Bureau Statistics. According to the recent Chinese press, policies will soon be put into place that further modernize agriculture, releasing between 100–200 million rural residents from agricultural work and moving them to urban residences.

prostitution.²⁶ Today, the media is filled with stories of men (and women) who have been exposed and prosecuted for trafficking children (including boys) and young women.

While migrant men are bound to their original homes, returning frequently to take care of farmlands or filial duties, more and more migrant women, since they are fated to be removed from their families anyway, are choosing to stay in these new work places so they can enjoy the greater freedom available to them in both work and marriage (even though they will always be regarded as outsiders).²⁷ Not finding other suitable work and/or marriage, some migrant women choose prostitution, fall victim to deceit,²⁸ or are pressed by their bosses to offer sexual services to attract customers.²⁹ Hostessing seems to be preferable for some to labour intensive industries that offer meagre wages in often exploitative, dead-end jobs,³⁰ but living “the life” is doubly hard for poor women migrants who face tremendous amounts of discrimination as rural women workers.³¹

Not all prostitution today in Shanghai is the result of traffickers, an excess of men, or wretched poverty. By the 1980s Reform Era, when the economy opened up and prostitution reappeared in most Chinese cities, new economic motivations for sex work emerged. The general consumer ethos of the period combined with the relatively easy access to call girls, taxi dancers, masseuses, and karaoke bar workers for men, and the availability of these jobs for women, means that shop girls or women in sweatshop jobs can aspire to buy urban fashions, jewellery, and apartments that their meagre incomes would not ordinarily allow.³² Prostitution draws on all manner of women in China today, from

26 Liu, *Migration, Prostitution* argues that while there is some trafficking, most migrants move of their own volition and then enter prostitution as the best choice available to them.

27 Louise Beyon, “Dilemmas of the Heart: Rural Working Women and their Hopes for the Future” in Gaetano and Jacka, *On the Move*, pp. 131–150; Lin Tan and Susan E. Short, “Living as Double Outsiders: Migrant Women’s Experiences of Marriage in a County Level City”, in Gaetano and Jacka, *Ibid.*, pp. 151–176.

28 Binbin Lou *et al.*, “Migration Experiences of Young Women from Four Counties in Sichuan and Anhui”, in Gaetano and Jacka, *Ibid.*, pp. 207–242, 223–224.

29 Tamara Jacka, “Migrant Women’s Stories”, in Gaetano and Jacka, *Ibid.*, pp. 279–285, 282.

30 Tiantian Zheng, “From Peasant Women to Bar Hostesses” in Gaetano and Jacka, *Ibid.*, pp. 80–109, 91.

31 Called pejoratively *dangongmei*. Tamara Jacka, *Rural Women in Urban China: Gender, Migration, and Social Change* (Armonk, NY, 2006).

32 Liu, *Migration, Prostitution*, Ch. 5, in which she finds all manner of reasons, from supporting families to paying for expensive urban lifestyles; Zheng, “From Peasant Women

poorly paid young girls to older women laid off in the great textile contraction of the 1990s and to migrant women of all ages.³³ Roaring capitalism has resulted in great economic inequality, and rampant consumerism has produced both the ability to pay for sexual services and men and women craving instant fashion and status not attainable on most salaries. The private businesses, both Chinese and foreign, that have boomed since the 1980s now seek “Miss Protocols”, a new category of employees: attractive young women for very visible PR office jobs.³⁴

Social Profiles

The best introduction to the social profiles of prostitutes is to look at legal/customary categories, both traditional and contemporary.³⁵ Pre-1949 Shanghai had its own legal and popularly accepted hierarchy,³⁶ with at least four and sometimes as many as six categories.³⁷ The seven categories used in China today in fact come from standard Shanghai police usage.³⁸ The top category, loosely and controversially linked to prostitution and whose disappearance was mourned in the late nineteenth century, were high-class courtesans, often called “storytellers”, who prided themselves on being entertainers with musical, poetic, dramatic, and dance skills, not sex, to share.³⁹ These women were

to Bar Hostesses”, pp. 82–85, stresses rural women’s need to adopt urban styles to avoid discrimination and to be able to both find work and a husband.

- 33 According to 1991 and 1999 Women’s Federation surveys, reported in Ren Xin, “Prostitution and Employment Opportunities for Women”, available at: <http://www.lolapress.org/artenglish/xinre13.htm>; last accessed 10 July 2017, and Quanhe Yang and Guo Fei, “Occupational Attainments of Rural to Urban Temporary Economic Migrants in China 1985–1990”, *International Migration Review*, 30 (1996), pp. 771–787, more than 800,000 women were laid off in the 1990s and the Women’s Federation retrained over 990,000.
- 34 Xin, “Prostitution and Employment”. See the discussion of “PR Ladies” in Ann Jordan, “Human Rights, Violence against Women, and Economic Development”, *Columbia University Online Journal of Gender and Law*, 5 (1996), pp. 216–272, 261 fn17.
- 35 Most writing about prostitution proceeds from these hierarchies with their differences in women’s backgrounds, education, age, health, and economic status, although some scholars see the categories as more ideal than real; see Henriot, *Prostitution and Sexuality*, p. 14.
- 36 *Ibid.*, Chs 1, 3; Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, Ch. 2.
- 37 Henriot, *Prostitution and Sexuality*, pp. 76–79.
- 38 “Sex Work in China”, Asia Monitor Resource Center, available at: <http://www.amrc.org.hk/content/sex-work-china>; last accessed 12 July 2017.
- 39 Called *shuyu*, a term that harks back nearly 1,000 years, but also known as *guanren*, “official persons”, perhaps harking back to Yuan and Ming court prostitution, *xiansheng* (mister),

inextricably linked to scholar-officials in the popular mind. By the twentieth century, however, these elite courtesans had been collapsed into the next category popularly known as “sing song girls” who dressed in elaborate costumes and specialized in hosting banquets and gambling parties for merchants and well-placed officials.⁴⁰ Sometimes they accompanied clients to plays or other forms of entertainment. Their brothels charged a set fee for all services. Next in the hierarchy were “tea-house” prostitutes whose houses were larger but had smaller rooms; their singing was not as refined and sex was more immediately and readily available.⁴¹ The next category which was purely about sex involved trysting houses where wealthy merchants could discretely meet concubines or those who professed to be respectable women needing a safe, secret place. By the twentieth century, trysting houses gave way to “salt pork shops” for immediate sex.⁴² The largest category of prostitutes in Shanghai in the late Republican era, “wild chicks” or “pheasants,”⁴³ lived and sometimes entertained in brothels, but most of their work was done as streetwalkers and they took men back to their rooms. Consisting of many subcategories, these mobile prostitutes ran the gamut from a middling more selective class with fancier rooms to poorer prostitutes in more sordid surroundings. This appears to have been a new category, with no mention of public solicitation in China before the twentieth century. Also numerous were those in opium dens that gradually became brothels called “flower smoke rooms”⁴⁴ and at the very bottom were “nailsheds”, flophouses that were small, dirty, barely furnished, and had no amenities.⁴⁵ Another group often assumed to be prostitutes were actors and singers—prostitution in China having always been linked, even in the breach,

“singsong girls”, or *shushi*, “storytelling officials.” The most well-known were *ming-ji* “famous/prestigious courtesans”. Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*.

40 These women were referred to as *changsan*, the “long three”, referring to dominos and the old fee of 3 yuan for a drink and another 3 for sex; they were at the top of the hierarchy in Shanghai in the twentieth century.

41 Called *ersan*, “two-three” and *yao-er*, “one-two” also named for dominos, with *ersan* absorbed into *changsan* (and both still calling themselves courtesans). *Yao er* survived through the Republican era.

42 Trysting houses were referred to first as *taiji* and then later as *xianrouzhuang* with the fast food connotations of salt pork.

43 *Yeji* or *zhiji*, these mobile (*liuji*) sex workers were further divided into *xiaji* (“lower class”) or *putong* (“ordinary”).

44 *Huayan jian* or *yanhua jian*.

45 *Dingpeng*. All the above categories are described in Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, pp. 41–53; Henriot, *Prostitution and Sexuality*, Chs 1–3; Baosheng Yu [Wang Tao], *Yinru Zazhi* [*Miscellaneous Notes from the Seaside*] (Shanghai, 1870, reprinted in 1989). Henriot lists other groups important in the 1930s and ‘40s that probably involved occasional prostitution, but he argues they should not be included in any official taxonomy; they include

with entertainment—and women returned to the stage in Shanghai with the first all-female troupe in 1870,⁴⁶ and after 1911 women performed in new-style teahouses where they often cross-dressed and portrayed men, as well as in the new, popular Yue opera imported from the Zhejiang countryside.⁴⁷

Today the quasi-official categories used by the police and public alike number approximately seven. The most elite companion is a new-style concubine or second wife serving one client alone, although now kept not on the family estate but in a separate apartment, with regular, usually monthly, payments. The second category, contracted wives, have less security and their length of service is not assured but they are “packaged”, essentially rented short-term for business trips or official events. The third category includes escort girls and KTV (karaoke) hostesses, bar girls who may but are not required to have sex, available instead primarily as companions for men while they eat and drink at bars, restaurants, and dance halls. They are sometimes called “three accompaniment girls” because they offer the three services of drinking, dancing, and singing. There are many of these in Shanghai. The fourth category are “ding dong girls” who call men in their hotel rooms and invite them out. The fifth are also ubiquitous in China today, “massage parlour” or “hair salon” girls who provide services like massages, haircuts or hairstyling, or sauna visits along with sex, usually inside an establishment, not outside (unless their services are provided on the street, which does happen). The sixth category of prostitutes, street walkers, solicit their customers from bars or hotels, sometimes for fondling in movie houses, and, as is general in China, they work without pimps. The last are literally at the bottom of society, “women who live in a shed” who service the poorest men, usually migrant workers, sometimes living with or among them, exchanging sex for food, shelter, and basic survival.⁴⁸

There is some dispute about the common belief that prostitutes, their houses, and their clients shared the same regional, class, or ethnic backgrounds.

masseuses, waitresses, and professional (taxi) dancers in the new dance halls. Henriot, *Prostitution and Sexuality*, Ch. 4.

46 Mann, *Gender and Sexuality*, p. 149.

47 Hui-ling Chou, “Striking Their Own Poses: the History of Cross-Dressing on the Chinese Stage”, *The Drama Review*, 42 (1997), pp. 130–152, 147; Jin Jiang, *Women Playing Men: Yue Opera and Social Change in Twentieth Century China* (Seattle, 2009), pp. 46–59; Mann, *Gender and Sexuality*, p. 150.

48 In Chinese, second wives are *ernai*; contracted girls are *baopo*; escort girls are *peinu*; “three accompaniment girls” are *sanpeixiaojie*; “ding dong girls” are *ding dong xiaojie*; massage parlour girls are *falangmei*; streetwalkers are *jienu*; and at the bottom, shantytown prostitutes are *xiaogongpeng*. See the discussion in Asia Monitor Resource Center, “Sex Work in China.”

Instead, it appears that sex work lacked the long procurement chains found in other kinds of work.⁴⁹ In fact, most brothels and entertainment establishments were notable for the diverse origins and backgrounds of the women within.⁵⁰ As for their exact provenance, although there was a scattering of some from further afield, nearly all Shanghai prostitutes were found to be from the city and its suburbs or had migrated from towns and cities in the two closest provinces, Zhejiang and Jiangsu.

The situation today, however, reflects new patterns of migration which respond to the burgeoning growth of China in the world economy and the voracious need for female labour. In 1920, an estimated 82 per cent of Shanghai's population were migrants, primarily from close-by areas. It is estimated that today about 25 per cent of the population in major Chinese cities is "floating" away from their official hometowns, with migrants traveling to work on the eastern seaboard today from further afield, particularly from the poor and overpopulated provinces of Sichuan, Hunan, and Guizhou. Today most seem to have accompanied or "followed" earlier migrants from their region, district, town, or village.⁵¹

In the past, women's social background, educational level, and general health declined down the ranks in the hierarchy of sex workers. Age was often inverse; women at the bottom were older, with many former higher-class

49 As described in Honig, *Sisters and Strangers*.

50 Henriot, *Prostitution and Sexuality*, p. 135.

51 Both twentieth-century social surveys and extensive records kept at rescue institutions like the Anti-Kidnapping Society (set up by local Chinese) and the western missionary-run Door of Hope have provided little evidence for regional or ethnic compartmentalization. Most elite courtesans claimed to have come from Suzhou with its traditional literati allure, but much of this was probably false advertising. Comparatively small numbers of elite prostitutes from Canton and Ningbo entertained men from those areas. Prostitutes from eastern Guangdong who had first serviced foreign sailors there, derogatorily labelled "salt water sisters", made their way to Shanghai by the late nineteenth century to work with poor dock workers and sailors in the Hangkou port area. Some authors assert that only poor, desperate, and unhealthy women would do this work, while others attest to the striking differences in style, song, and dress of these women and their rejection by other prostitutes and Chinese clients; Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, p. 40. Jacka and Gaetano, *On the Move*, pp. 24–25 report that in one establishment 72 per cent were from a single area and 95 per cent were from a single area in another, with another study reporting that 51 per cent of migrants from Sichuan follow their provincial counterparts. Perhaps migrants travel with fellow migrants and separate later. Also, see the women interviewed by Wei Zhong, "Red Light District" cited in Zhong, "A Close Look at China's Sex Industry" in *Lianhe Zaobao* (October 2, 2000).

prostitutes.⁵² What has changed dramatically today is the background of women involved in prostitution. The top three categories today often include women with more education and social standing. Even the fourth category of women soliciting in hotels might include local university students.⁵³ Most researchers, scholars, and popular writers on sexuality, gender, and prostitution in China today have remarked on this change. One scholar, while trying to explain the extraordinary figure of perhaps 20 million (some estimates reach 30 million or more) prostitutes in China—perhaps 500,000 in Shanghai alone—posits that there has been a restructuring of morality with prostitutes in bars and dance halls now including a range from migrants with no education to urban girls who want fancy things and highly educated, pretty urban girls who “go into it voluntarily to have a golden nest.”⁵⁴ The bottom two categories of sex work continue to be carried out by the poorest, least educated women who often are migrants, or, as was the case in the past, women who were at one time higher-level prostitutes. The age of prostitutes has also changed. A comparison of arrest records from 1991 and 1999 shows an increase in the age of the oldest from 37 to 54, reflecting the social and economic restructuring that has left older women without adequate incomes.⁵⁵ It is estimated that there are perhaps 100 million unemployed women in China,⁵⁶ and Shanghai, a textile centre that saw massive firings of women workers in the 1990s, provides a large share of the total.

Other Kinds of Sex Work

Child Prostitution

There were always children in brothels, the daughters of prostitutes plus young girls procured to be trained and brought up as entertainers, as well as girls doing any manner of work. Customers preferred sex with young girls; brothels demanded higher fees for virgins, with special initiation ceremonies in better establishments. There is still a preference across China for young sex workers, and that has been reinforced since the appearance of AIDS as there is common belief that young girls are freer of disease. There is some implication that the

52 Gronewold, *Beautiful Merchandise*; Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, p. 48; Henriot, *Prostitution and Sexuality*, p. 90.

53 Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, pp. 333–343.

54 Zong, “Close Look”.

55 Xin, “Prostitution and Employment Opportunities for Women”.

56 Zhong, “Close Look”.

One Child Policy combined with the cultural preference for a male heir has resulted in more trafficked girl babies, but that has been little studied.⁵⁷

Male Homosexual Prostitution

Male homosexual prostitution was quite common throughout Chinese history and is a major theme in literature and art. Male entertainers, especially those who played female roles (*dan*) in opera, were the most sought after, and in the early twentieth century, popular female impersonators in Shanghai like Mei Langfang attracted particularly wealthy benefactors.⁵⁸ In the 1920s and '30s, however, both homosexuality and prostitution were labelled deviant and criminal, resulting in their prohibition and then total suppression under Mao. Today, male prostitution has resurfaced and is particularly visible in Shanghai, an international destination for gay men (and women), even though homosexuality has been strongly suppressed by the socialist state and was labelled "hooliganism" (*liumang*) in the 1979 legal code. Newspapers frequently run exposes of young men who turn to prostitution for quick money, as in a spate of stories in 2011 and 2012 about a high school male prostitution ring in Shanghai.⁵⁹ A 2011 national survey of prostitutes which included Shanghai found that over a third of their respondents were male, almost all between the ages of 20 and 30; they are called "money boys" and primarily work at clubs or rental houses. They are often migrants, and there is great demand for their services, but their lives are unstable, marked by frequent moves—they are constantly harassed and their customers seem to want greater variety—and a very high incidence of venereal diseases and AIDS.⁶⁰

57 One of the unintended consequences of China's draconian One Child Policy which has been effect since 1980 is that there are now an average of 100 females for every 120 males in the population, and in some areas the demographic sex imbalance exceeds 100/150. Predictions are that by 2020 there will be 40 million men unable to find wives. The result will be a far higher demand for sex workers, which ironically will remove even more women from the marriage market. Under these circumstances, the sale and/or kidnapping of female children for wives or prostitutes is likely to increase, and there is anecdotal evidence that this is happening already. Susan Greenhalgh, "Patriarchal Demographics: China's Sex Ratios Reconsidered", *Population and Development Review*, 38 (2013), pp. 130–149, 134–135.

58 Vitiello, *Libertine's Friend*, pp. 6–9, 251 fn 6; Ruan, *Sex in China*, Ch. 7.

59 Widely reported on, as in the *South China Morning Post*, 12 November 2011.

60 *Xiao di* are "money boys". Kong, *Chinese Male Homosexualities*, argues that many migrant males turn to prostitution as the only way to make money but as the result of government repression, their low rural status and general homophobic culture, these men are the "transient queer labour" who are always on the move; also see Xing Zhao "Selling Smiles: Inside the World of Shanghai's Male Sex Workers" in *CNN International*, 30 June 2010;

Transgender Sex Workers

A new category among Shanghai sex workers includes those who are transgendered or ambiguously gendered and who argue for its long history in China, but as yet there is little mention of it in studies of prostitution. According to a few surveys, transgender sex workers are perhaps the worst treated, with high levels of violence, disease, and psychological problems with trauma and identity issues (one respondent in the survey called people like himself “evil spirits”).⁶¹

Changing Working Conditions

Working conditions for prostitutes in Shanghai have always varied greatly, depending on the prostitute’s class and clientele, and that is still the case. Like modern day mistresses, in the past the most sought-after courtesans would attend to only one or two clients a night, usually of her own choosing, and they would respect the elaborate rules that governed her art; she would entertain them at elegant teahouses, restaurants, and hotels attended by her large retinue, while, at the other end of the spectrum, the lowest level of prostitute would be pressed to service dozens of men a day in an unsanitary brothel. Those in the middle were available for sex, not entertainment, and they had to accept all who came to them; they were probably in debt to their madams, who also often used drug addiction as a means of control. Like the streetwalkers in China today, they were increasingly desperate for customers and money to survive (and in many cases, gave most of what they made to their families).⁶²

Violence seems always to have been an occupational hazard at all levels of sex work, both at brothels at the hands of harsh madams and customers or the public at large, as well as the state (police in particular), and it is an issue now as much as it was in the past. Fear of violence and mistreatment by both clients and managers have always been the major reasons prostitutes try to escape the life.⁶³

available at: www.cnn.go.com/shanghai/life/selling-smiles-shanghai-male-sex-workers; last accessed 23 September 2011; Vivien Cui “Money Boys Become Currency of Pimps”, in *South China Morning Post*, 25 October 2005; China Sex Worker Organization Network Forum, “Research”.

61 China Sex Worker Organization Network Forum, “Research”; also see Ruan, *Sex in China*, Ch. 8.

62 Henriot, *Prostitution and Sexuality*, Ch. 3.

63 Zheng, *Red Lights*, pp. 70–72, 83–85, 90–92, 104, 159; Min, *Migration*, pp. 133–138; Henriot, *Sex and Sexuality*, Ch. 6; Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, pp. 145–165.

In addition, there are and have always been serious health risks associated with prostitution, from diseases like syphilis (almost half of the prostitutes arrested by the police in 1951 had a combination of both syphilis and gonorrhoea⁶⁴) and problems of pregnancy and frequent abortions to today's HIV/AIDS epidemic.⁶⁵ In the past, the majority of prostitutes suffered from diseases but were not treated. There were attempts in the late nineteenth century to impose medical examinations patterned after the Contagious Diseases Act in Britain, and in 1877 a venereal disease lock hospital was opened in the International Settlement,⁶⁶ but both only dealt with women servicing foreigners and neither managed to treat many prostitutes as they avoided anything that would prevent them from working.⁶⁷ Today, HIV/AIDS is rapidly spreading through the population among intravenous drug users and sex workers on the east coast as the result of a general lack of information and infrequent condom use (60 per cent of males who have sexual encounters with sex workers in high class hotels use condoms versus 30 per cent in karaoke bars).⁶⁸ It is estimated that 1.5 million Chinese nationals are currently infected, and there has been a 30 per cent increase per year of infections on some parts of the east coast where there are many rural migrants, mostly men who often utilize the services of prostitutes; at the same time, many migrant women there turn to prostitution. Health officials and advocates who work with prostitutes worry that one result of harsh "strike hard" campaigns is that prostitutes tend to forgo the use of condoms both during and after campaigns so they can attract more customers to make up for lost time and money paid for fines.⁶⁹

64 Henriot, *Prostitution and Sexuality*, p. 149.

65 Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, pp. 36, 143, 174–176, 316, 348, 463 fn 138, Ch. 9; Henriot, *Prostitution and Sexuality*; Zheng, *Red Lights*.

66 Kyle Macpherson, *A Wilderness of Marshes: The Origins of Public Health in Shanghai, 1843–1893* (Berkeley, 1987), pp. 213–258.

67 Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, Ch. 8.

68 Zheng, *Red Lights*, p. 62; another study found only 13 per cent in 1995 reported using condoms with 20 per cent in 2002; condom use does not appear to have been openly discussed until the 1940s and even now discussions of it are relatively rare, although the medical literature suggests there were rather effective traditional methods for preventing pregnancy.

69 Joan Kaufmann "HIV, Sex Work, and Civil Society in China", *Journal of Infectious Diseases*, 204 supplement 5 (2011), pp. 218–222. Also see China Sex Worker Organization Network Forum "Research on Crackdown". According to an article by Maureen Fan, "Prostitution Flourishes in China", *Washington Post* 8 April 2007, sociologist Jing Jun reported that in one study, older more desperate female sex workers had higher rates of infection, with 60 per cent of workers aged over 60 infected with HIV.

Prostitute/Employer/Client Relationships

Most traditional prostitution was carried out at registered brothels or other establishments run by madams who were often retired prostitutes and staffed mostly by female servants for cleaning, makeup, sewing, and foot care, plus teachers of dance and music. Many writers commented on the fictive kin relationships that existed at such establishments, where madams were addressed as “mother”, older women as “aunts”, and other prostitutes as “sisters.”⁷⁰ It appears that the language of family in such relationships persists today; sex workers often call their madam “mother” and even male managers are referred to as “mamasan” in ethnographies of the world of male prostitutes.⁷¹ Although the Chinese system did not and still does not include pimps as in the west, in the multiple new venues for sex services like clubs and bars there is an increasing need for managers who not only supervise but also protect and control the working girls (and boys). The relationship, particularly when sex workers are not able to “go out”, verges on enslavement.

Interactions with courtesans required an elaborate code of conduct, and only men who were cognizant of its intricate rules were allowed to participate (novices and “country bumpkins” were the subject of much ridicule in this regard in novels and films). Elaborate rules and customs continue to be part of prostitutes’ lives, as in the description in contemporary ethnographies of karaoke and dance hall girls today,⁷² along with popular films, novels, and blogs (like *Shanghai Baby*). The game involves getting as much from clients as possible without giving up their freedom, or much sex. But there is as wide a range of prostitute/employer/client relationships as there are multiple arrangements at all levels.

Prostitutes’ Agency and Resistance

Certainly courtesans and entertainers at the top of their profession had a great deal more freedom than the “good” women cloistered in their homes. Feminists

70 My research on rescued prostitutes at the Door of Hope attests to the often powerful ties that existed within these establishments, even though many verged on the abusive. Gronewold, *Beautiful Merchandise*, 1984.

71 Vivien Cui, “Money Boys”, cites the cases of Li Ning, who manages money boys in Nanjing, and Bing Bing in Dalian, who at any time has thirty money boys in his employ with hundreds of clients, having worked over the years with more than 500 boys.

72 Zheng, *Red Lights*, Ch. 7.

and sex researchers have debated endlessly about the meaning of this freedom as well as the issue of agency for women and sex work.⁷³ At all levels of society, there always have been some women who started sex work of their own volition, deciding that engaging in this kind of work was the most preferable way to support themselves—and often their families, husbands, or children—and many make the same decision in today's Shanghai.

Likewise, there have been many debates about the notion of resistance. There have been cases of prostitutes protesting in groups, most famously in Shanghai in 1920, a time of mass strikes, when sing-song girls demonstrated on the streets to protest new laws that categorized them as prostitutes; their banners read, "We sell our smiles, not our bodies."⁷⁴ There are also celebrated stories of prostitutes joining together in the twentieth century to show their patriotism, especially the (most likely) apocryphal story of prostitutes in nearby Nanjing offering their own bodies to save "good" women from rampaging Japanese troops in 1937.⁷⁵ Today, there are scattered instances of prostitutes and their advocates using international human rights appeals and legal language, such as the well-known feminist activist Ye Haiyan, known as Liumang Yan or "Hooligan Sparrow", who has taken the fight for prostitutes' rights to the internet. In Shanghai, an advocacy group for male prostitutes, Shanghai Lei

73 In fact, Catherine Vance Yeh has argued that when high-level courtesans moved from Jiangnan to Shanghai after the mid-nineteenth century rebellions, courtesans themselves took advantage of the foreign concessions to redefine their use of space and time so they could attract more wealthy merchants rather than traditional literati as lovers (often popular male opera stars) in their private houses (*sidi* or *sifang*) and to use parks and carriages as newly defined public spaces for their own purposes. Yeh, "Playing with the Public: Late Qing Courtesans and their Opera Singer Lovers" in Goodman and Larson, *Gender in Motion*, pp. 145–168, 145–156.

74 Gronewold, *Beautiful Merchandise*; Henriot, *Prostitution and Sexuality*, pp. 62–64.

75 Portrayed most recently in the Zhang Yimou film, *Flowers of War* based on the Yan Galing novel of the same name. Historian Catherine Vance Yeh in *Gender in Motion*, "Playing with the Public", asserts that one of the most famous women in Republican China was a courtesan, Xiaofengxian, the favourite of prominent general Cai E. She was literate, interested in literature and politics, and independent (she paid the madam in her brothel so she could choose her visitors), and she took great political risks for her lover. Hershtater, *Dangerous Pleasures*, pp. 171–174, recounts stories of prostitutes around the turn of the century getting involved in patriotic actions; one contributed to the rights recovery movement in 1906, another established a Courtesan Evolution Corps in 1914 to support the new nation, and several prominent courtesans were involved in establishing schools for prostitutes, in line with calls for women's education in general.

(now Shanghai Xinsheng), offers services and legal help in combating forms of abuse.⁷⁶

Prostitutes' Culture

As entertainers traditionally linked to the world of literate scholar-officials, Shanghai prostitutes, particularly higher level courtesans, were associated with elite culture, singing and playing classical songs especially on the *pipa* (Chinese lute), acting out scenes from traditional opera, dancing, reciting poetry, and other social skills such as serving tea and playing elaborate drinking games with classical allusions. Courtesans were known for their trend-setting elaborate fashion.⁷⁷ By the late nineteenth century, the formless traditional women's tunic was transformed into the sexy *chipao* (*cheong sam*) by tailoring it tighter with a high side slit, and it became identified with the "sing-song girls" now included as part of the new "courtesan" world.⁷⁸ Courtesans' elaborate makeup, jewellery, hairdos, accessories, and foot-binding shoes were all closely watched and copied. Their exploits, romances, intrigues, and petty fights were followed in the tabloid press and formed the substance of a distinct courtesan novel genre. Visiting courtesans in their dazzlingly beautiful establishments, engaging them for formal banquets in restaurants and teahouses, and trying to become a favoured client were all part of elaborate rituals of which the courtesans were masters and ostensibly in control.⁷⁹

76 China Sex Worker Organization Network Forum, "Report"; Sara Davis, "Police Crackdowns in China: The Health and Human Rights of Sex Workers", in Harvard School of Public Health's blog for *Health and Human Rights: An International Journal*, 25 March 2012; available at: <http://www.hhropenforum.org/tag/anti-prostitution-laws/>; last accessed 23 September 2012; Zhao, "Selling Smiles"; *Daily Beast*, 31 July 2012.

77 As celebrated in 1980s nostalgic films like Hou Hsiao-hsien's *Flowers of Shanghai*, Chen Kaige's *Farewell my Concubine* and the images in popular late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Shanghai pictorials like *Duanshizhai huabao* with flamboyant clothing of bright colours and extravagant embroidery.

78 See Henriot, Ch. 1, for the evolution of the *chipao*; see also Antonia Finnane, *Changing Clothes in China: Fashion, History, Nation* (New York, 2008), p. 121.

79 Like *Precious Mirror of Flowers* (*Pinhua baojian*, 1849), *Traces of Flowers and Moon* (*Hua-yuehen*, 1872), Han Bangqing's *The Sing Song Girls of Shanghai* (*Haishanghua liezhuan*, 1894), the sordid *Nine-Tailed Tortoise* (*Jiuweigui*, 1911) or for a later period, Eileen Zhang's *Lust, Caution and Love in a Fallen City* (New York, 2007). Hershatler, *Dangerous Pleasures*, p. 417 fn 8. See also Stephen Cheng, "Flowers of Shanghai and the Late Ch'ing Courtesan Novel" (Unpublished Ph.D., Harvard University, 1979).

Traditionally, Chinese cities had zoned entertainment districts for teahouses, restaurants, stages, and brothels, all of which were controlled by the state. In the late Ming and early Qing eras, the entertainment area in Shanghai was in the northern part of the walled city.⁸⁰ Later with the growth of the merchant population with their regional associations, temples, and markets, the entertainment area diversified and spread beyond the walls. Shanghai in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries did not have specific zoned quarters but did have concentrations of brothels, especially downtown in the International Settlement along Fuzhou Road, along with poorer prostitutes concentrated in more marginal areas.⁸¹

Prostitutes' culture today is perhaps even more varied, with high-class call girls living in extreme luxury. Sex work is now viewed by many women as an easy way to earn money, participate in contemporary fashion, and be modern and fashionable, and this is accompanied by a disdain of regular employment on farms, at factories and in shops. On the other hand, there are perhaps millions of women, many of them poor older migrants or unemployed older women living in abominable conditions, who service the old, the very poor, and the criminal in so-called "ten yuan" (US\$2) brothels.⁸² Prostitution is a popular topic in newspapers, journals, on television, in movies, in advice columns, on the internet, and in literature, with regular scandals that involve corrupt officials either as purchasers of sexual services or having been tolerant of and perhaps profiting from sex work.⁸³

State, Society, and Prostitution

Scholars such as Susan Mann have convincingly argued that prostitution should be understood not just as entertainment or as a means to survival but, more importantly, within the context of arranged marriage in a highly patriarchal society which has resulted in male prerogatives in social and sexual conduct both inside and outside the home and in the need to protect (their)

80 Johnson, *Shanghai*, p. 118.

81 See Henriot for detailed Shanghai maps showing the shifting geography of prostitution in late Qing/early Republican Shanghai, *Prostitution and Sexuality*, pp. 205–222.

82 Paul Mooney, "China's Sex Worker Warrior Fights for Prostitutes' Rights", *Daily Beast*, 31 July 2012; Peter Barefoot, "10 RMB Brothel Sex Workers", available at: <https://www.chinasmack.com/10-rmb-brothel-sex-workers-comparing-prostitution-to-farming/>; last accessed 10 July 2017.

83 See Elaine Jeffreys, "Debating the Legal Regulation of Sex Related Bribery and Corruption in the PRC", in Jeffreys, *Sex and Sexuality*, pp. 158–178; Elaine Jeffreys, *Prostitute Scandals in China: Policing, Media, and Society* (London, 2012).

women while making others available to them as social companions and (often) sexual servicers.

Though prostitution was legal before 1949, there were always contradictions; the state used extensive means to limit and control prostitution and it was powerfully condemned in popular morality, with a major distinction between *liangmin* (good people) and *jianmin* (base people) who had to be kept separate and distinct. Due to heavy doses of Confucian morality and Daoist ideas about the body,⁸⁴ men were pressured to stay loyal to their families and not take risks, whether moral, legal, or medical.

Before 1949 there was a tradition of state oversight of prostitution so that it could regulate prostitution (and profit from it), promote public health, and maintain public order. State and society acknowledged that prostitutes played a necessary role, but also recognized that their presence was quite dangerous, so they had to be specially monitored, regulated, and controlled.⁸⁵ Often part of the underworld with its gangsters and brotherhoods, prostitution was thus connected with opium, alcohol, stolen goods, and other criminal activities.

Prostitution had long been addressed in state and local legal codes and regulations, both criminal and civil, which traditionally had not expressly prohibited prostitution but regulated and limited it, with status differences as an integral part of the law.⁸⁶ Although law codes underwent much revision and clarification under the Republican and PRC regimes, it has often been remarked that many of the traditional Confucian assumptions that undergirded imperial law about prostitution and sexuality remained and are still dominant in China today; these notions include the idea that people are innately good and educable, with the family being the key socializing unit rather than the

84 Ruan, *Sex in China*, Ch. 2; Mann, *Gender and Sexuality*, pp. 85–95.

85 Entertainment districts in the past and brothel districts in the twentieth century were sites of frequent violence and legal disputes, from patrolling police to constant court cases. Henriot, *Prostitution and Sexuality*, pp. 154–162; Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, Ch. 8.

86 Officials and their sons who frequented brothels were punished; respectable families were legally separated from prostitutes, actors, and singers, and they were forbidden from buying, adopting, or bringing them into their families through marriage. Under the activist Yongzheng emperor (1723–1735), the state undertook far-reaching legal reforms, attempting to incorporate formerly outcast groups within the law, and at the same time invoking the importance of marriage as necessary to bring all men under state control and provide uniformity throughout the empire. Relative tolerance of prostitution (at least when used by men of high status) gave way to powerful prohibitions on the selling of (good) women into prostitution and laws against harbouring prostitutes. Certain sexual practices were forbidden, such as anal penetration, which severely restricted (as least in law) male prostitution. Sommers, *Sex, Law, and Society*, pp. 292–357; Ruan, *Sex in China*, p. 97; for the text of the Qing code, see Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, pp. 474–476, fn 1.

state with its laws and punishment, and universal marriage therefore being absolutely essential.⁸⁷

During the Republican period (1911–1949), law codes were updated and made more “modern”, and the 1923 Provisional Law Code prohibiting procuring and trafficking was revised in 1935 to make it a crime to take anyone younger than 20 years of age from his/her family, particularly if the aim were “carnal knowledge or [intent] to do a lascivious act.”⁸⁸ The endless succession of court cases, as in the Qing, attests not only to the control of the state, but also to the awareness by ordinary Chinese subjects and citizens of their right to legal protection.

Faced with a burgeoning prostitution problem and powerfully influenced by western attitudes about women’s status, the treatment of social problems, public health concerns, and sexuality, late nineteenth-century reformers linked prostitution to China’s backwardness, and twentieth-century May 4th Enlightenment thinkers called for a strong, modern state. They both argued that prostitution should be closely regulated, with some even arguing for its abolition, as had been done in England and the United States.⁸⁹ Prostitution was thus more tightly regulated by all of the Shanghai governments until 1949 through licensing and taxation (via a five-class system). Extensive registries of both brothels and prostitutes were kept as part of a significant source of municipal income,⁹⁰ and weekly health examinations were made mandatory in the International Settlement in 1877.⁹¹ Shanghai, like other cities, also

87 Mann, *Gender and Sexuality*, pp. 67–68.

88 Quoted in Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, p. 187.

89 Recent work by Elizabeth Remick argues that the early twentieth century regulatory system with its systems of licensing, health examinations, taxation, and a mandatory women’s refuge was borrowed whole cloth from European models in an attempt to thoroughly modernize the state. Elizabeth Remick, *Regulating Prostitution: Gender and Local State-building, 1900–1937* (Stanford, 2014). An ill-fated policy of prohibiting prostitution, with a bizarre programme of first thoroughly licensing and then progressively closing brothels, was attempted in 1923, spearheaded by western missionaries (Shanghai was the headquarters for most foreign missionary organizations) working with Chinese Christians in a strident Moral Welfare League, but only in the International Settlement, not the French or Chinese cities. Sue Gronewold, “Encountering Hope: the Door of Hope Mission in Shanghai and Taipei” (Unpublished Ph.D., Columbia University, 1996); Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, pp. 272–288; Henriot, *Prostitution and Sexuality*, Ch. 12.

90 According to a 1922 survey, half of seventy-one Chinese cities had some kind of prostitute tax; noted in Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, p. 477 fn 4. Shanghai’s five types of houses that were licensed and taxed were: *changsans*, *yao er*, “pheasants”, “salt-pork”, and opium.

91 Further police regulations in the early twentieth century forbade prostitutes from public soliciting, gathering in groups, making fun of each other, speaking in a lascivious or lewd manner, and wearing clothing that was improperly seductive. As prostitution increased,

attempted gradual abolition. Of course, when prohibited, prostitution merely moved elsewhere, street and unlicensed prostitution exploded, and the policy was a disastrous failure. But the notion of abolition had been put on the table. When in 1928 Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government banned prostitution from neighbouring provinces in general and in the national capital in Nanjing in particular, prostitutes moved in droves to Shanghai.⁹²

After 1949, the strong popularly supported Maoist state that governed all of China focused on the complete eradication of prostitution (along with the sale and use of opium) as a major symbol of capitalist vice. Banned in Shanghai in 1951, prostitution was deemed to have been eliminated in 1958; it was claimed that venereal disease clinics were no longer necessary and they were shut down in 1965.⁹³ The state claimed that it had enacted total abolition, although there were scattered stories from 1950 until 1980 of poor women resorting to prostitution, officials having access to sexual services from various kinds of women (for example, drama troupes consisting of women with "bad" class backgrounds), and guest houses that offered sexual services for special foreign visitors.⁹⁴

Prostitution reappeared with a vengeance in the early 1980s under Deng Xiaoping's reform economy which permitted private entrepreneurship along with increasing geographic mobility and the development of market socialism

new regulations forbade the use of indecent language and immoral conduct on roads and in public places and outlawed nudity and gambling. Prostitutes could not drink or spend the night in hotels, nor could guests entertain them there. Later, in 1936, escort agencies and dancing companion societies were forbidden. Children were also taken into account; no-one under sixteen could stay overnight in brothels and brothels could not be located near schools. *Ibid.*, pp. 207–213; Henriot, *Prostitution and Sexuality*, Ch. 11.

92 Hershatler, *Dangerous Pleasures*, p. 287.

93 This was helped by the presence of a strong Chinese state, the disappearance of powerful gangs who had either fled in 1949 or been executed as counterrevolutionaries, and the fact that many women returned to their rural homes or found other jobs. The execution of traffickers, the arrest of brothel owners, and the closing of all brothels were coupled with the forced re-education of prostitutes in a Women's Labour Training Institute under the aegis of the Social Affairs Bureau; many women were eventually moved back to their rural homes, some got jobs in the city, and a large group who did not have families were sent to state farms in remote border regions. Marriage was part of the package for as many as possible, in line with Chinese attitudes about marriage as a form of social control. *Ibid.*, Ch. 13; Kong, *Chinese Male Homosexualities*, p. 153, discusses the conundrum that those with alternative sexualities find themselves in, as their lifestyles are labelled deviant and pathological.

94 Hershatler, *Dangerous Pleasures*, p. 332.

and Chinese capitalism; wealth and profits skyrocketed, first in the countryside and then in cities. Prostitution looks quite different in the Reform Era, as old-fashioned brothels were relatively rare (and there were still relatively few pimps) but sexual services were now intertwined with an explosion of new entertainment venues open to all such as movie houses, dance halls, bars, hair salons, barbershops, coffeehouses, roadside shops, train stations, parks, and especially karaoke bars. In some of these establishments, madams were managers and sex workers lived on the grounds and were prohibited from “going out.” In the 1990s, a new kind of upper-level sexual servicer emerged, first in the Special Economic Zones (SEZ) in the south and then in Shanghai and northern cities: women who are neither poor nor rural and who more aggressively seek out wealthy foreign men or overseas Chinese in particular. These women are able to advertise in a myriad of ways, using new technologies like cell phones, pagers, and all manner of social media available today, which allow them to maintain their own rosters of men they regularly service.⁹⁵

Although prostitution is formally illegal in the PRC, its forceful reappearance in the 1980s has led to a spate of regulations attempting to limit and control this new phenomenon.⁹⁶ Government at all levels has attempted to rein in prostitution, but, as has already been noted, due to a general culture of corruption, officials at all levels are often implicated in prostitution. Both national and local “strike hard” (*yan da*) campaigns against illegal activities that include sex work, gambling, drug use, and trafficking are waged regularly with great drama and visibility but with unclear results.⁹⁷

95 Ren Xin, “Prostitution and Economic Modernization of China” in *Violence against Women*, 5 (1999), pp. 1411–1414; Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, pp. 333–343.

96 Early in the Reform Era, when it appeared that prostitution might make a come-back, all other provinces followed Guangdong province in the south (where many of the first special economic zones were located) in issuing “Provincial Provisional Rules on Banning Selling and Buying of Sex”, followed ten years later in 1991 by the National People’s Congress’ “Decision on Strictly Forbidding the Selling and Buying of Sex” and in 1993 by the State Council’s “Rules Regarding the Detention and Education of People Who Sell and Buy Sex” particularly aimed at the prevention of venereal diseases. In 1997 the PRC’s Criminal Code law reaffirmed the prohibition on organizing, coercing, inducing, sheltering, or facilitating prostitution, accompanied that year by Communist Party rules against Party members engaging in the buying or selling of sex. In 1999 the State Council issued rules banning businesses from engaging in prostitution: “Regulations Regarding the Management of Public Places of Entertainment”. Zhang Heqing, “Female Sex Sellers and Public Policy in the People’s Republic of China”, in Jeffreys, *Sex and Sexuality*, pp. 139–158, 142.

97 A particularly aggressive campaign is going on at present under an administration that came into office promising to eradicate high-level corruption and special privileges; the previous national campaign was in 2010, with a special agency in Shanghai because

The increasing prevalence of prostitution (estimates range widely, from the official government figure of six million in 2004 to perhaps more than 30 million today)⁹⁸ has resulted in challenges for the state and its work with women, most notably for the quasi-state All-China Women's Federation (*Quanguo Funu Lianhehui*, known popularly as *Fulian*). While on the one hand decrying the exploitation of women, the Women's Federation as a whole has tended to defend traditional marriage and urged women not to migrate, for example, but to stay at home and be filial and "ideal" women, lest they become "bad" or "fallen" women,⁹⁹ although the sensational press and public are equally fascinated by lurid stories of the sex industry largely filled with migrant women.

Attitudes toward sexuality in general and particularly about men's use of sexual services seem to be undergoing major transformations. Men's attitudes have changed dramatically, from the traditional concern over saving one's male *yang* and imbibing as much female *yin* as possible to a general acceptance today of frequent sex and sex services. In a 2006 national survey, 7.2 per cent of urban males and 1.8 per cent of rural men reported that they purchase sexual services.¹⁰⁰ Women's attitudes have changed as well, particularly among young women, as a result of the One Child Policy; ironically, it has shifted the focus on sex for procreation to sex for pleasure.

the Shanghai Expo was being held that year. An earlier campaign in 1997 netted 432,000 sex workers, a number that has grown exponentially. Those arrested are often treated harshly, beaten, fined (frequently as much as 5,000 *yuan*, US\$800), and perhaps sent to spend years in one of more than 1,000 labour re-education camps (*laogai*) located in poor remote provinces. China Sex Worker Organization Network, "Research"; Davis, "Police Crackdowns in China". Forced labour apparently has little effect; most women return to prostitution, probably having learned more about the trade from fellow inmates. Evans, *Women and Sexuality*, p. 171.

- 98 Estimates vary widely. Xue Bai, *Toushi sanpeinu* [*Looking into Escort Girls*] (Beijing, 2002) estimated 6–8 million in 2000; the WHO report in 2004 gave a figure of 6 million with estimates ranging up to 30 million as posited by Huang Yingying *et al.*, "HIV/AIDS Risk among Brothel-based Female Sex Workers in China: Assessing the Terms, Content, and Knowledge of Sex Work", *Journal of the Sexual Transmission of Disease*, 31 (2004), pp. 695–700.
- 99 As exhorted in their publications; see Wanning Sun, "Indoctrination, Fetishization, and Compassion: Media Constructions of the Migrant Woman", in Jacka and Gaetano (eds), *On the Move*, pp. 109–130, 114–115.
- 100 Suiming Pan, William Parish, and Yingying Huang, "Clients of Female Sex Workers: A Population-Based Survey of China", *Journal of Infectious Diseases*, 204 supplement 5 (2011), pp. 1211–1217.

Lively debates continue in the Reform Era, especially among feminists, around the issue of either eradicating or ameliorating prostitution by counselling and helping prostitutes and women with sex issues in general, and tolerating sex work. Sexologists in China are divided about public policy towards prostitution, with many arguing for decriminalization.¹⁰¹ These issues are much discussed in Shanghai today, along with the concomitant issues of venereal diseases, AIDS, abortion, divorce, and domestic violence, bolstered through the establishment of clinics, women's shelters, and hotlines. There is a myriad of advocacy groups—religious organizations, both foreign and Chinese NGOs, and feminist and LGTB organizations that focus on health, safety, security, and other issues that affect sex workers, although the impact of the recent government crackdown on civil society is unclear.¹⁰²

At the end of her recent book on karaoke bar hostesses, anthropologist Zheng Tiantian returned to visit the women she came to know. Business had been sluggish, but instead of redefining the audience to include families, as in Japan, karaoke bar owners in China instead began offering naked hostesses who sang, danced, and touched customers' genitals "to see their reactions", a change that was so popular that there were hour-long lines outside the bars. Lamenting this increasingly demeaning work for what she calls the new "entrepreneurial man" in China, Zheng closes with the conclusion—an apt conclusion for this paper—that "the demand for naked hostesses is a long way from the scholar's relationship with the courtesan in classical China."¹⁰³

101 Zhang quoting Li in Jeffreys "Female Sex Sellers", pp. 139–141. Although researchers like Pan Suiming hasten to add that the changes are gendered and generational, with young men and women most affected in the shift from sex for reproduction to sex for pleasure and even sex for leisure, young women are still more constrained by social considerations. Pan, "Transformations in the Primary Life Cycle". For the effects on the economy, see Ming Xia in Joseph T.H. Lee (ed.), *Marginalization in China: Recasting Minority Politics* (New York, 2012), p. 111, who quotes prominent economists Ning Liu and Huiming Tien (eds), *Heise youhuan [Black Fear]* (Beijing, 2001) as saying that twenty million sex workers are involved in an economy of 500 billion yuan (6 per cent of the GDP) and bring in 1,000 billion yuan for spending and consumption.

102 The NGO Shanghai Leyi (now Xinsheng) works with male sex workers; Project Hope from Hong Kong works on education; other NGOs in Shanghai work on health, especially HIV/AIDS, such as Asia Catalyst, UNFPA and Amity, a philanthropic missionary group. There are many philanthropic arms of missionary groups such as Amity. To follow government suppression see: <http://chinadevelopmentbrief.cn/>; last accessed 8 July 2017.

103 Zheng, *Red Lights*, p. 245.

Selling Sex in Singapore: The Development, Expansion, and Policing of Prostitution in an International Entrepôt

Shawna Herzog

Introduction

Commercial sex has been an available and important part of Singapore's economy and society since Sir Stamford Raffles—representative of the British East India Company (E.I.C.)—negotiated Singapore's acquisition in 1819. Before this, it was a small Malaysian fishing village ruled by the Johor Sultanate and used by the Temmenggong, the sultan's military leadership, as a personal getaway from politically tumultuous court life. The island retreat would certainly have included a population of slaves to attend to both the domestic and sexual needs of its residents.¹ Until the late eighteenth century, women were inconspicuous commodities in Southeast Asian slave markets, and native, Arab, and Chinese merchants sold them throughout ancient trading networks. Since at least the fourteenth century, the southern tip of the Malayan Peninsula was a vital artery of trade for merchants in Southeast Asia, which connected the eastern and western hemispheres. Stopping between the silver mines in Latin America and the spice and luxury markets in Asia, Spanish and Portuguese merchants traded with local chiefs for women in ports throughout the Philippines and along the Malayan coast to solidify business relationships in the late

1 Abdulla Munshi, *The Hikayat Abdullah : An Annotated Translation*, trans. A. H. Hill (Kuala Lumpur, 1970), pp. 140–147; Carl Trocki, *Singapore: Wealth, Power, and the Culture of Control* (New York, 2006), pp. 21–47; Carl Trocki, *Prince of Pirates: The Temenggongs and the Development of Johor and Singapore, 1784–1885* (Singapore, 1979), pp. 1–6; Barbara Watson Andaya, “Temporary Wife to Prostitute: Sexuality and Economic Change in Early Modern Southeast Asia”, *Journal of Women's History*, 9 (1998), pp. 11–34, 13. Andaya's description of society and the roles of women and slaves during this period in Southeast Asian society, supports this presumption. Moreover, during times of difficulty, slaves often chose to sell their bodies as an additional means to support their household (p. 14). While this type of behaviour was not likely exemplary for women and girls of the upper classes, contemporary Southeast Asian society did not see the choice of selling sexual services with the same negative moral judgement as their European colonizers.

sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.² During this period, merchants frequently negotiated for a local “wife” or concubine to gain access to local markets; these women were important assets because, in addition to providing domestic labour and serving sexual desires, they functioned as intermediaries and formed critical connections within the community necessary for successful trade.³ The Dutch maintained this practice for hundreds of years and by end of the eighteenth century they had formed vital relationships with local women of influence in the region, which allowed them to reap remarkable profits in Indonesia and build a global empire. However, these relationships were eroded by emerging ideas of nationalism and racial degeneration. Eventually, concubinage, and the resulting *métis/métisse*, or “mixed-blood” children became a threat to imperial power and the colonial government strongly discouraged marriages with indigenous women.⁴ Moreover, in addition to these more permanent relationships, there were also taverns, inns, and opium dens in which men could purchase more temporary encounters with slave girls or local women who performed sex work as an income supplement. By the nineteenth century, individual entrepreneurs, businessmen, and women from around the region capitalized on the growing demand for domestic and sexual services from increasing populations of migrant male labourers and began to import women and girls to supply a growing commercial trade for colonial centres throughout Southeast Asia.

Britain’s development of Singapore into an international entrepôt during the first half of the nineteenth century changed well-established trading patterns and brought both a demand for and supply of commercial sex to the island. Singapore’s development as a hub for British power in the latter half of the nineteenth century offered employment opportunities for millions of unattached male labourers from around the world; at the same time, the colony became a primary distribution centre for the trade in women and girls who provided these labourers with highly sought after domestic and sexual

2 For more on women in “early modern” Southeast Asia, see Barbara Watson-Andaya, *Other Pasts: Women, Gender and History in Early Modern Southeast Asia* (Honolulu, 2000). For more on early colonial concubinage in Southeast Asia, see Tamara Loos, “A History of Sex and the State in Southeast Asia: Class, Intimacy and Invisibility”, *Citizenship Studies*, 12 (2008), pp. 27–43.

3 Loos, “A History of Sex and the State in Southeast Asia”, pp. 31–37.

4 Ann Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley, 2002), pp. 22–110; Jean Gilman-Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia: Europeans and Eurasians in Colonial Indonesia* (Madison, 1983), pp. 91–113.

services.⁵ By the 1870s, at the height of the controversy surrounding Britain's Contagious Disease Ordinances, the colonial state had grown large enough to enforce its legislation and Singapore's government attempted to regulate the local sex industry. However, Singapore was already a key centre for what was a sophisticated, intricately organized, and highly prosperous underground network, and colonial officials struggled unsuccessfully to curb it. By this point, women regularly travelled to, or were smuggled into, the colony's notoriously accommodating brothel districts from around the globe.

Singapore's separation from British authority and the establishment of an independent government and legislative code in 1959 once again brought local officials' attention to the commercial sex trade. Then, a new surge of economic growth and prosperity between the 1960s and '80s initiated a transition in the market. An explosion of economic excess increased inequalities and initiated an expansion of Singapore's sex industry. The country's new government took what Jin Hui Ong, Director of Advanced Studies at the National University of Singapore, describes as a "puritanical approach" and attempted to push the sex industry out of the city.⁶ This new administration created a campaign against "yellow culture" in order to expel all forms of vice.⁷ Still, regardless of official policy, brothel owners, women, and law enforcement officers eventually negotiated unofficial systems of regulation and control in response to the realities of an entrenched trade that to this day remains intact.

This study examines the development of Singapore's sex industry from 1600 to the present and by focusing on the precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial periods, explores the most important influences that inhibited and propelled its expansion. The island's position as a strategic trading and military centre located between the Pacific and Indian Oceans has been the root of its political importance and caused the population to swell, which meant that over the years colonial officials, military commanders, and corporate investors were, and still are, keenly interested in local affairs and governance. In the past two centuries, colonization, war, and unprecedented economic growth drove waves of unattached male labourers, soldiers, seamen, and businessmen to take up temporary residence in Singapore. Simultaneously, women from around the world have voluntarily travelled, or were trafficked against their will, to supply

5 James Francis Warren, *Ah ku and Karayuki-San: Prostitution in Singapore 1870-1940* (Singapore, 2003), pp. 67-72.

6 Jin Hui Ong, "Singapore", in Nanette Davis, (ed.), *Prostitution: An International Handbook on Trends, Problems, and Policies* (London, 1993), pp. 243-272, 246.

7 *Ibid.*

these men with domestic and sexual labour. As a result, urbanization and the development of Singapore as an international maritime power fuelled the formation and expansion of its current multi-billion dollar sex industry.⁸ As a result, for the past 200 years Singapore's officials have taken a variety of approaches to manage—or eliminate—the sale of sex in this city, but ultimately have had little success.

Historiography

While Southeast Asia is a relatively understudied region, there are a few important studies that demonstrate the critical connections between prostitution, the trade economy, and the implementation of political power in Singapore.⁹ Until the last decades of the twentieth century, scholars working on Southeast Asian history had largely ignored the influence of women and gender on its past. Focused on the paths of emerging independent nations, the bulk of historical research about Southeast Asia sought primarily to describe developing nationalisms, and the influential men that drove these movements, which fuelled and shaped later independence movements. Women, as primary subjects of historical enquiry, did not enter the discourse until the late 1990s.¹⁰ Since then, like most other fields of history, Southeast Asian scholars have begun

8 It is important to note that there have been, and still are, plenty of women voluntarily going to Singapore to work as prostitutes; but, it is difficult to tell if someone has voluntarily immigrated, or if recruiters or traffickers coerced or kidnapped them, took them against their will, and forced them—directly or indirectly—to prostitute themselves. As this chapter demonstrates, attempting to differentiate between the two has historically been a primary focus of anti-trafficking policies and governmental legislation in Singapore.

9 The following studies are some of the key works shaping our current understanding of prostitution in Singapore: Watson-Andaya, “Temporary Wives to Prostitute”; Anthony Reid, “The Decline of Slavery in Nineteenth Century Indonesia”, in Martin A. Klein, (ed.), *Breaking the Chains: Slavery, Bondage, and Emancipation in Modern Africa and Asia* (Madison, 1993), pp. 65–79; Ong, “Singapore”, pp. 243–272; Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (New York, 2004), *passim*; Philip Howell, *Geographies of Regulation: Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth Century Britain and the Empire* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 188–229; James Warren, *Pirates, Prostitutes and Pullers: Explorations in the Ethno- and Social History of Southeast Asia* (Crawley, Australia, 2008), pp. 220–309; Warren, *Ah Ku and Karayuki-san*, pp. 25–91; Loos, “A History of Sex and the State in Southeast Asia”, pp. 27–43.

10 Watson-Andaya, *Other Pasts*, pp. 1–7.

to incorporate women into their analyses and expand theoretical applications of gender within established narratives. This historical investigation of the sex trade in Singapore is a direct result of this increased focus on women in Southeast Asian history. At the same time, current research on prostitution has primarily used undercover journalism, government reports, and NGO records to explain the demographic and sociological aspects of the region's modern sex trade. Yet, historians such as Anthony Reid, Barbara Watson-Andaya, James Warren, Philippa Levine, and Eric Tagliacozzo have highlighted the historical connections between sexual services, the trade economy, and the execution of political and legal power. These foundational works create a new understanding of the commercial sex trade's history in Southeast Asia and the country of Singapore, and set a high standard for future scholarship. Nonetheless, there is still a need for further research.

Selling Sex in Precolonial Singapore and Southeast Asia

The southern portion of the Malayan Peninsula connects the eastern and western hemispheres and has long been a vital artery of trade for merchants in Southeast Asia. Before British colonization at the end of the eighteenth century, the small island of Singapore, or "Singapura", was merely a small fishing village and private retreat for Malay royalty and officials.¹¹ Long before the arrival of Europeans, women were an important commodity in Southeast Asian slave markets and sold by native, Arab, and Chinese merchants throughout trade networks that by the beginning of the seventeenth century encompassed the globe.¹² In the late seventeenth century, Spanish and Portuguese merchants travelling between the silver mines in Latin America and the spice and luxury markets in Asia began trading with local chiefs for women in ports throughout the Philippines and along the Malayan coast to solidify business relationships.¹³

11 Trocki, *The Prince of Pirates*, pp. 21–30.

12 Shawna Herzog, "Convenient Compromises: A History of Slavery and Abolition in the British East Indies, 1795–1841" (Unpublished Ph.D., Washington State University Department of History, 2013), pp. 136–179; Richard Allen, "Suppressing a Nefarious Traffic: Britain and the Abolition of Slave Trading in India and the Western Indian Ocean, 1770–1830", *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 66 (2009), pp. 873–894; Richard B. Allen, "Satisfying the 'Want for Laboring People': European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500–1850", *Journal of World History*, 21 (2010), pp. 45–73.

13 For more on women in early modern Southeast Asia, see Andaya, *Other Pasts*, Chapters 4–7. Additional discussion of early colonial concubinage in Southeast Asia can be found in Loos, "A History of Sex and the State in Southeast Asia", pp. 27–43.

These merchants often negotiated for a local “wife”, or concubine. Here women were important assets because, in addition to providing domestic labour and appeasing sexual desires, they also functioned as important intermediaries and formed critical connections linking them to, as Southeast Asian historian Barbara Watson-Andaya describes, “a network of kin” within the community that was necessary for successful trade.¹⁴ At first, because these relationships were still rare, the women also acquired a great deal of prestige by having a foreign husband or lover.¹⁵ In fact, this system allowed the Dutch to reap remarkable profits in Indonesia; they formed relationships with local women with influence in the region, which allowed them to dominate trade for nearly 300 years.¹⁶ However, during the end of the eighteenth century, changes within the indigenous elite and the encroachment of European imperial centres caused a shift in attitudes towards these women and their sexuality. Additionally, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, European ideas were also changing. Emerging nationalist perceptions of European superiority and fears of racial degeneration initiated a shift in opinions about colonial societies and Europeans began to denigrate and castigate these intercultural relationships.¹⁷ Europeans believed that concubinage, and the resulting *metis/se*, or “mixed-blood” children threatened imperial power and colonial governments strongly discouraged interracial intimacies.¹⁸ Consequently, as Watson-Andaya explains, “foreigners increasingly preferred slaves, or ex-slaves who could act as both servants and sexual partners, [and] the status of the temporary wife was permanently eroded.”¹⁹

The Colonial Period

Although Europeans were well established in Southeast Asia by the beginning of the nineteenth century and had already explored a variety of intimate relationships with native women, it is unlikely that the small fishing village of

14 *Ibid.*, pp. 31–37.

15 Watson-Andaya, “Temporary Wives to Prostitute”, p. 13.

16 For a concise description of Dutch history in Southeast Asia, see Anthony Reid, *Charting the Shape of Early Modern Southeast Asia* (Chiang Mai, 1999), pp. 92–99, 155–179; Eric Tagliacozzo, *Secret Trades, Porous Borders: Smuggling and States Along a Southeast Asian Frontier, 1865–1915* (New Haven, 2005), pp. 1–19, 28–47.

17 Gilman-Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia*, p. 99.

18 Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial*, pp. 22–110; Gilman-Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia*, pp. 91–113.

19 Watson-Andaya, “Temporary Wives to Prostitute”, p. 11.

Singapore had more than a few—if any—local women supplementing their incomes before the British arrived.²⁰ In fact, it was Britain's colonization of Singapore in 1819 that laid the foundations for the island's sex market; the Empire's aversion to interracial marriage combined with shifts in the perceptions of local elites initiated restrictions that encouraged the development of a commercial sex trade. In contrast to other European empires, the British concerned themselves with the sexuality of their subjects early on in their imperial projects, and although they were relatively ineffective, the authorities created policies to prohibit the familial connections that were often established in interracial relationships and marriages in other colonial outposts around the globe.²¹ Much earlier than the French or the Dutch, the British sought a solution to the complications and challenges caused by the intimacies of concubinage, such as interracial children, unconventional family loyalties, and challenges to imperial policy. Fearing racial degeneration, religious corruption, and the collapse of social constructs, the British began defining themselves in opposition to the "others" far beyond their shores.²² Eventually, the Empire outlawed interracial marriage "among the higher ranks" throughout all of its colonies. In response, officials in India and the E.I.C. supplied British military encampments with a contracted labour force of prostitutes regulated by colonial authorities.²³ Within this setting, British officials believed that prostitution was a solution to, and a preferable alternative for, either homosexuality or long-term relationships with indigenous women. Since Singapore was a colony administered first by the E.I.C. at the India Office and then by the Colonial Office, these perceptions offer some insight into why officials initially attempted to regulate rather than prohibit prostitution altogether.

Established as a trading station, Singapore initially had very few female immigrants and colonial officials worried about the disproportionate ratio of men to women. An 1830 census revealed that there were only 4,121 women compared to 12,213 men in the colony.²⁴ Although the colonial government banned the slave trade in British territories, there is evidence that local authorities

20 Andaya, *Other Pasts*, pp. 1–7.

21 Stoler's *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power* is the premier work on this subject. In her study, she clearly illustrates shifts in European ideology and imperial paranoia about colonial intimacies for fear of racial degeneration and compromises of imperial power relationships.

22 Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (Yale, 1992), pp. 2–7.

23 Betty Joseph, *Reading the East India Company, 1720–1840: Colonial Currencies of Gender* (Chicago, 2004), pp. 100, 104–105; Karen Weierman, *One Nation, One Blood: Interracial Marriage in American Fiction, Scandal, and Law, 1820–1870* (Amherst, 2005), pp. 45–48.

24 "Census", *Singapore Chronicle*, 15 July 1830.

may have overlooked the import of women and girls, because it reduced the disparity between the sexes and provided both domestic and sexual labour.²⁵ In the British colonial records, Chinese traders were often blamed for the illicit traffic from local islands like Batta, Balli, Nias, and the interior of Borneo; Malay and Bugis traders also brought Batak women from the east coast of Sumatra into the Straits Settlements and Singapore.²⁶ Existing flows of women and girls that supplied other Southeast Asian maritime centres like Malacca, Manila, and Batavia, combined with professional prostitutes seeking new markets immigrating from poverty or entrenched systems of brothel-prostitution in places like Japan, China, and South Asia, poured into Singapore's developing sex trade.

Anthony Reid argues that the prohibition of slavery and slave trading in European centres "increased the traffic in many of these independent corners of Indonesia."²⁷ Indeed, most of this new traffic consisted of women and girls imported to service the increasing male migrant labour force pouring into the region. Arab and Chinese merchants brought girls from China and South Asia who had either been sold outright, or whose poverty-stricken families had contracted their sexual labour for a specified period. In colonial Singapore, these women were often black-market commodities; some became the wives or concubines of wealthy merchants while many others did not. However, not all of the women working in the sex trade were forced or coerced. In some cases, women already working as prostitutes in other cities heard about Singapore's prosperity and negotiated their own passage.²⁸ Although some women went to mining camps and plantations, most worked within the community in a variety of capacities and provided both domestic and sexual services to transient merchants, sailors, and soldiers accumulating in the growing international port.

The colony also functioned as a depot for large volumes of imported products and a stopping point for migrant labourers making their way in and out

25 William Evans, *Slave Trade (East India) Slavery in Ceylon: Copies or Abstracts of All Correspondence Between the Directors of the E.I.C. and the Company's Government in India, Since the 1st Day of June 1827, on the Subject of Slavery in the Territories Under the Company's Rule: Also Communications Relating to the Subject of Slavery in the Island of Ceylon* (London, 1838), pp. 237–239.

26 Evans, *Slave Trade (East India) Slavery in Ceylon*, p. 306.

27 Reid, "Decline of Slavery in Indonesia", p. 71.

28 *Correspondence Respecting the Alleged Existence of Chinese Slavery in Hong Kong: Presented to Both Houses of Parliament by Command of her Majesty* (London, 1882), pp. 37–49.

of the East Asian markets.²⁹ At the same time, floods of migrant men created demand for a secondary stream of innkeepers, tailors, interpreters, prostitutes, and other service providers ready to bring them the “comforts of home”.³⁰ There were no laws prohibiting prostitution or brothels in early Singapore, and since slavery had been legally abolished, colonial officials labelled most of the women they encountered working in Singapore’s brothels as slave-debtors. In the eyes of the colonial state, these women were indentured labour, but not true slaves. This superficial label allowed officials to overlook circumstances they knew to be illegal slave trading in order to accommodate their perceived need for more women in the colony and avoid uncomfortable international legal disagreements with regional leaders. With very little power to actually enforce them, British officials established perfunctory regulations that legally nullified any financial obligations if a debtor’s master or mistress were in “any manner an accessory to her prostitution.”³¹ The reality, however, was that these women and girls were debtors only in name; most were bought or traded as slaves and their masters expected them to deliver whatever type of labour requested. Some worked as cooks, maids, and laundresses in addition to providing sexual services for their master’s clientele. Others worked exclusively in taverns, opium dens, and brothels offering sexual services for the rest of the developing entrepôt. There is also evidence that some girls were trafficked to Singapore after being purchased as young slaves at the age of 4 or 5. Then, while working as household servants, their masters trained them to work as prostitutes upon turning 14, the age at which girls were legally able to “choose” prostitution as a profession.³² This was a legal parameter established by the colonial authorities at the end of the eighteenth century in an attempt to curb the illegal trade in women and girls for the purposes of prostitution. Nonetheless, even after debt-slavery was abolished in 1830, the demand for women was so great that supply continued to flow into Singapore’s commercial sex industry relatively unimpeded. By 1855, Singapore’s officials followed the model of the colonial authorities in Hong Kong and included an early form of brothel registration in its business registry, becoming among the first colonies in

29 Carl Trocki’s *Prince of Pirates* and James Warren’s *Ah ku and Karayuki-San* both examine the development of Singapore’s labour market as well as the thriving economy within it, which attended to the needs of displaced workers passing through the international port.

30 I am deliberately invoking the language of Luise White’s work, *The Comforts of Home* (Chicago, 1990), pp. 6–37 to illustrate the vital function prostitutes performed in colonial society, as well as how various administrators reacted to and accommodated their presence.

31 Sir John Hobhouse, *Slavery (East Indies): Return to an Order of the Honorable* (The House of Commons, 22 April 1841), p. 111.

32 Hobhouse, *Slavery (East Indies)*, p. 109.

the Empire to regulate its brothels.³³ By the time Britain's Parliament passed the Contagious Disease Acts between 1864 and 1869, making the regulation of prostitution an imperial policy, Singapore had already started the process of categorizing brothels and regulating prostitutes.

There were a variety of women and positions within colonial Singapore's sex industry. During the first few decades of Singapore's development, the majority of prostitutes were Chinese, Indonesian and Malay women, and residents complained in local newspapers about prostitutes working in public; they did not complain about the existence of prostitution, just that prostitutes performed sexual acts in public spaces.³⁴ However, by the 1870s there was much more diversity among the prostitutes and most business was conducted in brothels. As scores of brothels profited from selling sex to this flood of immigrants, local merchants and traders made a killing by furnishing the women with essential commodities like fabric for dresses, perfumes, make-up, soaps, and liquor.³⁵ As the city grew, Chinese secret societies already in control of sophisticated underground networks of human traffickers imported a variety of women and girls—primarily Chinese—to satisfy the exploding population of male labour.³⁶ In fact, studies by scholars such as Philippa Levine and

33 *The Straits Times*, 17 October 1855, p. 1.

34 "Sobriety", *Singapore Chronicle*, 23 June 1831.

35 Warren, *Ah ku and Karayuki-San*, pp. 32–36.

36 During this period, according to colonial records the British deemed "traffickers" to be those in the business of illegally purchasing, selling, and/or transporting people from one place to another. Evans, *Returns: Slave Trade (East India)*, pp. 3–4. The label of "trafficker" automatically implied the illegal transportation of people across political borders and was associated with the slave trade. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, antislavery associations and women's groups worked to prohibit regulated brothels within the British Empire and created a more inclusive and expansive definition of both perpetrator and victim. As Carina Rays' research illustrates, by the beginning of the twentieth century, trafficking had become a much more specific legal concept which focused on underage girls who were forced, coerced, or manipulated under false pretences. A trafficker was anyone who assisted in the procurement or transportation of these girls for "immoral purposes or to gratify another person's passions within and across national borders" (p. 102). In the late 1920s, the newly formed League of Nations took up the task of investigating the issue, and it added young boys to their scope of victims and by the late 1930s the definition included adult women trafficked across international borders. For more see: Carina Ray, "Sex Trafficking, Prostitution, and the law, in Colonial British West Africa, 1911–43", in Benjamin Lawrence and Richard L. Roberts (eds), *Trafficking in Slavery's Wake: Law and the Experience of Women and Children in Africa* (Athens, OH, 2012), pp. 101–120, 102–105. In the 1950s, the United Nations took up trafficking as an issue of human rights, but the Cold War complicated the enforcement of relatively vague international laws. A survey

Phillip Howell illustrate that in the second half of the nineteenth century, Singapore had clearly identified and geographically segregated commercial sex districts that were organized according to the ethnicity of the clientele.³⁷ By the last decade of the nineteenth century, both the wealthy and poor areas of the city had their own red-light districts, and this system lasted well into the twentieth century.³⁸

Much of what we know about prostitution in Singapore after 1860 comes from Warren's research on the Chinese *Ah ku* and Japanese *Karayuki san* who worked in the city's sex industry during the height of British regulationism between 1864 and 1888 and the two world wars.³⁹ In addition to the *Ah ku* and Japanese *Karayuki san*, Warren's work also provides important insight into Singapore's commercial sex trade and describes the environments of its eastern and western sectors. The eastern district contained almost as many European prostitutes, and the "respectable colonial female population [was] living in nearby residential areas."⁴⁰ Since the colonial government maintained a strict ban on British women working as prostitutes in its eastern colonies, most were poor women from central and eastern Europe, mainly from Hungary and Poland. There were some Russian Jewesses as well as a few

made by INTERPOL in the 1970s brought the topic to the attention of the UN again there have been consistent efforts to strengthen and enforce international anti-trafficking laws; Kathleen Barry, *Female Sexual Slavery* (New York, 1979), pp. 283–298. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "Article 3, paragraph (a) of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons defines Trafficking in Persons as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs"; available at: <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/what-is-human-trafficking.html>; last accessed 8 July 2017. For a complete history see: Anne T. Gallagher, *The International Law of Human Trafficking* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. xxiii–34.

37 The following works are dedicated to this argument: Levine, *Prostitution, Race, and Politics* and Howell, *Geographies of Regulation*.

38 Warren, *Ah ku and Karayuki San*, p. 34.

39 According to Warren, "*Ah ku*" was a respectable term for Chinese prostitutes in colonial Singapore; a *Karayuki san* in Singapore referred to "women from the poorest sectors of society during the Meiji-Taisho periods who lived and worked abroad as prostitutes." Warren, *Ah ku and Karayuki San*, p. 3.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 40.

French and German women as well.⁴¹ Yet, according to Warren, European women had a “notorious reputation” for being loud “foul-mouthed” street-walkers whose assumed privilege as “courtesans of a superior race” made them behave in a manner that appeared gross and vulgar to local authorities. In contrast, one colonial officer lauded the “quiet charm of the native women.”⁴² European women generally arrived with their *souteneur*, or pimp, who sold their “wares” to passers-by.⁴³ They solicited from doorways and street corners; five or six girls worked in a brothel servicing a variety of clients, primarily British or other Europeans, in narrow cubicles. The demand for these women was created almost entirely by European residents, merchants, or tourists visiting the port.⁴⁴

Until the latter half of the nineteenth century, Chinese women formed the largest portion of sex workers in Singapore. Internal conflict, expansion of external trade, poverty, and famine in China during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries initiated a flow of Chinese into Southeast Asia who quickly established themselves as merchants, shopkeepers, and plantation owners, which provided an external boost to the Chinese economy.⁴⁵ By the 1780s, there were at least 100,000 Chinese men working work in tin mines and on gambier plantations throughout Southeast Asia.⁴⁶ At the same time, Chinese law prohibited the emigration of married Chinese women, so the mines and plantations were filled with a multitude of unattached men and very few women. However, wealthy merchants, and the Secret Societies to which they

41 *Ibid.*

42 Warren, *Ah ku and Karayuki San*, p. 40. Of course, there are layers of gender construction and British perceptions of prostitution, orientalism, and imperial categorization at work here, but the image is nonetheless vivid. For more on British perceptions of commercial sex, as well as discussions about the role of gender and Empire, see: Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 1–48; Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago, 1992), pp. 1–40; Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York, 1995), pp. 236–257; Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, pp. 22–79; Philippa Levine, *Gender and Empire* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 14–46, 134–156; Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton (eds), *Bodies in Contact: Rethinking Encounter in World History* (Durham [etc.], 2005), pp. 1–19, 125–142.

43 Warren, *Ah ku and Karayuki San*, p. 88.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 75.

45 Diana Lary, *Chinese Migrations: The Movement of People, Goods, and Ideas over Four Millennia* (Lanham, UK, 2012), pp. 92–94; Eric Tagliacozzo and Wen-Chin Chang (eds), *Chinese Circulations: Capital, Commodities, and Networks in Southeast Asia* (Durham, 2014), pp. 24–27; Barbara Watson-Andaya and Leonard Andaya, *A History of Malaysia* (London, 1982), pp. 94–97.

46 Trocki, *Prince of Pirates*, p. 4.

belonged, had direct connections to China's supply of poverty stricken, famine driven, or kidnapped slaves.⁴⁷ As previously mentioned, when Raffles acquired Singapore from the Sultan of Johor in 1819, an entrenched traffic of indigenous and Chinese women and girls already circulated throughout the region.⁴⁸ By 1868, a year after the E.I.C officially transferred control of the colony to British Parliamentary rule, 2,061 prostitutes worked in the 349 brothels operating in the tolerated districts in Singapore; there were nine Europeans, 408 "native" women, and 1,644 Chinese.⁴⁹ In 1877, the colonial government established the office of the Chinese Protectorate in order to curb Chinese organized crime, alleviate the abuse of poor migrants, and, as Philippa Levine explains, to bring the Chinese under the "control of the administration".⁵⁰ Supervision of the colony's numerous Chinese brothels was one of the Protectorate's many responsibilities. Although a few indigenous, South Asian, and European women provided sexual services, the majority of prostitutes before the 1880s were Chinese *Ah ku*.

Japanese women started to arrive in Singapore during the 1860s, after Japan opened its port in Nagasaki to international trade and began sending coal to Southeast Asia. By the 1880s, many—if not most—ships leaving Nagasaki had women hidden on board.⁵¹ Along with increased mobility, Bill Mihalopoulos explains that "the movement of young Japanese women into sex work occupations abroad was one spontaneous reaction by the rural poor to the radical social restructuring unfolding in Japan from 1850 onwards."⁵² In fact, food shortages, heavy taxation, and corvée systems strained the peasantry to such a desperate point that between 1865 and 1867 there were seventy-five peasant uprisings.⁵³ Poverty and famine pushed young girls to seek a living overseas at a time when expansion of exports established new connections between

47 The following works discuss the importance and connections Chinese Secret Societies held within Southeast Asia: Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, pp. 141–143; Trocki, *Prince of Pirates*, pp. 107–111; Tagliacozzo, *Secret Trades, Porous Borders*, p. 372.

48 Herzog, "Convenient Compromises", pp. 30–35.

49 British National Archives, Colonial Office [hereafter CO] /273/91/75, "Appendix N", "Abstract of Return of Brothels and Prostitutes of Singapore", in "Governor of Straits Settlements to the Colonial Office", 24 February 1869, pp. 75–77.

50 Levine, *Prostitution, Race, and Politics*, p. 25.

51 Bill Mihalopoulos, "Ousting the 'Prostitute': Retelling the Story of the *Karayuki-san*", *Postcolonial Studies*, 4 (2001), pp. 169–187, 173.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 170.

53 Mikiso Hane, *Peasants, Rebels, Women, and Outcasts: The Underside of Modern Japan* (Oxford, 1982), p. 12.

Japanese communities in the Amakusa Islands, the Shimabara Peninsula, and Nagasaki. At the same time, newly developing colonies like Hong Kong and Singapore had a deficit of women and the promise of prosperity. Japan's transition to a money economy in the 1870s, and the falling price of rice in the 1880s, led to the bankruptcy and eviction of many farm families. As Hane explains, "in 1883 there were 33,845 such cases"; by 1885, 108,050 families were homeless and without a means to support themselves.⁵⁴

According to government reports, in 1878 there were only two Japanese brothels open for business. However, by 1905, "37 years after the Meiji Restoration, and the year of the advent of the Russo-Japanese War", there were 109 Japanese brothels and 633 Japanese prostitutes, or *Karayuki san*, registered in the colony.⁵⁵ In 1906, Tanaka Tokichi, the Japanese consul in Singapore, argued that thousands of women were pouring into the city; he estimated that approximately twenty women each week arrived from Moji, Kuchinotsu, and Kobe with the intention to work as prostitutes. Fleeing desperation and violence, *Karayuki san* used what Mihalopoulos described as "subterranean economies" to make their way out of Japan.⁵⁶ However, while some went with their parents' permission (they likely received between 300 and 500 *yen* for a five-year contract), and with full knowledge that they would be working as prostitutes, Hane reminds us not to ignore the fact that many were, "sold into slavery or tricked into their situation through their sense of responsibility toward their poverty-stricken parents and siblings."⁵⁷ In fact, the parents and procurers often prearranged the amount of money to be remitted to the family once the girls were sold and working. Local "procurers" (*zegen*), employment agencies, and third party brokers promised young girls "a better life overseas" and stability for their families.⁵⁸ In some cases, former prostitutes at the end of their contracts returned to Japan and visited villages describing the luxury and success that awaited them. Unfortunately, as Mihalopoulos asserts, "the journey from Japan to Hong Kong or Singapore transformed the women into a basic

54 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

55 Warren, *Ah ku and Karayuki San*, p. 47.

56 Mihalopoulos, "Ousting the 'Prostitute'", p. 177.

57 *Ibid.*; Hane, *Peasants, Rebels, Women, and Outcasts*, p. 207. According to Hane, the average monthly income for peasants in 1878 was 1 *yen* 75 *sen* (there are 100 *sen* in a *yen*), and the situation did not improve until after the Second World War (p. 21). An average textile worker earned between 13 and 20 *sen* per day and "superior workers" saw an increase from 9 *yen* 22 *sen* per year in 1875, to 17 *yen* and 69 *sen* in 1881. A family could have a two-story home built for around 100 *yen* (p. 176).

58 Mihalopoulos, "Ousting the 'Prostitute'", p. 175.

commodity for everyday usage.⁵⁹ Once they arrived, brokers immediately sold them to brothels for between 200 and 300 *yen*, from which they subtracted between forty-five and fifty *yen* for personal and travel expenses. Then they sent another thirty to fifty *yen* to their parents—a sum their parents pre-arranged with the broker based on the woman's attractiveness and earning potential—while earning between seventy and 100 *yen* for themselves.⁶⁰ Of course, the young women became responsible for the entire cost of the journey, which the brothel keepers withheld from their earnings. As a result, the *Karayuki san* who arrived in Singapore during this period were already straining under the debt for money “loaned” to their families: the cost of their journey, food and lodging, as well as any clothing or personal items before meeting their first customer.

Prostitution was a lucrative business in colonial Singapore, but not all brothels, or prostitutes for that matter, were the same. While Europeans generally visited the eastern side of the city, Chinese, Japanese, Malay, Indian, and Javanese men tended to frequent the western quarter. Serving a second-class clientele, these women also divided their services by ethnicity. As Warren explains, the *Ah ku*, Malay, and European prostitutes worked in “all-nationality” establishments, but Cantonese women accepted only Chinese clients.⁶¹ However, the *Karayuki san*, who did not arrive in significant numbers until the 1880s, also accepted foreign patrons. Poverty and famine pushed some families to sell daughters they were unable to feed; at the same time, Singapore's booming economy drew people from poor regions in search of prosperity. Clients looking for overnight stays with Chinese prostitutes visited the larger, cleaner, and better-decorated *loh kui chai* brothels; the cheaper brothels, or *pau chai*, were poorly ventilated, cramped, and dirty. The bigger houses had as many as seventeen to eighteen girls working in them.⁶² The *Ah ku* lived in “two-, three-, or four-storied buildings with large numbers painted or affixed to the fanlights over the doors, with a red (or some other colour) lamp behind the number.”⁶³ The *Karayuki san* did not generally discriminate between clients; their primary goal was to make as much money as possible to send home to their families, who knew they were in Singapore doing sex work. Like the *Ah ku*, there were higher and lower grades of Japanese prostitutes; some took appointments and never left their lavish apartments, while others waited behind screens for clients and worked in dingy though less cramped conditions.⁶⁴

59 *Ibid.*, p. 178.

60 *Ibid.*, p. 177.

61 Warren, *Ah ku and Karayuki San*, p. 42.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 47.

63 *Ibid.*, p. 49.

64 *Ibid.*, p. 51.

The *kwai po*, who were at the top of the social hierarchy in Singapore's commercial sex industry, managed brothels' business affairs. The *kwai po* was responsible for guarding the owner's "property" and often policed the women mercilessly. This is the person who quantified the value of the women's bodies and was often the liaison between prostitutes and local authorities. More than just brothel managers, *kwai po* were interpreters, bookkeepers, parental figures, debt-collectors, and prison guards for the girls working inside. In fact, the majority of women in these brothels were their "virtual prisoners" because working prostitutes were rarely able to pay off their compounding debts. As debtors enslaved in exchange for money given to them or their families, many prostitutes owed money for their passage in addition to loans they may have taken out; the *kwai po* added this debt to any personal costs above and beyond their room and board, which accumulated quickly.⁶⁵ Moreover, if the *kwai po* learned that a woman planned to run away without paying her debt, she was often drugged, taken away, and sold to another brothel. Regardless of how much of her contract she may have already worked off, she incurred an entirely new debt and contract that she had to repay.⁶⁶ Warren estimates that in the 1880s, "80 per cent of young Chinese girls brought to Singapore" worked in brothels within this system.⁶⁷ Although it is clear that not all of these women were completely victimized, their "choices" were regularly shaped by poverty, famine, abuse, or neglect and the disposition of their *kwai po*. For some migrant women, prostitution could be a means to relatively lucrative employment, but it regularly required a relinquishment of their personal rights.

Chinese prostitutes in Singapore were generally ranked according to their financial relationship to the house; they were "sold", "pawned", or "voluntary."⁶⁸ The *kongchu* or "sold" women were particularly helpless; the *kwai po* purchased them from traffickers, so they were considered property of the brothel. These women were in essence "the adopted daughters" of the brothel owner.⁶⁹ The house provided for the *kongchu*'s basic necessities but the *kwai po* retained all of their earnings. The *pongnin*, or those "pawned or hired to a house", were prostitutes like the *Karayuki san* who were working off a debt.⁷⁰ Indentured for

65 Adam McKeown discusses the lives of indentured labour in Singapore in his chapter, "The Social Life of Chinese Labour", in Eric Taggiasco and Wen-Chin Chang, (eds), *Chinese Circulations: Capital, Commodities, and Networks in Southeast Asia* (Durham, 2011), pp. 62–83, 75–78.

66 Warren, *Ah ku and Karayuki San*, p. 55; McKeown, "The Social Life of Chinese Labour", pp. 76–77.

67 Warren, *Ah ku and Karayuki San*, p. 91.

68 *Ibid.*, p. 52.

69 *Ibid.*

70 *Ibid.*

a minimum of six years, the *pongning* had to give half their profits to the *kwai po* in return for room and board. The other half of their income was theirs to either send home or pay down their original debt. However, as previously stated, the cost of needs beyond room and board were added to their totals, which regularly created a debt-cycle that kept many perpetually indentured. Moreover, if she felt so inclined, a *kwai po* could sell off or transfer a *pongning*'s debt towards the end of her term and obligate the woman to a new term of service. Both the *kongchu* and the *pongning* depended upon the good nature of the *kwai po*. The *tap tang* were women that had not been bought and did not owe a debt to the house, but they still had to give half of their earnings to the *kwai po* for food and rent. If they were truly free agents, they kept the remainder of their earnings for themselves. However, it was not unusual in the 1920s for a *tap tang* to send money to a "pocket mother", usually ex-prostitutes who purchased or indebted young women to provide for them once they were no longer able to work.⁷¹ Although the *kongchu*, *pongning*, and *tap tang* all—to some degree—worked under the thumb of the *kwai po*, their independence and autonomy was in direct correlation to the amount of debt they carried with the house.

As one of the easiest ways to accumulate capital before the turn of the century, brothel prostitution in Singapore funded many Japanese and Chinese businesses during this period; they played an important role in Singapore's economic development.⁷² Brothels made money from both prostitutes and their clients. Receiving well over what they initially paid for the women, brothel owners often sold girls after a few months of work and made money on the sale in addition to receiving a portion of her earnings. Warren explains that there would have been a daily profit of \$1,650 if every *Ah ku* listed in the 550 houses registered in Singapore. Each worked "at the standard rate of \$3" per night; this converts to approximately US\$131, which would be \$267 today.⁷³ Extrapolating that amount with the minimum of 288 days that he avers they worked, Warren contends that the profits from these prostitutes, "would have easily been over \$475,200 a year", which would have been a staggering \$37,805,400 today.⁷⁴ The Japanese houses worked "24 hours a day, 7 days a week" and the average

71 Warren, *Ah ku and Karayuki San*, p. 52; Major, *Slavery, Abolitionism and Empire in India, 1772–1843* (Liverpool, 2012), pp. 131–162.

72 Warren, *Ah ku and Karayuki San*, pp. 52–67; Levine, *Prostitution, Race, and Politics*, pp. 29–30.

73 Warren, *Ah ku and Karayuki San*, p. 61. All references to dollars in Warren's work refer to contemporary Straits dollars.

74 *Ibid.* All currency conversions were performed with the British National Archive's currency converter available at: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/default.asp#mid>; last accessed 8 July 2017.

prostitute grossed “about 250 *yen* a month”, which meant exorbitant profits for the more than 100 registered brothels in the city. Although the Women’s Protection Act in 1880 officially prohibited the illegal traffic in women and girls, the misguided ordinance actually caused an increase in prices and certainly did not stop the trade. The value of the women changed according to demand and went up as Chinese immigration increased. Brokers sold girls for as much as \$500 each, “depending on the woman’s ‘virginity, age, beauty, and origin.’”⁷⁵

Regulationism

In response to an epidemic of venereal diseases that began in the 1860s, the colonial government began legislative efforts to contain and regulate the commercial sex industry in the name of public health. The passage of Singapore’s local Contagious Disease Ordinance (CDO) in 1870 marked the beginning of Singapore’s enduring legislative struggle with the realities of a thriving commercial sex industry and the social, ethical, and political consequences of maintaining it. The colonial authorities had already created a system to catalogue the various brothels within their business registry in the 1850s. The CDO granted colonial officials the legal authority to interrogate, examine, and detain women known for or suspected of working as prostitutes. Initially, women and brothel owners throughout Singapore resisted and avoided the government’s system of examinations and detainment; but within a few years, incidences of disease diminished and prostitutes began going to their examinations voluntarily.⁷⁶ Moreover, officials noticed a levelling off in the opening of new brothels. Many argued that regulationism was noticeably successful in reducing incidences of syphilis and gonorrhoea and it gave officials the authority to offer assistance to victims who had been trafficked or were being abused. Still, there was overwhelming evidence showing that in parts of England and in some British colonies there were officials who misused the authority granted by the CD Acts to terrorize middle- and working-class women.⁷⁷ Consequently, anti-prostitution and anti-trafficking activists fought hard to abolish what they saw as a blatant exploitation of working women and girls, and in 1888 Parliament repealed the imperial CDO.

75 *Ibid.*, p. 63.

76 Yong Kiat Lee, “Prostitution and Venereal Disease in Early Singapore (1819–1889), Part II”, *Singapore Medical Journal*, 21 (1980), pp. 781–791, 782.

77 For more on officials misusing authority granted by CD Acts, see Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, pp. 79–85.

In spite of vocal objections by Singapore's officials, residents, and the medical community, the colonial government—wary of public censure—ordered that mandatory registration and examination systems be dismantled and all women detained in lock hospitals be released. However, to mitigate the effects of the repeal, from 1889 to 1927, unbeknownst to the British public, Singapore's officials expanded the role and authority of the Chinese Protectorate through "legal measures pertaining to the Protection of Women and Girls Ordinance" to allow for the maintenance of an "extra-legal system of publicly recognized houses".⁷⁸ This period of "quasi-regulation" allowed the city to profit from brothels' services through taxes and it gave local police the authority to close or tolerate a brothel at their discretion. An unofficial list contained the names of brothels and prostitutes regularly seen by private physicians and those not on the list were not allowed to operate. This system primarily focused on controlling brothels, particularly the Japanese houses that serviced European clientele; but as Warren explains, in the Chinese brothels venereal diseases spread "as immigrant labour kept on increasing right up to the First World War."⁷⁹

In 1912, public scandal about "white slavery" made popular by Mrs. Archibald MacKirdy and W.N. Willis' book, *The White Slave Market*, resulted in intense scrutiny of Singapore's extra-legal system, forced officials to address the illegal trade in women and girls more seriously, and motivated officials to push the commercial sex industry out of public view.⁸⁰ Anti-trafficking activists quickly took notice of Singapore's "tolerated houses" and began a vitriolic public campaign for their abolition.⁸¹ Exaggerating an already dismal situation, abolitionists offered up public descriptions of miserable, drug-addicted European women who had been stolen from their homes and were in need of rescue. Even though European women were the minority in Singapore, the campaign focused on the trade's degradation of "white European daughters". Social reformers used every avenue at their disposal to bring attention to the fact that British officials had allowed Singapore's authorities to tolerate the system of brothels, which were notoriously responsible for the sexual exploitation of women and girls. The political pressure eventually forced the Colonial Office

78 Warren, *Ah ku and Karayuki San*, p. 147.

79 *Ibid.*, p. 149.

80 Mrs. Archibald MacKirdy and W.N. Willis, *The White Slave Trade* (London, 1912). Warren discusses the impact this had on the British and Singaporean public: Warren, *Ah ku and Karayuki San*, pp. 151–158. For more on the reactions of the British public to regulationism, see: John F. Decker, *Prostitution: Regulation and Control* (New York, 1979); Paul McHugh, *Prostitution and Victorian Social Reform* (New York, 1980); Donald Thomas, *The Victorian Underworld* (New York, 1998).

81 Warren, *Ah ku and Karayuki San*, pp. 154–156.

to take action and authorities used an emergency amendment to the Women and Girls Protection Ordinance to expel all European prostitutes from the city; by 1916, there were no officially-known European prostitutes in Singapore.⁸² Of course, the campaign against the “white slave trade” did not bring about the end of prostitution in Singapore, as some may have wanted, but the movement did make it more difficult to own and run a brothel in the city.

In the late 1920s, an increasingly powerful nationalist movement and political tensions motivated the Japanese government to make efforts to have all its citizens removed from the city and sent back to Japan. With the help of the British Parliament, the Japanese Consul took steps to deport all *Karayuki san* from the colony. Although Japan had profited from their sexual labour for more than twenty years, *Karayuki san* were forced out of Singapore and went back to generally unwelcoming communities in Japan. Some *Karayuki san* protested and challenged the local government’s authority to force them out; others stayed due to outstanding debts or because they had a venereal disease, while others disappeared into the city and sold sex privately to earn a living. Those taken back to Japan were left on the docks with no financial assistance or means of support. With few economic options left open to them, some followed the Japanese army as they prepared to invade China; many committed suicide as a result of shame from discrimination and lack of opportunity.⁸³ Nonetheless, neither the efforts of the British authorities nor the Japanese government could completely eliminate the populations of *Karayuki san* working in Singapore’s sex market. Meanwhile, groups such as the Association for Moral and Social Hygiene continued to critique the tolerated system, which gained new support as venereal diseases spread rapidly during World War I.⁸⁴

Increased overhead costs, scrutiny from the local authorities, and the mass deportation of Japanese prostitutes also pushed many *Ah ku* underground and initiated a dramatic rise in clandestine prostitution in the city. The combination of high fees and taxes required to run a brothel forced many of the Chinese establishments to close.⁸⁵ At the same time, the removal of the *Karayuki san* encouraged more Eurasian, Malay, and Thai women to enter into Singapore’s now clandestine sex markets. As a result, many women went to work at coffee shops, teahouses, markets, laundry shops, and eating-houses, and offered

82 *Ibid.*, p. 155.

83 *Ibid.*, pp. 157–165; Warren, *Pirates, Prostitutes, and Pullers*, pp. 240–247.

84 Regulationism and the effects of its repeal were part of a long and protracted debate in British Parliament. For more on this, see: Levine, *Prostitution, Race and Politics*, pp. 37–145 and Howell, *Geographies of Regulation*, pp. 113–188.

85 Warren, *Ah ku and Karayuki-San*, p. 167.

sexual services on the side. The surreptitious manner in which they worked also meant that they did not have the same open access to medical services they had during regulationism and many saw regular check-ups as an easily avoidable financial imposition. Thus, the steady stream of military troops that flowed into the barracks and clandestine brothels during and after the war took a variety of venereal diseases back home with them.

Consequently, rates of venereal infections in Singapore reached epidemic proportions and by the 1920s local authorities scrambled for ways to control it. Appealing to the Colonial Office, Singapore's officials once again proposed a system of brothel regulation reminiscent of the 1870 Ordinances. However, changes in the political leadership and sentiment resulted in little support for state-sanctioned and controlled prostitution; seizing the opportunity, social reformers called attention to the epidemic and pushed for abolition. By 1927, officials attempted to eliminate "professional prostitution" in Singapore without actually prohibiting the practice, but by implementing a ban on the immigration of known prostitutes.⁸⁶ Additionally, authorities made brothels illegal and by 1930, Singapore's notorious brothel districts were closed. Many women returned home to their countries, found jobs as servants, cooks, or washwomen, or married former clients. Others tried their luck in the underground market, since the act of selling sexual services was still legal in Singapore.⁸⁷

Postcolonial Singapore

The Second World War brought another influx of military battalions onto the island and generated a dramatic increase in the number of brothels, prostitutes, and yet another outbreak of venereal infections. This revitalization of the industry led Singapore's authorities to once again rethink their policies on prostitution. Between 1930 and 1960, local officials changed their focus from abolition to containment in an effort to curb the spread of diseases and the abuse suffered by women working in illegal clubs and houses.⁸⁸ Underground brothel prostitution had survived, and by the time Singapore gained its independence from British rule in 1959 and formed an independent government in 1963, the old colonial red-light districts thrived and serviced men from around the world. Regulations against maintaining brothels, soliciting, and zoning

86 *Ibid.*, p. 175.

87 Ong, "Singapore", p. 245.

88 *Ibid.*, p. 246.

ordinances, which quarantined the commercial sex sector in specific parts of the city, pushed Singapore's sex trade out of public view but made way for a new extra-legal system that accommodated the persistent demand.

This change initiated an entirely new organizational structure in Singapore's sex market. The elimination of secret societies did remove much of the coercion that existed in brothels, and the availability of other work made prostitution—at least for local women—more of a personal choice than a last resort. Nevertheless, an underground trade in trafficked women and girls still exists in Singapore and authorities have been only minimally successful at suppressing it. The economic boom that occurred between 1970 and 1990 created another surge in demand in Singapore's commercial sex trade. A recession in the 1980s brought a new supply of unskilled Malay women unable to find factory or manufacturing work, and women from rural India migrated to Singapore with their children and worked as prostitutes trying to support their families.⁸⁹ In the urban centre, Chinese women are still the dominant ethnicity among Singapore's commercial sex workers. However, as Ong's research demonstrates, an increase in construction, the result of an explosion in tourism in the 1990s, drew in increasing numbers of Korean and Thai prostitutes who made money following the pool of single men working in construction and providing services at job sites.⁹⁰ Still, the primary centres are the "Designated Red-Light Areas", where in the 1990s women earned between \$7 and \$120 per client for a variety of sexual services.⁹¹

In spite of decades of legislation, there remains a teeming commercial sex market in Singapore. According to researchers Shyamala Nagaraj and Siti Rohani Yahya, since laws prohibit "the use of premises for prostitution, most legal establishments tend to observe the rules and to keep the business of commercial sex independent of their operations."⁹² Their study, "Prostitution in Malaysia", examines Singapore's sex industry extensively as a part of the Malayan peninsula and describes the development of the "sex sector".⁹³ They illustrate the role Singapore's sex sector plays as a central economic feature of the island. For example, the "freelancers" and "special workers" operate in dance halls,

89 Shyamala Nagaraj and Siti Rohani Yahya, "Prostitution in Malaysia", in Lin Lean Lim (ed.), *The Sex Sector: the Economic and Social Bases of Prostitution in Southeast Asia* (Geneva, 1998), pp. 67–99, 70–73.

90 Ong, "Singapore", p. 257.

91 *Ibid.*

92 Nagaraj and Yahya, "Prostitution in Malaysia", p. 76; the amounts in Nagaraj and Yahya's study are given in contemporary US dollars.

93 *Ibid.*

nightclubs, karaoke lounges, and supper clubs, and there are strip clubs and lounges where clients pay for nude dances, touching, and other forms of sexual intimacy. The women might be contracted by the house or work independently, but they negotiate intercourse outside their duties as employees. Taxi drivers are important links for sex workers in an era of increased police raids and underground prostitution; drivers are regularly a client's connection to clubs, establishments, and streets where sexual services are offered.

This same study explains that commercial sex workers in Singapore are classified by either their means of procurement or their employment status. Using methods of procurement as categories, Singapore's prostitutes work as "market prostitute[s] (at the lowest rung of the earnings ladder)" in the local markets; "streetwalker[s]" who are more mobile and advertise inconspicuously to avoid solicitation charges; "the employed commercial sex worker", or those employed by an establishment rather than working independently; "massage parlor, bar or nightclub workers; the freelancers; and the special workers (social escorts)."⁹⁴ However, the "employment status", and full- or part-time work are also important factors. Prostitutes in the "primitive labour market", such as the streetwalkers and clandestine brothel workers who worked full-time, earned the least and were at the bottom of the hierarchy.⁹⁵ The "enterprise labour market" included women working at massage parlours, taverns, and lounges, and they generally worked part-time and had more autonomy in stipulating their prices and choosing clientele.⁹⁶ Finally, those who were "self-employed", the call girls and special escorts, generally earned the most. Ranging in age from the early teens to seniors, many of these women according to Nagaraj and Yahya willingly entered prostitution, while others were sold or forced into the business by family members, spouses, or boyfriends. While the above categories are certainly problematic, they are descriptive categories that give us an idea of the ways sex workers have adapted to legislative prohibitions, while continuing to accommodate customer demands.

There are a few women in Singapore who are full-time employees, with "specified duties, leave and other employment benefits", and whose sexual labour is contracted on the side. However, most prostitutes in Singapore work in brothels or as independent agents and, according to a 1992 study, averaged about US\$28 per client and US\$1,400 per month.⁹⁷ Still, there was a remarkable disparity between the highest earners, making US\$11,200 per month, and the

94 *Ibid.*

95 Nagaraj and Yahya, "Prostitution in Malaysia", p. 78.

96 *Ibid.*, p. 79.

97 *Ibid.*, p. 84.

lowest, making a mere pittance of US\$40 per month. As one would imagine, the same contingencies of youth, beauty, and ethnicity determine the value of these women's bodies, just as for their nineteenth-century counterparts. Older prostitutes are not able to charge as much as younger women, but young women who are deemed unappealing are also limited in how much they can charge. Additionally, Nagaraj and Yahya explain that "transvestites and transsexuals form a special category because they cater mainly to homosexual clients" and generally use prostitution as a primary means of support. They are outcasts of a still predominantly Islamic society, where homosexuality is a punishable crime and they are often subject to even more harassment and abuse by the authorities.⁹⁸ The researchers also found that there is a small population of male prostitutes in Singapore who are generally frequented by wealthy women, work in exclusive locations, and charge exorbitant rates. As one of the only studies even making mention of male, transsexual, or child prostitution, it is clear that these areas need further investigation.

There are still several local ordinances and acts that prohibit various aspects of the sex trade in Singapore, but the primary concern at the moment is the active movement of underage girls being trafficked into the market.⁹⁹ As of 2012, prostitution—the act of selling sexual intimacies—is not illegal; however, soliciting, running a brothel, and profiting from the earnings of someone else's sexual labour are. In July of 2012, after a series of public scandals about underage prostitution, freelance journalist Paul Fitzpatrick wrote an article for the *Singapore Business Review* exposing the character of prostitution in Singapore today. Unknowingly, the journalist described what, for Singapore, had become a curiously familiar pattern. He reported that while they are not legal, the "police unofficially tolerate and monitor a limited number of brothels. Prostitutes in such establishments are required to undergo periodic health checks and must carry a health card."¹⁰⁰ Other prostitutes, Fitzpatrick claimed, can

98 *Ibid.*

99 Nagaraj and Yahya, "Prostitution in Malaysia", p. 90.

100 Paul Fitzpatrick, "Into the Red Light: Prostitution in Singapore", *Singapore Business Review*, 20 July 2012; available at: <http://sbr.com.sg/leisure-entertainment/commentary/red-light-prostitution-in-singapore>; last accessed 8 July 2017. The following articles describe two separate scandals about officials and public figures purchasing underage women for sexual services: Cheryl Ong and Jalelah Abu Baker, "In Singapore Clients will Face Charges if Prostitutes are Under the Age of 18", *Straits Times Indonesia*, 13 February 2012, available at: <http://jakartaglobe.id/archive/in-singapore-clients-will-face-charges-if-prostitutes-the-under-age-of-18/>; last accessed 30 June 2017; Sanat Valilikappen and Andrea Tan, "Singapore Charges 48 in Underage Prostitution Scandal", *Bloomberg*, 18 April 2012; available at: <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-04-18/singapore-charges-48-in-underage-prostitution-scandal.html>; last accessed 21 May 2012.

be found in massage parlours and karaoke bars, while “street girls”, “ding dong girls”, “packaged women”, “second wives”, and “female companions” are some of the many options for commercial sex.¹⁰¹ Women continue to use prostitution as a means to compensate for the difficulty of finding other employment and Chinese prostitutes are still making a “significant contribution to China’s economy.”¹⁰² Although he fails to comment on the advantages that Singapore’s sex trade creates for Singapore’s economy, Fitzpatrick does describe a familiar world of extra-legal conditions for unofficial brothels, sex work veiled behind other service industries, and a categorized hierarchy determined by employment status, method of procurement, and potential earnings. He explains that self-employed “second wives”, or “packaged women” make more than “street girls”, and a woman’s youth, beauty, and ethnicity remain key to top profits in the city’s sex industry.

With such detailed descriptions of this underground and seemingly nefarious trade, it is important not to assume that all sex workers have been trafficked, coerced, or forced into the business. As mentioned frequently above, prostitution can be a lucrative business and Singapore’s growth and prosperity, along with the notoriety of its red-light districts, have drawn professional prostitutes from around the world for more than a century. The numbers of men passing through this international entrepôt have promised both security of employment and the potential for prosperity. Nonetheless, Singapore’s authorities have historically battled the illegal trade in women and girls who were unwillingly trafficked into Singapore’s brothels; smugglers have supplied young women and girls, either indentured or sold outright, in Singapore since the beginning of the nineteenth century in spite of local political and legal authorities’ efforts to stop it. In fact, an article in the *Jakarta Globe* claims that in 2008 officials tightened laws to combat human trafficking and Singapore’s authorities recently uncovered a ring of “vice syndicates” providing patrons with underage girls.¹⁰³ So, while prostitution itself is still legal in Singapore and there are many women voluntarily working in its booming sex industry, there is also still a thriving illicit trade to accommodate the unfulfilled demands of migrant consumers.

Conclusion

Singapore’s sex industry developed, expanded, and fluctuated according to historical waves of unattached merchants, labourers, soldiers, and businessmen

101 Fitzpatrick, “Into the Red Light: Prostitution in Singapore”.

102 *Ibid.*

103 Ong and Baker, “In Singapore Clients will Face Charges”.

flowing through this international entrepôt. In fact, prostitution has been an important part of Singapore's culture, politics, and economy since its founding in 1819. Moreover, persistent themes within discussions about sex work in Singapore have shaped public perceptions and occupied the attention of government officials for almost two centuries; the traffic in women and girls has been a concern since the abolition of the slave trade in the Straits Settlements in 1807. From the beginning, officials worried that there were not enough women for the flood of male labourers immigrating to the port city and "turned a blind eye" to the illegal flow of women and girls imported into Malacca, Penang, and Singapore in spite of explicit legislation.¹⁰⁴ Singapore's sex industry grew so quickly that the city joined Hong Kong to become the first of Britain's colonies to include brothels within their business registries and built a system of municipal regulation. However, venereal diseases, the second most important theme in the history of prostitution in Singapore, brought the colony's brothels and prostitutes into an international discourse. Britain's passage of the imperial CD Acts between 1864 and 1869 granted Singapore's government the imperial authority to expand and enforce regulationism as they attempted to gain control of the commercial sex trade. Officials passed the colony's CDO in 1870 and implemented practical reforms, such as establishing health codes and providing access to health care for women working in brothels. These provisions made noticeable differences in the lives of prostitutes over the following two decades. Another spike in disease and increases in military encampments followed the repeal of the imperial CD Acts in 1888 and forced local officials to find a way to accommodate the obvious demand for commercial sex, while complying with imperial policy. In the early twentieth century, the British public's reaction to news of Singapore's extra-legal system of regulationism pushed the trade underground; it is remarkable how strikingly similar this scenario is to the unofficial lists of tolerated houses in the city's current sex market described by Nagaraj, Yahya, and Fitzpatrick. Since the first ordinance prohibiting the immigration of identified prostitutes in 1927, the authorities in Singapore have worked to contain sex work within designated areas of the city; they have attempted to identify and examine working prostitutes, while continuously fighting a black market element that has been consistently out of reach.

Unfortunately, the historical record contains very little information about the prostitutes themselves; save for a few diaries and oral histories from the latter half of the nineteenth century, their stories almost always emerge from court hearings and legal complaints made to the magistrate. As one might

104 Reid, "The Decline of Slavery in Indonesia", p. 72.

imagine, these are generally the stories of women coerced or trafficked into the trade, or abused and mistreated by a client or proprietor. Written by legal officials, those reports also regularly confirm widespread preconceptions about the violence, exploitation, and degradation of the thousands of women who have worked in Singapore's sex trade. Without challenging the veracity of these perceptions, those reports do not reflect the existence of women who, for almost 200 years, travelled willingly to the city as prostitutes or with the intention to work as one, in search of a fortune. Like any other migrant labourer, Singapore's prosperity lured prostitutes in search of work and, although the records are scarce, we know that some were quite successful. Still, historically even the wealthiest concubines and successful brothels have been subject to the scrutiny of local authorities attempting to curb the illicit trade in women and girls or control the spread of venereal diseases. In the end, Singapore seems to be in another period of "extra-legal" regulation; local citizens, authorities, and Singapore's government officials are—once again—grappling with attempts to control the business of selling sex in the city.

Prostitution in Sydney and Perth since 1788

Raelene Frances

Introduction

Prostitution, in the sense of the commercial exchange of sexual services for material advantage, was unknown in Aboriginal society in Australia prior to European settlement.¹ It arrived in Australia with the First Fleet which brought convicts and their jailers to establish a new colony in Sydney, New South Wales in 1788.² Commercial sex persisted as an important part of Australian society after the end of the convict period in the middle of the nineteenth century.

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- 1 In the early colonial Australian context, “prostitution” was a term that was used loosely and often included any extra-marital sexual contact as well as the sale or barter of sexual services. Historians who have studied this topic have attempted to distinguish between these different uses of the term in the interests of clarity. A similar slippage continued into the twentieth century, when the concept of the “amateur prostitute” entered the lexicon and was especially popularised during World War I. This term referred to young women—often characterised as shop-girls—who engaged in promiscuous sexual activity but did not necessarily seek financial reward. Later in the twentieth century, this concept was expressed in the term “charity girls”, that is, women who gave away sex for free. This study attempts to survey the spectrum of the exchange of sexual services for financial reward, and includes barter as well as cash transactions.
- 2 However, there was a sexual dimension to the complex exchange of goods and services between Aboriginal people and the fishermen from Macassa in Sulawesi who visited the northern coasts of Australia annually from at least the late 1600s. Raelene Frances, *Selling Sex: A Hidden History of Prostitution* (Sydney, 2007), pp. 77–80; Christine Choo, “The Impact of Asian-Aboriginal Australian Contact in Northern Australia, Particularly the Kimberley, Western Australia”, *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, 3 (1994), pp. 295–310; Ian Crawford, *We Won the Victory: Aborigines and Outsiders on the North-West Coast of the Kimberley* (Fremantle, 2001), Ch. 4; Lloyd Warner, *A Black Civilisation* (New York, 1964); Campbell McKnight, *The Voyage to “Marege”: Macassan Trepangers in Northern Australia* (Melbourne, 1973); Ronald M. Berndt and Catherine H. Berndt, *Arnhem Land: Its History and its People* (Melbourne, 1954); Derek Mulvaney, *Encounters in Place: Outsiders and Aboriginal Australians 1606–1985* (Brisbane, 1989).

Even in the British colonies that were not originally convict settlements—namely western Australia and south Australia—prostitution was always a part of the social fabric of the immigrant society and increasingly drew indigenous Australians into these exchanges. This chapter focuses on two case studies from different sides of the Australian continent: Sydney, on the east coast, and Perth, on the west coast. Their different histories illuminate key themes in the history of sex work in Australia. In the case of Sydney, we see a convict society gradually evolving into a free settlement and in the case of Perth, a colony established by free settlers. These two cities provide interesting contrasts, too, in that they developed quite different ways of dealing with prostitution, even when their legal frameworks were very similar. This essay will explore these differences, as well as the similarities between the sex industries in each city.³

Social Profiles of Sex Workers

Sydney

The early convict colony of New South Wales was viewed by many contemporaries as one vast brothel, and its capital, Sydney, was regarded as the centre of

3 Despite its long history, prostitution was not treated as a serious subject of historical investigation until the advent of feminist historiography in the 1970s. Anne Summers, in *Damned Whores and God's Police: The Colonization of Women in Australia* (Melbourne, 1975), examined the official categorising of colonial women as either good or bad, with sex workers firmly in the latter. The first major study of prostitution in Australia, a collection edited by Kay Daniels, was published in 1984. Tellingly entitled *So Much Hard Work*, this volume represented the dominant strand in Australian feminist historiography of prostitution, one that saw prostitution as sex work. Although radical feminists such as Sheila Jeffreys have challenged this theoretical approach—arguing that “sex work” normalizes an institution that is inherently oppressive of all women—the first major survey of prostitution across the whole continent, published in 2007, was firmly within the tradition set by the contributors to the Daniels volume. Kay Daniels (ed.), *So Much Hard Work: Prostitution in Australian History* (Sydney, 1984); Frances, *Selling Sex*. Another important study includes Barbara Sullivan, *The Politics of Sex: Prostitution and Pornography in Australia since 1945* (Melbourne, 1997). For a succinct overview of this history and historiography, see Raelene Frances, “Prostitution”, in Graeme Davison, John Hirst and Stuart Macintyre (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian History* (Melbourne, 1996), pp. 530–531; also Raelene Frances, “A History of Female Prostitution in Australia since 1788”, in Roberta Perkins *et al.*, *Sex Work and the Sex Industry* (Sydney, 1994), pp. 27–52. For alternative approaches, see Sheila Jeffreys, *The Idea of Prostitution* (Melbourne, 1997); Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge, 1988); Cheryl Overs, “Prostitution: We Call it Sex Work Now”, *Lilith*, 6 (1989), pp. 64–68; Christine Overall, “What’s Wrong with Prostitution”, *Signs*, 17 (1992), pp. 705–724.

this “vice”.⁴ There was certainly a strong demand for sexual services in a colony where white men outnumbered white women by at least four to one until the middle of the nineteenth century. A substantial proportion of the women transported over the six decades from 1788 had been selling sex in the cities of Great Britain prior to setting sail for Australia. Around 20 per cent were officially recorded as prostitutes in the British jail records, while the records collected on the journey out suggest a much higher proportion had been involved in commercial sex in some way prior to setting sail. Apart from women who were full-time sex workers, it was common in British cities of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries for women to combine the sale of sexual services with other trades, so that many convict women had dual occupations recorded on their jail entries, such as, “framework knitter and prostitute”, “weaver and prostitute”, and “factory girl and prostitute”.⁵ Some of these women continued to sell sex on arrival in Australia and they were joined by women who sold or bartered sexual services for the first time either on the convict ships or in the new colony.

As the convict colony increasingly attracted free immigrants, many of the new female settlers from poorer backgrounds in Britain also sold sex. Throughout the colonial period and until the 1950s the urban sex industry was dominated by women of British descent, with English women forming the majority of these. The majority of these women were nominally Protestant Christians, although the presence of a significant number of women of Irish descent meant that Catholics were also represented. The migration of a small number of Jews from Poland and Russia from the late nineteenth century also added a few Jewish women to the ranks of Australia’s sex workers. And from the early days of colonization, Aboriginal women, dispossessed of their land and traditional economies, also provided sexual services to the colonizers in exchange for food, money, or alcohol. But their numbers diminished over the course of the nineteenth century as they were increasingly pushed out of urban areas.⁶

Immigration programmes after the Second World War contributed to a more diverse ethnic composition of the Sydney sex workforce as some immigrant

4 Summers, *Damned Whores and God’s Police*.

5 Lloyd Robson, *The Convict Settlers of Australia* (Melbourne, 1994 [1965]), p. 67; Henry Mayhew, “The Slop-workers and Needlewomen”, in E.P. Thompson and Eileen Yeo (eds), *The Unknown Mayhew: Selections from the Morning Chronicle 1849–50* (Melbourne, 1973), pp. 201, 211, 216; Deborah Oxley, *Convict Maids: The Forced Migration of Women to Australia* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 166; Plummer to Macquarie, 4 May 1809, *Historical Records of Australia*, series 1, vol 7, p. 205; Katrina Alford, *Production or Reproduction?: An Economic History of Women in Australia, 1788–1850* (Melbourne, 1984), p. 15.

6 Frances, *Selling Sex*.

and second-generation women also became involved in selling sexual services. These included women from Greek, Italian, Polish and Balkan backgrounds as well as British women. From the late 1970s onwards Australia also became a destination for Asian immigrants, and Vietnamese, Philippine, Chinese, Thai and Indonesian women entered the industry. By the turn of the twenty-first century, immigrant sex workers also included a number of women from the former Soviet Union.

Perth

Like Sydney, Perth was colonized by the British, although it was not initially a convict colony (only between 1850 and 1868 did it take a limited number of male convicts on probation). Established in 1829, the small settlement on the Swan River struggled to survive until gold was discovered 600 kilometres inland to the east of the capital in the 1890s. Few white women sold sex in the early years, and those that did were drawn from the population of British immigrants and their descendants, as well as the few Aboriginal women who existed on the fringes of the township. The gold rushes to the fields around Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie in the 1890s brought a dramatic change to the coastal town as Perth (and its port, Fremantle) became a major staging post for travellers and goods to and from the gold fields. Sex workers came from around the world to service the now thriving township and the mining districts. Of these, French women formed the largest single national group, comprising around 20 per cent of sex workers known to the authorities. Next came the Japanese, with 10 per cent, followed by Italians, with 1.5 per cent. Moreover, these numbers were disproportionate to the numbers of those groups in the Australian population as a whole, the census recording 0.1, 0.5 and 0.7 per cent respectively for French, Japanese and Italian nationals in western Australia in 1901. Australian-born women made up around half of the total known sex workers, whereas all persons of Australian birth made up 70 per cent of the total West Australian population (excluding indigenous people).⁷

The numbers of Japanese sex workers decreased rapidly after 1901 but French and Italian women continued to play an important part in the city's sex industry until World War II as both workers and madams, although women of British descent always formed the majority of sex workers. After the war, Perth experienced similar changes as those noted in Sydney: more workers from different immigrant groups, initially European but also including Asians,

7 Raelene Davidson (now Frances), "Prostitution in Perth and Fremantle and on the Eastern Goldfields, 1895-1939" (M.A. thesis, University of Western Australia, 1980), p. 137.

especially from South East Asia starting in the 1970s, and more recently, women from former Soviet Union countries.

Education

The evidence we have about the educational levels of sex workers suggests that in general they were no more nor less educated than the rest of the working classes, from whom most were drawn. After the introduction of compulsory education in the late nineteenth century, almost all Australian-born prostitutes were literate. One exception to this is indigenous women, who had lower levels of literacy in general, especially if they had not had mission education. The other exception is the various waves of transitory sex workers coming from Asia, who (apart from women coming on student visas) have tended to come from poor rural families with low levels of access to education.⁸

Prior/Parallel Employment

For many women, sex work was only one of many occupations they engaged in during the course of their lives, although for a minority it was their sole career. More commonly, women sold sexual services for a short period of their lives before leaving to marry or to take up other work or establish a business. A minority also sold sex in conjunction with other types of work, such as factory, shop, bar, or office work, either to supplement low wages in these occupations or to tide them over periods of underemployment and unemployment. However, it was difficult to retain a “respectable” job if it became known that a woman was also selling sex and this difficulty increased from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards as middle class notions of respectability permeated the working classes. Since the introduction of fees for university education in the 1990s and the decriminalization of prostitution in several states, more tertiary students have taken up sex work on a part-time basis.⁹

8 This conclusion is based on analyses of police records, which recorded whether those arrested could read and write as well as other details such as religion, occupation, age, marital status, and address.

9 Sarah Lantz, “Sex Work and Study: Students, Identities and Work in the 21st Century” (Unpublished Ph.D., University of Melbourne, 2003); Priscilla Pyett *et al.*, *Profile of Workers in the Sex Industry: Melbourne* (Melbourne, 1995); Jocelyn Snow, “Female Sex Workers in Victoria” (Unpublished M.A., University of Melbourne, 1999); Sarah Lantz, “Students Working in the

Family Situation

The ranks of Australia's sex workers comprised women from every type of family situation—single, married (both legal and *de facto*), widowed and divorced. They were mothers, daughters and sisters, and sometimes they operated in collaboration with another female member of their family—two sisters working together, for example, or mother-daughter partnerships. It was not unusual for women to marry their clients, and some continued to earn a living in the sex industry after marriage. Aboriginal women usually operated within an extended network of kinship relationships, their earnings contributing to the economic sustenance of the wider group.¹⁰ Non-Aboriginal women also used the sale and barter of sex as one of a range of strategies by which they contributed to the household economy, especially in times of economic depression. From the late nineteenth century, however, it became increasingly difficult for women to maintain “normal” family structures whilst working in the sex industry: government child welfare agencies increasingly considered prostitution a disqualifying factor for motherhood, and removed the children of prostitutes from the “moral risk” of such homes. From the early twentieth century onwards, stronger legislation against men living off “immoral” earnings meant that it was more difficult for women to live with male relatives whether or not the men were receiving the earnings of their prostitution. Asian women who came to work in Australia throughout this period tended not to have family with them, except sometimes in the case of sisters. However, many had families in their country of origin, whether parents or children, and sent a proportion of their earnings home.

Age Structure

As far as historians can tell, most women who worked in the sex industries of Sydney and Perth were in their twenties and thirties, although it was not unusual to find both younger and older women also working. A study of western Australia's prostitutes from the 1890s to World War II found that those women coming under police attention as a group was ageing over this period. But so too was the general female population as the youthful immigrants of the 1890s

Melbourne Sex Industry: Education, Human Capital and the Changing Patterns of the Youth Labour Market”, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 8 (2005), pp. 385–401.

10 Frances, *Selling Sex*.

either aged or departed the state. It is difficult to be very precise about the ages of prostitutes, however, as those coming under police attention may not have been representative of the total prostitute population; it is possible that the police were more inclined to prosecute older women soliciting, for example, or older women may have been more likely to be working on the streets because they were less employable in brothels. Child prostitution has not been a prominent feature of either of these cities, although it has certainly existed with cases of children as young as 10 and 11 selling sex.¹¹

Physical and Psychological Health

Venereal disease was an occupational hazard for all sex workers in both Perth and Sydney, with the incidence of infection increasing in the late nineteenth century.¹² Greater awareness of prevention amongst some sections of the sex industry at this time provided some protection for women in the early twentieth century, although it was not until the later stages of World War II that effective treatment became available for the more virulent venereal diseases.¹³ The late 1960s brought new challenges as diseases developed resistance to antibiotics and new strands were introduced at the time of Australia's involvement in the war in Vietnam. When the worldwide HIV/AIDS crisis emerged in the 1980s, Australia's sex workers were seen as particularly vulnerable. However, in this instance health authorities worked closely with sex worker organizations to ensure that Australia's sex industry generally responded effectively to this threat, with education campaigns and prophylactic measures adopted to minimize the impact on sex workers and their clients.¹⁴

Sex workers were also liable to fall pregnant, particularly before the development of more reliable forms of female-controlled contraception like the pill. Pregnancy itself held dangers for mothers, especially before the development of antibiotics in the 1930s, and maternal death rates were high, as were deaths from abortions.¹⁵

11 Davidon, "Prostitution in Perth, Fremantle and the Eastern Goldfields", Ch. 4.

12 Frances, *Selling Sex*, pp. 40–41, 58–59, 68, 72–73, 79, 100, 135–136, 139–140, 157–162, 180–181, 207–210.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 261. The famous 1864 Contagious Diseases Act was not adopted in New South Wales, although it was in Queensland, Tasmania, and Victoria.

14 Paul Sendziuk, *Learning to Trust: Australian Responses to AIDS* (Sydney, 2003).

15 Frances, *Selling Sex*, pp. 40–41, 135–136, 139–141.

The Market for Sex

From the earliest days of European settlement, Australia has been a very urban society, despite its rural image. By the late nineteenth century it was one of the most urbanized countries in the world. These centres always provided the major base for the sex industry, particularly the ports, which provided the essential link between this island continent and the rest of the world.

Until the early twentieth century, Australia's white population was disproportionately male, a fact which also increased the demand for commercial sex. This was especially the case in the early days of Sydney, where women comprised less than a quarter of the population for much of the first sixty years of the convict settlement and even at the end of the transportation period were outnumbered two to one.¹⁶ The sex ratio in the city began to even out by the middle years of the century, but the seasonal influx of itinerant rural and maritime workers continued to ensure that Sydney retained its predominantly masculine demographic. While the limited labour market for women ensured a steady supply of workers in the sex industry, the ongoing imbalance in the ratio of men to women ensured a ready demand for their services. Even when the balance in the cities had evened out later in the century, there was clearly still a high demand for commercial sex. And visiting seamen and rural workers were by no means the only customers. Many contemporary commentators believed that young single men provided the major demand, a demand made stronger by the fact that many men deferred marriage until they felt they were in a secure financial position. In the last half of the nineteenth century, around 60 per cent of men in Australia under thirty remained unmarried—a much higher proportion than in England or Wales. This was particularly so in the middle classes and aspiring segments of the working classes, where material expectations were higher and men took longer to establish careers. In some cases, such as banks, employees were actually forbidden to marry before they had achieved a certain level of seniority, and hence salary.¹⁷

16 Plummer to Macquarie, 4 May 1809, *Historical Records of Australia*, series I, vol. 7, p. 205; Katrina Alford, *Production or Reproduction?: An Economic History of Women in Australia, 1788–1850* (Melbourne, 1984), p. 15.

17 Mark Finnane and Stephen Garton, "The Work of Policing: Social Relations and the Criminal Justice System in Queensland 1880–1914, Part 11", *Labour History*, 63 (1992), pp. 43–64, 45; Graeme Davison, *The Rise and Fall of "Marvellous Melbourne"* (Melbourne, 1978), pp. 193–195; "Report from the Select Committee upon a Bill for the Prevention of Contagious Diseases ...", *Victorian Parliamentary Papers*, 1878, pp. 67–68. For marriage patterns, see Peter F. McDonald, *Marriage in Australia: Age at First Marriage and Proportion Marrying, 1860–1971* (Canberra, 1975).

But it was not only single men who wished to buy sexual services. Apart from the desire for variety in their sexual lives, married men in colonial Australia had additional reasons to seek sexual satisfaction outside the home. With contraceptive techniques unreliable, married couples faced the prospect of either numerous pregnancies and abortions, or periods of abstinence from sex in order to limit their families. We know that the middle classes were successfully limiting their families in the last three decades of the nineteenth century, and abstinence within marriage played a major part in this success. It is not surprising, then, that married men of this class availed themselves of the services of sex workers, who would take responsibility for any babies conceived. They were also in a financial position to afford such services.¹⁸

Perth's sex ratios in the early days of settlement were less severely skewed than those in convict Sydney, but still dominated by men. The discovery of gold in the 1880s had a dramatic impact on the numbers of men in the capital, as men flocked from all over the world to try their luck on the fields.¹⁹

In Perth as in Sydney, wars also provided a magnet for men, as troops assembled and disembarked from these centres. There have been three main wars affecting the sex industry in Australia: the two world wars and the Vietnam War. In the case of World War I, the major impact was to increase demand for sexual services in the cities where troops gathered for disembarkation to the war zone. Both Sydney and Perth were thus affected, with increases in the numbers of women engaging in prostitution and increases in earnings. World War II had an even more marked impact, as hundreds of thousands of troops, including US troops, were stationed in or passed through both cities. Sydney, in particular, experienced unprecedented demand for sexual services after Australia became the headquarters for the allied campaign in the Pacific. Similarly, during the Vietnam War Sydney became a popular destination for both Australian and US servicemen on rest and recreation and once again demand for sexual services escalated. The impact on Perth/Fremantle was much less, although the visit of US naval vessels continued to provide periodic boosts to demand both during and after the war, up to the present.²⁰

Since the earliest days of European colonization, both Perth and Sydney have been subject to high levels of immigration, originally from Britain. From the latter half of the twentieth century immigrants came from a wider range of countries in both Europe and Asia, and more recently, the Middle East and Africa. Migration provided both a demand for prostitution and supplied many

18 Frances, *Selling Sex*, pp. 133–134.

19 Davidson, "Prostitution in Perth, Fremantle and the Eastern Goldfields".

20 Frances, *Selling Sex*, pp. 208–209, 229, 235, 249–252, 252–268.

of the women who worked as prostitutes. Most noticeable, however, was the arrival in the late 1880s and '90s of significant numbers of women from Japan. The *Karayuki san*, as they were known, were brought from poor areas of Japan under a form of debt bondage which saw them bound to sexual service for many years. During this time, they worked in brothels throughout the mining and port cities of northern Australia. Some also worked in Perth and its port of Fremantle in the 1890s and early 1900s, before the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 prevented further arrivals.²¹

The arrival of the telegraph in Australia in the 1870s, at the same time as steam ships came to dominate maritime passenger routes, facilitated greater movement and higher levels of coordination and professionalism in the international sex industry. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 cut weeks off the sea journey from Europe to Australia and Asia, further contributing to the speed at which sex industry entrepreneurs could respond to shifting markets for sexual labour. Australia was part of this international movement, with workers and entrepreneurs (both male and female) from Europe and Asia arriving in Fremantle/Perth to take advantage of the booming mining economy. In some cases, Australian women joined the international traffic, travelling to Asia and Europe, and sometimes stopping off in Buenos Aires. The reduction in the cost of air travel in the 1970s facilitated the increase in numbers of women arriving in Australia specifically to work in the sex industry, initially from Asia but more recently also from eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union and Africa.²²

Starting in the 1920s, cars also formed an important part of the sex industry, in some cases providing vehicles from which women solicited. Tilly Devine, a notorious Sydney sex worker and entrepreneur, solicited from the back seat of her husband's Cadillac in the early 1920s. More commonly, motor vehicles provided an opportunity for men to solicit and pick up street workers. In the 1960s, escort agencies used cars to transport workers to clients' homes, businesses, or hotels.

21 Frances, *Selling Sex*, pp. 46–60, 112, 236, 76–77, 93; Noreen Jones, *No. 2 Home: A Story of Japanese Pioneers in Australia* (Fremantle, 2002); Sone Sachiko, "Karayuki-san of Asia 1868–1938: The Role of Prostitutes Overseas in Japanese Economic and Social Development", (Unpublished M.Phil., Murdoch University, 1980); James Warren, *Ah Ku and Karyuki-san: Prostitution in Singapore 1870–1940* (Singapore, 1993); David C. Sissons, "Karayuki-san: Japanese Prostitutes in Australia 1887–1916: 1", *Historical Studies*, 17 (1968), pp. 323–341; David C. Sissons, "Karayuki-san: Japanese Prostitutes in Australia 1887–1916: 11", *Historical Studies*, 10 (1977), pp. 474–488.

22 Frances, *Selling Sex*, pp. 60–73.

The increasing use of telephones in the early twentieth century contributed to the ease of communications, but the impact was felt more at the local than international level: in the 1920s, Sydney's first "call girls" made their appearance, the telephone allowing them to conduct their business more discretely with a select clientele. Public phone boxes also provided convenient places for women to advertise their services with a contact phone number. By the late twentieth century, phone sex had arrived, with women charging customers for erotic conversations over the telephone. The internet provided further opportunities for technologically-assisted virtual sex, as well as a new medium for advertising sexual services.

Changing attitudes to women and sexuality also had an impact on the market for sex. The movement for greater equality for women, which began in Australia in the 1870s, had only a limited impact on the demand and supply of commercial sexual services before the 1960s. Although employment opportunities for women did widen somewhat in the late nineteenth century, prostitution was still the most lucrative economic option. The "first wave" women's movement affected the sex industry indirectly through feminists' agitation for stronger laws and enforcement in relation to so-called "trafficking", or coerced prostitution, and to men living off the proceeds of prostitution.²³ The revived feminist movement in the 1960s and '70s contributed to new official approaches which decriminalized prostitution and made it easier for women to work in the sex industry. At the same time, more relaxed attitudes to sexuality in Australian society generally meant that women outside the sex industry were more willing to engage in extra-marital sex. This also reduced the demand for commercial sexual services, particularly for straight vaginal intercourse. The net effect of this increased supply and reduction in demand has been reduced earnings for sex workers over the period since the 1970s, and a greater demand for more "exotic" kinds of services from sex workers.²⁴

Legislative and Policing Context

All of this commercial sexual exchange occurred within a specific legislative and policing framework which changed over time. For most of the colonial period up to 1901, Australian authorities treated prostitution as a "necessary evil", seeking to ameliorate those aspects that offended neighbours and the public,

23 Raelene Frances, "Women in White Australia", in Michelle Hetherington (ed.), 1913: *Year of Dreams* (Canberra, 2013), pp. 94–105.

24 Frances, *Selling Sex*, Part 5.

such as rowdy brothels and flagrant soliciting, through the disorderly houses acts and vagrancy laws. This was the case for both Sydney and Perth, although in both cities the situation began to change in the late nineteenth century.

Perth

Until the outbreak of war in 1914, Perth's sex workers had operated with a minimum of police intervention, as long as they were not too overt about soliciting in the main streets of the city or too disruptive to neighbours. The major legislative change before the war was the introduction of the "Evil Fame" clause of the Police Offences Act in 1904. This was aimed more at men living off the proceeds of prostitution than at women and gave the police a very powerful weapon to deal with these so-called "bludgers" and exclude them from the industry. With the outbreak of war, military, medical, and police authorities combined to institute a kind of de facto regulation of Perth's sex industry. Brothels were localized on Roe Street and prostitutes were required to undergo regular medical examinations by a government doctor. This move was intended to make policing of the booming wartime sex industry easier, and also to reduce the risks of the troops becoming infected with venereal diseases.²⁵

On Roe Street the number of brothels increased to fifteen in 1915 and stabilized at around ten by 1918, and there was a gradual decline in the number of brothels outside this street. This trend continued until the 1920s, by which time there was a dramatic reduction in "street strolling". There were isolated houses in the surrounding suburbs such as Subiaco, East Perth, Victoria Park, West Perth, and Leederville, but these seem to have been few in number and catered for the upper end of the market. The remaining premises used by prostitutes as their addresses in the city centre catered mainly for the homeless. They were usually "coffee palaces" and were notorious for their cheapness and filthy conditions.²⁶

The red-light district on Roe Street was closed in 1958 and the inmates dispersed to massage parlours and escort agencies in the suburbs, again prompted by a change in police practice rather than a change in the law. For the remainder of the twentieth century and until 2011, the laws remained largely unchanged, and the police continued to exercise a "containment" policy in relation to the

25 Chief Secretary's Office file 1083/1915, State Records Office of Western Australia [hereafter SROWA].

26 Raelene Davidson (now Frances), "Dealing with the 'Social Evil': Prostitutes and Police in Western Australia, 1895–1924", in Kay Daniels (ed.), *So Much Hard Work* (Sydney, 1984), pp. 162–191; Paul Hasluck, *Mucking About: An Autobiography* (Perth, 1977), p. 116; Health Department versus People's Palace, Magistrate's Evidence Book, Perth Police Court Petty Sessions, 11 December 1914, SROWA; "Glimpses of the City", *Sunday Times*, 22 August 1920.

sex industry. Under this policy, they tolerated a certain number of establishments providing they operated under a set of unwritten police rules.

Sydney

The sex industry in Sydney took a very different course. While Perth's sex industry came increasingly under police control to the exclusion of organized crime, Sydney's commercial sex scene fell increasingly into the hands of criminal gangs. From 1908 to the mid-1920s it became embroiled with organized crime, culminating in the famous "razor wars" of the late 1920s when violence erupted on the streets of Darlinghurst as rival gangs struggled for control of Sydney's criminal scene. These decades saw the rise of two legendary women, Kate Leigh and Tilly Devine, who dominated Sydney's sex industry from the 1920s until well into the 1950s.²⁷

Five important factors contributed to this development. Changes to the *Police Offences Act* in 1908 provided the first precondition. Under this legislation men, but not women, could be convicted of living off the earnings of prostitution. Men who had previously owned brothels and associated openly with female prostitutes thereafter risked prosecution. These risks and penalties increased with changes to the *Crimes Act* in 1924 that provided a three-year prison sentence for re-convicted "bludgers". Most of these men retreated from open involvement in the sex industry. At the same time, stronger provisions against street soliciting gave the police more power over the movement of prostitutes, while the attack on their male associates made them more vulnerable both to arrest and to violence from clients.²⁸

Secondly, the imposition of six o'clock closing hours on hotels in 1916 provided an opportunity for the illegally inclined to profit from the illicit sale of liquor after hours, as well as making brothels more attractive as sites of evening entertainment. Thirdly, troops returning from World War I brought with them a taste for cocaine and other narcotics, and when these drugs were made illegal in the 1920s another avenue of illicit traffic opened up. Fourthly, Sydney was the only Australian city, apart from Melbourne, large enough to sustain a market in illicit gambling, alcohol, drugs, and sex to support extortion rackets. Finally, New South Wales had a long history of police corruption, which arguably predisposed them to cooperate with organized criminal gangs. The last factor seems to have been the most important, since Melbourne shared all the

27 Judith Allen, *Sex and Secrets: Crimes Involving Australian Women since 1880* (Melbourne, 1990), pp. 192–193; Frances, *Selling Sex*, Ch. 13.

28 Under-Secretary to Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, 15 December 1953, AA Series 1838/1, item 856/14/8/2, National Archives of Australia [hereafter NAA].

other preconditions but did not develop a network of organized crime trading in illegal vice on anywhere near the scale found in Sydney.

These criminals received a setback when changes to the law in 1929 made it an offence to consort with convicted criminals, and in the next decade Sydney's leading criminals in the sex industry faced prosecution and expulsion. Criminal dominance was quickly replaced by corrupt police control. No further major changes occurred in the legal framework governing prostitution until the 1960s. By that time, Sydney's longstanding culture of police corruption had reached new heights. Women who worked in the inner city were required to pay a regular fee to each of the two police branches that covered the area. But "weighing-in", as bribing the police was called, was no guarantee of immunity. There were still a few honest policemen who regularly arrested women for offences such as soliciting, consorting, and offensive behaviour. And a special blitz occurred before almost every state election, regardless of the party in government at the time. In 1964 alone there were 14,850 prostitution-related arrests—averaging approximately 30 arrests per woman that year. Nor was this unusual: from 1963 to 1966 the number of arrests annually never fell below 12,000. Some women had up to 1,000 convictions recorded against them.²⁹

Other legislative changes at this time had a major impact on the operations of the sex industry in both Sydney and Perth. The federal government had assumed control of income taxes from the states during World War II and in the decades afterwards it adopted an aggressive approach to collecting revenue, actively seeking out those engaged in illicit enterprises. Despite bribes paid to the police, women who sold sex on the streets and in the brothels were often charged, and once they were convicted the Taxation Department would also insist that they pay taxes. Call girls were less susceptible to prosecution and taxation, unless someone informed on them to the Taxation Department.

At the same time as workers were subject to increasing pressure from the police and taxation officials, a struggle for control of Sydney's sex industry coincided with a rise in organized criminal syndicates associated with the traffic in marijuana and, more particularly, heroin. Conditions in Sydney were ripe for aspiring gangsters. The Askin Liberal Government, elected on a "law and order" platform in 1965, was in fact closely associated with criminals involved in gambling, prostitution, drugs, and extortion. The first US troops from Vietnam brought with them in 1966 not just an apparently insatiable demand for sexual services but also well-established drug-taking habits. No city in Australia

29 Perkins, "Being and Becoming 'Working Girls'", p. 180.

was more affected by this phenomenon than Sydney. By the end of the decade powerful and violent syndicates, in collaboration with a corrupt police force and politicians, were attempting to monopolize Sydney's sex industry. For anyone not wishing to conform, life became very dangerous indeed.³⁰

The Askin Government's amendments to the law in 1968 increased the range of offences for which women selling sex could be convicted, including loitering for the purposes of prostitution in, or in sight of, a public place. Penalties for some existing offences were increased, and for the first time women as well as men became liable for living on the earnings of prostitution.

Workers, brothel-keepers, and brothel employees thus all became much more vulnerable to the law, a fact that the police were quick to exploit. Despite increasing amounts being paid to the police and their criminal associates in "protection money", arrests and convictions of sex workers increased dramatically after the legislation: charges for soliciting jumped from 90 in 1969 to 3,631 in 1970. "The Doors"—as the individual one-woman brothels operating on a shift basis were called—were finally closed in late 1968 and the inmates dispersed to the increasing number of massage parlours appearing in the suburbs, or moved to other parts of Darlinghurst.³¹

Further dramatic changes occurred after the defeat of the Askin Government in 1976. Neville Wran's subsequent Labor Government was influenced by libertarian and feminist critiques of the criminalization of prostitution. Libertarians argued that the criminal law should not interfere in private sexual acts between consenting adults, while feminists also objected to the way in which prostitution laws discriminated against women selling sex but provided no penalty for the male clients. Both groups argued for the decriminalization of most aspects of prostitution, making an exception for activities that caused public nuisances or involved exploitation.

While such arguments were present to greater or lesser degrees in all Australian states, New South Wales became the first to experiment with decriminalization. In 1979 it decriminalized soliciting for the purposes of prostitution (although "truly offensive" soliciting was still an offence under the *Offences in Public Places Act*). It was also no longer an offence for a reputed prostitute to be found on premises used for prostitution. However, brothel-keepers and workers were still liable under the *Disorderly Houses Act*, and new provisions

30 Although widely suspected at the time, these suspicions were not finally confirmed until the investigations of the Wood Royal Commission in 1995–1996: "Royal Commission into the New South Wales Police Services", *Final Report* (Sydney, 1997).

31 Allen, *Sex and Secrets*, pp. 192–193.

imposed penalties for advertising sexual services and operating brothels under the guise of another service, such as massage. As a result, street prostitution boomed and spread out of Kings Cross into neighbouring residential areas, upsetting the other residents, who were increasingly from a different social class as the inner-city suburbs gentrified.³²

Not surprisingly, the police were less than happy about this reduction in their powers and campaigned actively against the change. Prostitution became both more visible and more contentious, with local councils like Sydney City Council under pressure to deal with the residents' complaints. The government amended the laws in 1983 to make soliciting "near" schools, churches, hospitals, and dwellings an offence. It also appointed a select committee to inquire into prostitution, and this committee recommended further sweeping changes. The changes included a major shift in emphasis in the management of prostitution away from criminal law and towards town planning, bringing brothels under the control of local councils. However, the Wran Government was defeated in the 1988 election before the recommendations could be implemented.

The incoming Greiner Liberal Government introduced a new *Summary Offences Act*, which increased penalties for all existing prostitution-related offences (reintroducing jail sentences in some cases) and made clients liable for the first time—although very few men have since been charged. The new legislation allowed more scope for police judgement in enforcing the law, particularly in regard to soliciting, thus once again increasing the scope for selective enforcement and police corruption.³³

The extent of this corruption was exposed when the new Carr Labor Government appointed Justice James Wood to lead a royal commission of enquiry. The government immediately moved to deal with the findings of this enquiry via a new *Disorderly Houses Act*, which set up clear criteria under which brothels could be closed by the Land and Environment Court. In effect, after 1995 brothels in New South Wales could operate legally if they had a planning permit from their local council, although there is no requirement for licensing or registration of these businesses. Soliciting continues to be legal unless it occurs within sight of a school, church, residence, or hospital.

32 Sullivan, *Politics of Sex*, pp. 180–182. See also Raelene Frances and Alicia Gray, "Unsatisfactory, Discriminatory, Unjust and Inviting Corruption: Feminists and the Decriminalisation of Street Prostitution in New South Wales", *Australian Feminist Studies*, 22 (2007), pp. 307–324.

33 Marcia Neave, "Prostitution Laws in Australia: Past History and Current Trends", in Roberta Perkins, Garnett Prestage, Rachel Sharp and Frances Lovejoy (eds), *Sex Work and Sex Workers in Australia* (Sydney, 1994), pp. 67–99, 80.

Impact of Policing Regimes on Working Conditions

All these shifts in the legislative environment and in policing regimes had profound effects on the working conditions of women in the sex industry. The ability of women to solicit in public is a case in point. Both Perth and Sydney are blessed with relatively mild climates, making outdoor soliciting a more comfortable option than in many other parts of the world. Such soliciting—and, indeed, outdoor sexual activity—has existed to varying degrees throughout the history of both cities. Street soliciting was widespread in Sydney in the colonial period, becoming more heavily policed in the late nineteenth century as middle-class women began to use public urban streets more frequently for shopping and recreation. A similar development occurred in Perth, where soliciting in the central business district was more heavily policed starting in the early twentieth century and streetwalkers pushed across the railway line into the area north of the city now known as Northbridge. As we have seen, during World War I a section of Roe Street in this area became an unofficial red-light area supervised by the police. Brothels were allowed to operate in this area providing they abided by a set of police rules, one of which was that the women did not solicit in the street. This arrangement was in place until the brothels were closed in 1958. Thereafter, street soliciting reappeared sporadically, particularly in the northern and eastern areas adjacent to the central business district. Most of Perth's sex industry was, however, conducted in massage parlours and from escort agencies.

Although central Sydney housed some large brothels in the early 1850s, these were dispersed by the police in the mid-1850s, their inmates scattering to the adjoining streets and lanes and to the portside suburb of Woolloomooloo. For the rest of the nineteenth century, large numbers of women continued to solicit quite openly in streets adjoining Sydney's central business district. However, after changes in the law in 1908, police action against soliciting increased.³⁴ As we have seen, the legal changes of 1908 also made it virtually impossible for men to be involved in the sex industry without facing criminal charges, which also contributed to a decline in street prostitution as without their male associates women were more vulnerable to violence from clients and other men. In the decades after 1908, Sydney's sex industry increasingly moved indoors to brothels owned and managed by women who were not liable under the legislation for living off the proceeds of prostitution.

34 "Select Committee into the Condition of the Working Classes of the Metropolis", New South Wales Legislative Assembly [hereafter SC on Working Classes, New South Wales], *Votes and Proceedings*, 1854–1860, vol IV, Evidence, p. 22.

With the exception of a small group of call girls who began operations in Sydney's wealthier eastern suburbs in the 1930s, between 1908 and the 1960s almost all of the city's commercial sex was sold in the streets, brothels, and bars of the inner suburbs, stretching from the Woolloomooloo wharves through East Sydney to Surry Hills. In the 1950s, a prominent feature of this area was "The Doors", which were rented to individual women on a half-day shift basis. There were up to forty such houses operating at any one time, employing between them over one hundred women. The working women usually had an older woman as a "sitter", who provided security. These "shabby but homely" houses catered for the many visiting seamen and for the thousands of immigrant men who, from the late 1940s, often came to Australia before their wives or as single men.³⁵

The older style brothel with a madam and a number of girls was almost unknown in Sydney in the 1960s, having gradually disappeared in the 1950s to be replaced by this more intimate style of brothel. The only other kind of "in-house" prostitution took place at coffee shops and green grocer stores that took a commission from clients sent to women working in the upstairs rooms. Massage parlours were only beginning to appear on the scene in the mid-1960s, and initially these offered only "hand relief".

As well as the easily identified "Doors", prospective clients would still find plenty of streetwalkers plying their trade in the suburbs east of the city centre. These women tended to be younger, in their teens and 20s rather than their 30s and 40s as were the women of the Doors. The beats frequented by streetwalkers were along the streets of Kings Cross, including Darlinghurst Road. Each stretch of a beat was occupied by a particular woman or group of women, who defended the territory with enthusiasm, and violence if necessary. These workers were subject to considerable harassment from the police, and paid heavily in fines and bribes, until changes to the law in 1979 (amended in 1983) decriminalized street prostitution. Thereafter, street work became more attractive and still flourishes in commercial areas of the city.

Impact of Policing Regimes on Relations with Clients and Employers

Legislative and policing frameworks also affected relations within the sex industry. Women selling sex in convict Sydney were often associated with

35 Marcel Winter, *Prostitution in Australia*, (Sydney, 1976), pp. 32–39; Jan Aitkin, "Prostitutes in New South Wales", seminar on Victimless Crime, Seymour Centre, Sydney, Background Papers, 1977, p. 204; Roberta Perkins, *Working Girls: Prostitutes, Their Life and Social Control* (Canberra, 1991), p. 131.

“bullies” or “bludgeoners”—men who provided physical protection for the women against other men but often also inflicted violence on the women themselves. But this was not always the case, and others operated as individuals or as madams independently of men. The changes to the law in 1908 which made men associated with prostitution liable to criminal charges and imprisonment meant that thereafter only the most criminally-inclined men continued to openly associate with prostitutes. This fostered the emergence of the criminal gangs who dominated the Sydney scene in the 1920s and early '30s until harsher consorting laws in the early 1930s disbanded them. At the same time, the 1908 laws opened the way for the famous Sydney “vice queens”, Tilly Devine and Kate Leigh, who dominated Sydney’s underworld in the interwar years. Unlike men, they could not be prosecuted for living off the proceeds of prostitution.

As we have seen, the tougher laws against soliciting and more vigorous policing, combined with criminal sanctions against male “protectors”, drove many women off the streets into the brothels. Here they were forced to share their earnings with the madam and lost the independence they had as freelancers. While women working in these brothels received some protection, they were also often paid for their services in cocaine and the drug was used as a way to keep sex workers dependent.

A similar situation arose in the 1960s, when the increasing traffic in heroin, combined with the presence of Vietnam War troops, saw another boom in organized crime in Sydney. Sydney’s sex workers at that time found it almost impossible to escape extortion and violence at the hands of criminal gangs. Crime and police corruption continued to be prominent features of Sydney’s sex industry for the remainder of the twentieth century, although the decriminalization of many forms of prostitution in the 1980s reduced but did not eliminate the scope for these activities.

At the same time as Sydney’s prostitution laws were being liberalized, Australia became the destination for a new wave of immigrant sex workers, primarily from Asia. These workers arrived under various kinds of debt bondage arrangements, whereby they were required to repay their fares, visas, etc., before receiving any earnings. These “debts” often amounted to tens of thousands of dollars, and could increase after arrival in Australia. Likewise, some operators ensured that the women never earned any money of their own by informing on them to the immigration authorities, who then deported the women as illegal immigrants. Since the turn of the twenty-first century, greater awareness of this issue and new federal legislation and more energetic policing has meant that more of these operators have been prosecuted, but the practice still exists.

Perth

Legislative and policing environments similarly shaped relations in Perth's sex industry. In colonial Perth and Fremantle, the majority of women selling sex did so on a relatively independent basis, working from homes, on the streets, or in small brothels. Individual operators often had a male "protector" who usually took a proportion of their earnings. These men were increasingly the target of criminal legislation in the early 1900s, particularly the "Evil Fame" clauses of the 1904 *Police Act*. These laws were aimed particularly at the group of men who had arrived in western Australia from Europe during the gold rushes of the 1890s, bringing with them women who worked in the sex industry. The relationship between these men and their female companions varied: there were clear cases of deception and coercion, but also relationships that looked more like partnerships. These criminal "syndicates", comprised of small groups of men in loose alliances, cooperated to transport women around the Mediterranean, Egypt, Asia, South Africa, and the Americas as well as Australia, depending on where the most favourable market and legal climate was to be found. As the international traffic in women and children became an increasing focus of official attention in the first three decades of the twentieth century, this trade became increasingly difficult to sustain. Australia was an active participant in these policing efforts, using the Federal *Immigration Restriction Act* of 1901 to exclude and deport persons suspected of being associated with the sex industry.³⁶

At the same time, the efforts of the local police in Perth and Fremantle to localize and control prostitution resulted in the setting up of a semi-official red-light district in Roe Street. Until the closure of these brothels in 1958, most of Perth's sex workers operated under strict rules enforced by the police with the cooperation of madams. One of these rules was that women were not allowed to have male associates. Workers were free to come and go on Roe Street, but while residents they led fairly restricted lives and, as was always the case in brothels, shared their earnings with the madam.

The police were always the most important controlling force in the West Australian sex industry, ensuring that the criminal organizations that were so prominent in Sydney did not secure a foothold. This was the case even after Roe Street was closed, when the new policy of police "containment" continued the earlier tradition of de facto toleration for selected operators who worked within a set of police guidelines.

36 Raelene Frances, "White Australia and the White Slave Traffic: Gender, Race and Citizenship", *International Review of Social History*, 44 (1999), supplement, pp. 101–122.

Other Factors Shaping Working Conditions and Cultures

It was not only the policing regimes that affected the shape of the sex industry and the experience of those involved in it. As the case studies of Perth and Sydney illustrate, the nature and size of cities was an important determinant of the scale and diversity of the industry and associated workplace cultures.

In convict Sydney, prostitution was closely associated with the convict system: most of the women selling sex were either convicts or former convicts. With the assisted immigration of free women in the 1830s, free working class women also entered the sex industry. However, for the most part, the sex industry was still integrally related to the rough culture of convictism and merged into the communities of convicts, ex-convicts, and poorer immigrants who settled in the areas around the Rocks in Sydney.

With the end of convictism and increasing free immigration, especially with gold discoveries in the 1850s, the sex industry expanded and diversified. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the police in Sydney counted upwards of 500 women selling sex on a full-time basis, while Perth recorded up to several hundred.³⁷ The sex industry at this time was structured hierarchically, with conditions, earnings, and status varying according to one's location in this hierarchy. The types of establishments selling sex proliferated with increasing urbanization: the bigger and more prosperous the city, the greater the variety.

At the top end of the market, defined by the prices charged and the status of the clientele, were the "grand brothels", which flourished for a short period of time in mid-nineteenth-century Sydney. Such brothels were lavishly furnished, equipped with the best champagnes and spirits, and staffed by well-dressed, attractive young women. Their prices reflected their pretensions to exclusivity. The women in these houses had no need to solicit custom, as the notoriety of the houses ensured that clients sought them out. Alternatively, Sydney's higher class demi-monde might rendezvous with potential clients in the private boxes of the theatres.

At the next level down the status ladder were those brothels that were comfortably if not expensively furnished and which employed young women to solicit custom from prominent city streets in the evenings and from the theatres and racetracks. Also found soliciting at the theatres and in the streets were the so-called "clandestines", women who came in from the suburbs for a few hours each evening. These women took their customers to houses of assignation or

37 As the Census did not have a category for sex workers, and many women concealed their occupation, the only figures we have come from police reports, and all figures must be treated with great caution.

short-time houses—sometimes a hotel—where they could purchase the use of a room for as long as their customer's payment allowed. Although not as elaborately attired as the "dressed girls", these women adopted the appearance of "decency" rather than conspicuous sexual allure, appealing to men who preferred a quiet woman to an obvious harlot. Such a woman might build up a small but regular clientele who visited her in her own suburban house, rather than have to go into the city to seek custom.

Below these women were the streetwalkers more usually referred to as "common prostitutes", women and girls who were seen frequently about the streets and hotels of the cities and wharves both in the daytime and throughout the night, maximizing their earnings by the number of customers rather than the scale of their fees. They were often older than the average sex worker, and more likely to be diseased and heavy drinkers. These women might reside in a house with a few other such women, or live with men who "protected" them and with whom they shared their earnings. They took customers back to their homes, short-time houses, or hotels. More economically if less comfortably, women transacted their business in one of the many public parks.

At the very lowest end of the market were those women who operated out of the meaner dwellings in the back lanes of the central city and near the wharves. On par with these women were the sex workers who catered for "coloured" clients, who were mostly Chinese, but also Syrians, Indians, and Lascars. The status of a sex worker was thus defined by the race and class of her clients as well as by her age, appearance, and habits.³⁸

Each class of sex worker attracted a certain type of client, although these were not rigid categories. As we have noted, the "grand brothels" were patronized by those with money and often with social position. The middle range of options were, not surprisingly, patronized by a variety of men of the middling classes: both married and unmarried and of moderate means. The men who sought out the "clandestines", particularly those who operated discretely in suburban houses, were perhaps looking for the illusion of romance and even domesticity. Women who frequented the wharves dealt mainly with seamen and wharf labourers, while the customers who found themselves in the "dens" in the back lanes of the major capital cities were more likely to be rural workers who had come to the city to spend their end-of-season cheques. Streetwalkers, however, picked up a diverse clientele which included clerks and tradesmen as well as labourers.

As well as affecting the volume of sold sex, client demand clearly shaped the types of services provided by sex workers. This demand varied with the

38 "1878 Inquiry into CD Bill", p. 10.

class of the client, being a product of both masculine desires and the client's ability to pay to satisfy these desires. The experience of working in the sex industry at this time thus depended very much on which part of the industry a woman worked in: women in the higher-class brothels were expected to provide a greater range of both sexual and emotional services than those offering a cheap, quick outlet for the pent-up lusts of visiting seamen or bushmen. For the madams of the elite brothels, the industry was generally comfortable and lucrative. For every pound the "girls" earned, they took ten shillings. Also, sales of liquor contributed in no small way to their total earnings. The only risk such women faced was the threat of prosecution for keeping a disorderly house.

However, it was rare for the keepers of these houses to be charged by the police, because they both operated discreetly and therefore did not offend "public order", and also because policemen were reluctant to embarrass clients who included their superior officers and members of the colonial establishment. Even when prosecutions were launched, the bench often proved reluctant to convict the keepers or inmates of these "flash" houses. Operating with virtual immunity from police intervention, such women could become very wealthy indeed.

For the "girls" in their employ, the opportunity to work in comfortable, even luxurious, surroundings, and not have to solicit in public, must have been enormously attractive. For women who feared public notoriety, these high-class establishments provided a degree of protection from the public gaze and were a favoured first port of call for "respectable" women deciding on a career, or short stint, in the sex industry. These brothels also protected their inmates against male violence and arrest. For those able to avoid the temptations of alcohol, the relatively high earnings allowed women to accumulate sufficient savings to finance an independent life, either as a madam or in some other business venture. Some, too, became mistresses or even wives of their clients.³⁹

Their working lives were not, however, without risks. Venereal diseases were no respecters of social class. Although madams kept a close eye on their workers and encouraged regular medical check-ups, infection was not unheard of. Once infected, the "girls" could find themselves turned out of these "grand brothels" and forced to seek a livelihood elsewhere, moving down through the options outlined above if unable to secure a cure. Likewise, pregnancy was a real possibility although the risks of pregnancy were less for well-paid women working in "flash" houses with good sanitary facilities and could avail themselves of the increasing range of contraceptive devices coming onto the

39 "Inquiry into Chinese Gambling", *New South Wales Parliamentary Papers*, Legislative Assembly, 8 (1891–1892), p. 318.

colonial market. Pessaries, douches, “Dutch caps”, and condoms were all available in Australia in the 1880s and ‘90s, although relatively expensive, the latter providing protection against venereal diseases as well as pregnancy. That these devices were commonly used by sex workers is indicated by the fact that they were regarded by disapproving contemporaries as “the contrivances of the brothel”.⁴⁰ If all else failed, such women could afford the services of a medical practitioner to secure an abortion, and these “flash” houses had doctors regularly attending the inmates to monitor their health.

Women and girls employed in the medium-range brothels also enjoyed a certain degree of protection from violence, but those located in residential areas could face prosecution if their presence upset their neighbours.⁴¹ Women working in medium-range brothels also shared their earnings with the brothel-keeper, but generally earned enough to live well and save provided they did not drink heavily. Like their counterparts in the more elite establishments, they too faced the risks of disease and pregnancy, but probably many took precautions. Like the madams in the elite brothels, the women who operated these medium-grade brothels could accumulate considerable wealth, allowing them to invest in additional brothels. At both the top and middle levels of the industry, women operated independently or in partnership with another woman, relying on word of mouth and/or commissions to cab drivers for their custom.⁴²

At the bottom of the brothel hierarchy were those in the less salubrious parts of town that catered for visiting sailors and rural workers as well as Chinese and other “coloured” labourers. These were often run by men as well as women, and tended to be more disorderly in the literal sense of the word, encouraging heavy drinking and gambling as well as sex, and often being the site of drunken brawls between clients and sometimes between the women. The women who worked in these brothels did not necessarily live on the premises but paid the keeper for the use of a room and access to the custom that the house’s notoriety ensured.⁴³ The conditions under which these women and girls worked were often appalling. Housing was substandard and overcrowded, and furniture, if it existed, of the crudest form.

Pregnancy and venereal disease were always a reality, although women did seek treatment if not prevention. Those who went to jail received some

40 Evidence, Dr Charles Mackellar to Royal Commission into the Decline of the Birth Rate, *New South Wales Parliamentary Papers*, 1903.

41 Cited in Andrew Brown-May, *Melbourne Street Life* (Melbourne, 1998), p. 58.

42 *West Australian*, 15 November 1901.

43 See a police superintendent file note, March 1893, CSO 5/6123, SRNSW. See also *Daily Telegraph*, 15 March 1893, “1878 Inquiry into CD Bill”, p. 40.

treatment, however inadequate. Others sought free treatment at the various underfunded asylums and public hospitals, some of which provided separate wards for cases of venereal diseases. As well as being vulnerable to disease, women who worked in the Chinese and other so-called “lower class” brothels were often arrested on vagrancy charges. Racial prejudices ensured that the former were particularly singled out by the police and treated unsympathetically by magistrates. The major compensations for women who worked in the lower end of the sex trade were the conviviality and comradeship of working with “mates”, and, of course, the money they earned, which even at the lowest end of the scale was at least double what a woman could earn at a respectable occupation.

The “clandestines” who visited the city from the suburbs took more risks than the “dressed girls” and the brothel inmates. They might pick up a violent customer, and the houses of assignation and short-time houses provided less protection against such men than the brothels. On the other hand, it was easier for such women to avoid being classed as common prostitutes, especially if they could demonstrate an alternative means of income. These women could also keep most of their earnings, their major expense being for “short-time” accommodation. Dressed less conspicuously and typically coming into town only two or three nights a week, and then for only a few hours, they were less visible and less likely to be identified as sex workers by either the police or the general public. They were, however, likely to be more vulnerable to disease, not having the benefit of any treatment while in jail and also being less likely to seek treatment privately.

As well as disease, “clandestines” were particularly vulnerable to pregnancy. Women identifying as prostitutes had few babies, particularly when compared to married women. While it is clear that an enormous number of abortions were carried out in the late nineteenth century, women without professional connections in the sex industry would have found it more difficult to access safe and affordable practitioners. They were no doubt well represented amongst the women who died as a result of botched and unsanitary abortions.⁴⁴

Women and girls who worked full-time as streetwalkers were potentially the most vulnerable, being about the streets at all hours and often taking their customers to exposed and dangerous places like public parks. These women were the targets for gangs of youths—“larrikins”, as they were called—who perpetrated pack rape upon them, secure in the knowledge that the courts were lenient in cases of the rape of prostitutes. To give themselves a measure of protection, women tended to solicit in groups and have male companions watch

44 Frances, *Selling Sex*, Ch. 8.

them from a safe distance. They also became adept at avoiding the uniformed police, who were required to keep to a regular beat. Homeless women found in the streets were especially liable to arrest, and could be charged as vagrants for having no fixed address and insufficient lawful means of support. Those whom the police said were selling sex were very likely to be sent to jail, rather than to private benevolent homes, as were “respectable” homeless women.⁴⁵

Streetwalkers were also the most vulnerable to disease and pregnancy, as it was more difficult to afford and to use prophylactic techniques in such circumstances. The major advantage of streetwalking, however, was that it allowed a woman a great deal of independence. She was not subject to surveillance by a brothel-keeper, and could keep all her earnings. Some streetwalkers reportedly did manage to accumulate enough to invest in a business of their own, where they became the madam. The independence of the streetwalker, however, could come at a huge cost, and sometimes proved illusory. Male companions could turn out to be exploiters and abusers rather than protectors, and certain identification as a common prostitute placed women at a serious disadvantage in colonial society.⁴⁶

It is important to note that women did move between the various types of sex work in colonial times. Some accumulated enough capital from streetwalking to set up as brothel-keepers; an individual brothel-keeper, renting her house, might make enough to buy the property or even several properties. On the other hand, women could move down as well as up, especially if they became addicted to alcohol. Thus, a woman might begin her days in a high-class brothel and gradually make her way down to the brothels of the back lanes.

To some extent, these gradations and hierarchies of status and income persisted into the twentieth and twentieth-first centuries. But as we have seen, the world that professional prostitutes encountered in the late 1930s was very different from the one that confronted their nineteenth-century counterparts. Changes to laws and methods of policing, coupled in the case of New South Wales with the rise of organized crime, meant that it became much more difficult to operate as a full-time freelance worker. These changes also altered the relationship of prostitutes to the working-class communities in which they traditionally operated, increasingly marking out full-time sex workers as part of a deviant underworld. The 1904 Evil Fame legislation in western Australia, and

45 “Royal Commission on the Victorian Police Force”, *Victorian Parliamentary Papers*, 3 (1906), p. 135; *Argus*, 16 March 1863, p. 5; see also Christina Twomey, *Deserted and Destitute: Motherhood, Wife Desertion and Colonial Welfare* (Melbourne, 2002), pp. 83–84.

46 William Augustus Miles, “The Registry of Flash Men”, available at: www.records.nsw.gov.au; last accessed 10 July 2017.

the later New South Wales consorting laws, made respectable sections of the population subject to imprisonment for associating with criminals and known prostitutes.

Similarly, the stronger laws against soliciting in public meant that any women seen talking in the street to sex workers risked being accused of soliciting, while all men living with prostitutes fell under suspicion of the new laws against living off the earnings of prostitution. This meant that even male relatives in paid employment could be convicted of living off the earnings of their mothers, wives, sisters, or daughters simply because they shared a house with them or were “habitually in their company”. Penalties for landlords who knowingly let their premises to those engaged in the sex industry drove a wedge between respectable property owners and women who had previously found landlords keen to accept the higher rents they could pay. This opened up another opportunity for criminal elements to exploit the need of prostitutes for accommodation. Stricter enforcement of licensing laws similarly made it more risky for hotel licensees to allow known prostitutes to linger on their premises, literally forcing such women out into the cold to ply their trade.

These changes were part of a broader attempt in western society to mark out “deviant” sections of the working class and isolate them from the respectable mainstream in order to maintain more effective surveillance and control of their activities. Certain modes of behaviour that had once been accepted became pathologized and criminalized, and individuals who persisted in these behaviours found themselves the targets of police, medical, and other attention, often ending up in asylums, prisons, reformatories, or other institutions.⁴⁷

In Australia this class-based assault took on a particular racial/ethnic character, as governments attempted to contain the potentially “contaminating” influences of Aboriginal populations by confining them to reserves, restricting their employment opportunities, and attempting to control their personal/sexual relationships. Even the tolerated brothels of western Australia can be seen in this light: institutions in which the authorities hoped to isolate and control the potentially disruptive freelance prostitutes.

But while these efforts were successful in changing the working lives and personal relationships of full-time sex workers, it is equally apparent that many women avoided the attention of the authorities by selling sex in “a quiet way”, usually on a part-time basis. These “amateurs” and “clandestines” continued to challenge the controlling attempts of the state, which in turn tried harder to classify women on the basis of their sexuality. The desire to mark out and

47 Lynette Finch, *The Classing Gaze: Sexuality, Class and Surveillance* (Sydney, 1993), pp. 47–49.

control those selling sex thus affected the lives of all women, as their sexuality was under constant scrutiny and classification, regardless of economic class.

Although these attempts clearly impinged on women's lives, they were only ever partially successful and often contested. Women selling sex were particularly resourceful in resisting attempts to stigmatize them and regulate their behaviour. They were always creative in finding ways to avoid arrest and prosecution. The case of Sydney madam Kate Leigh demonstrates how some women campaigned to counter attempts to stereotype and isolate them from local communities. Leigh wrote letters to the press contesting media representations of her actions, and dispensed largesse to local charities; she was engaging in what today would be regarded as a very successful public relations exercise.

On a less grand scale, some women cultivated relationships in the neighbourhoods in which they lived and worked, with apparent success. They were generous in providing financial support to those less fortunate, and careful not to offend sensibilities by exposing their children to foul language and male clients. Some also minded children so that their mothers could go out to work.⁴⁸

On the other side of the continent a woman with a police record for prostitution-related offences protested Policewoman Dugdale's allegation that she was a negligent mother: "I'm as good a bloody woman as any other bloody woman around here", she shouted.⁴⁹ Such talking back may not have convinced the police or the court, but it indicated that women did not necessarily accept or internalize the labels put on them by authorities.

A more subtle example of this linguistic contest appears in evidence given to the Royal Commission into the Perth City Council in 1938. Asked how and why she embarked on a career in the sex industry, one Roe Street brothel resident explained:

I have been all sorts of things. First of all, I worked in a [*sic*] office as a bookkeeper, then I had a business of my own, and I finished up as a barmaid. It was from the bar that I went to Roe Street. I found that at the occupation I was following I could not earn a decent wage to keep myself properly [...].⁵⁰

48 Margaret Fitzpatrick, interviewed by Judy Wing, 9 July 1987, New South Wales Bicentennial Oral History Project, ms. 5163, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales; also comments from an anonymous caller to Richard Glover's programme, ABC Radio National, 3 August 2005.

49 Police vs. Francis, Perth Police Court Minutes, 1386/44, 3 April 1920, SROWA.

50 "Royal Commission into Perth City Council Administration 1938, Report of Evidence", pp. 844–845, Hansard Library, Western Australian Parliament.

It is the use of the word “decent” that is especially challenging. In selling sex, she is able to earn a decent living for the first time; this completely reverses the usual terminology, which would have classed sex work as thoroughly indecent. Her further evidence sheds light on what she means by “decent”: it is a reference to dignity and security rather than morality. Her ambition is to save enough to provide for herself in old age, to avoid the indignity of dependence and institutionalization.

While women’s own efforts to assert a counter-definition of what it meant to sell sex were clearly important, perhaps most important in undermining and complicating official attempts to mark out prostitutes as a deviant subclass was the advent of the “spectacular modern woman” in the person of the flapper. Arriving in the cities and towns of Australia in the later wartime years and the 1920s, the modern young woman challenged traditional notions of respectable femininity not just by her short skirts and “look at me” appearance but also by her financial independence, her presence on the streets and public transport, and her pursuit of pleasure. Smoking cigarettes and dancing the Charleston, wearing revealing clothes and make-up, indulging in the pleasures of consumerism—modern young women confused observers who sought a clear demarcation between “good” and “bad” women.⁵¹ All this confusion was to the great advantage of women selling sex, many of whom continued to evade easy classification by moving between and across, or by redefining, the boundaries of the respectable: “as good a bloody woman as any other ...”⁵²

Conclusion

This study has shown that similar legislative frameworks can produce radically different outcomes for working conditions in the sex industry. In both Sydney and Perth the increasing criminalization of prostitution-related activities in the early twentieth century created new opportunities for individuals and groups to exert control over sex workers. In the case of Perth, the police, sometimes in collusion with local governments and medical authorities, were able to introduce an unofficial policy of “containment” whereby sex workers operated in places and under rules established by the police. In Sydney, harsher laws provided an opportunity for criminal gangs to work in collusion with a corrupt police force to extort payments and exert physical control over

51 See Liz Conor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman: Feminine Visibility in the 1920s* (Bloomington/Indianapolis, 2004).

52 Police vs. Francis, Perth Police Court Minutes, 1386/44, 3 April 1920, SROWA.

sex workers. In both instances, the outcomes for sex workers were worse, with decreased earnings and less control over the location and nature of the sexual services provided and the conditions under which these were delivered. This situation persisted until the late twentieth century when new approaches to decriminalizing aspects of prostitution in Sydney reduced the opportunities for extortion and police corruption. Perth has resisted making changes, despite attempts in recent years to partially decriminalize and license the sex industry.⁵³ In both cases, attitudes continue to change, as legislators grapple with the ongoing tension between the civil rights of sex workers and the perceived interests of the wider community.

53 "Liberal Rebellion over Prostitution Laws", *West Australian*, 8 April 2013.

PART 2

Thematic Overviews



“We Use our Bodies to Work Hard, So We Need to Get Legitimate Workers’ Rights”*: Labour Relations in Prostitution, 1600–2010

Marion Pluskota

Researchers in the history of prostitution have only very rarely questioned the notion of labour relations in prostitution in a comparative perspective.¹ Similarly, the role of prostitution in the early modern economy or in the family economy has not been discussed in depth. However, prostitution was an essential component of the economy of makeshift of eighteenth-century urban working-class women, as highlighted by Olwen Hufton in 1974, but very little since then has been said on the means at the disposal of the prostitute to negotiate working conditions and labour relations.² Under a Marxist interpretation, “prostitution is only a specific expression of the general prostitution of the labourer”, meaning that in a capitalist economy, any sale of service creates a relation of subordination that transforms the worker into a commodified object.³ In economistic analyses of prostitution, such as the work of Rosner, prostitution is seen as a viable and cost-effective choice, maximizing the utility of one’s body.⁴ Prostitution follows the mechanisms of the free market and responds to an important demand from mainly male clients.⁵ And with the rise of prostitutes’ activist groups staking claims for their rights as sex workers, a call has been made for historical studies on their working conditions as well as on the networks and exchanges facilitating or restraining their rights and their struggles to be recognized as citizens and workers.

The prostitutional exchange seems to be a very basic paradigm for labour relations: one producer and one buyer, with the production of surplus (historically

* Quoted from an interview with a sex worker in Kolkata in Dasgupta, this volume, Calcutta.

- 1 Note the exception of Lex Heerma van Voss, “The Worst Class of Workers: Migration, Labor Relations and Living Strategies of Prostitutes around 1900” in Marcel van der Linden and Leo Lucassen, (eds), *Working on Labor: Essays in Honor of Jan Lucassen* (Leiden, 2012), pp. 153–170.
- 2 Olwen H. Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France* (Oxford, 1974).
- 3 Quoted in Jessica Spector, *Prostitution and Pornography* (Stanford, 2006), p. 64.
- 4 Richard Posner, *Sex and Reason* (Cambridge, 1992).
- 5 Marjolein van der Veen, “Rethinking Commodification and Prostitution: An Effort at Peacemaking in the Battles over Prostitution”, *Rethinking Marxism*, 13 (2001), pp. 30–51, 30.

prostitutes earn more than other women in low-skill employment). Nevertheless, the prostitudinal exchange is rarely the making of only two people; the sexual intercourse is most often based on a reciprocal exchange (money-sex), but the process leading to this intercourse involves more complex relations between various actors negotiating the sexual encounter. Besides, the situation of a post-monetary exchange also leaves the prostitute facing a new set of negotiations in the course of which, according to her own economic status, she has to decide how the surplus will be spent. The income provided by the sex trade can be used for different purposes such as to redistribute money, often from urban to rural areas, to cope with poverty, to compensate for the lack of social welfare and income maintenance programmes⁶ or to build up capital.

The organizational structures and relations in prostitution are diverse and complex, and the analytical tools of labour history seem particularly adequate for analysing in depth the working relations that are built up in the sex market. The study of labour relations looks at the relationships between different instances (employees, unions, management, the state, and consumers) in a working environment and how the work is organized in terms of contracts, payment, and use of surplus value. It differs from the study of working conditions which focus on the outcome of the negotiation process. Early labour relations studies focused on the analysis of relations between unions and the state, and how unions' claims were negotiated in a capitalist economy. This approach is particularly relevant when studying contemporary prostitution and the protests of unionized sex workers but this scope would limit our research only to the past fifty years, whereas the construction and recognition of prostitutes as a group of workers are the results of a long-term evolution of working practices that have been defined and negotiated by various people and subjected to important legal and social changes over the past four centuries. Only by studying these interactions can we consider prostitution as a form of labour and understand the evolution of labour relations from a pre-modern to a global economy. The aim of this chapter is therefore twofold: firstly, to categorize the type of labour relations prostitutes established over time and space and how they negotiated them; secondly, to point out the different factors that influence labour relations and to show how changing patterns can be connected globally.

This chapter on labour relations in prostitution is based on the overviews collected for the project *Selling Sex in the City*, many of which appear in this volume. Though it focuses on the economy of prostitution and labour relations in particular, working conditions, gender issues, and migration studies

6 Lin Lean Lim, *The Sex Sector* (Geneva, 1998), p. 10.

are embedded in my analysis. The setting chosen for this study is the urban environment, and as we will see, labour relations are often influenced by the environment surrounding the prostitutional exchange. Depending on the time and place, work structures can be socially institutionalized, and the effects of this institutionalization on labour relations will be analysed here.⁷ Lastly, these labour relations in prostitution will be thought of as occurring in a monetized economy, even though payments are not restricted to cash; payments in kind or gifts are also possible and are more common in conditions of survival sex, a type of prostitution engaged in by people in extreme need as obtaining basic necessities such as food is the foremost priority.⁸ In order to understand the evolution through time and space of labour relations and the role of globalization in this process, I have decided to follow a thematic approach to the subject, as prostitution and labour relations did not evolve in a linear way in varying urban contexts.

Types of Labour Relations in Prostitution⁹

In most papers, the word “whore” (and its equivalents in other languages) does not refer to a type of work. It refers to and denigrates the “morality” of women as regards their sexuality. At the beginning of the period studied, judicial archives on trials for scolding shows the omnipresence of the word “whore” as an insult.¹⁰ In Bolivia nowadays, prostitutes themselves make a difference between *una puta* and *una meretriz*: one is giving her body to anyone, without payment, while the other is a working woman.¹¹ By avoiding the word *puta*,

7 The categories of labour relations are based on the IISH definitions from the global project on the history of labour relations. Available at: <https://collab.iisg.nl/web/labourrelations/explanation-of-the-different-labour-relations>; last accessed 9 January 2015.

8 The expression “survival sex” is open to debate but in this paper “survival sex” refers to people who engaged in sexual relations for subsistence needs. Melissa Ditmore, *Prostitution and Sex Work (Historical Guides to Controversial Issues in America)* (Westport, 2010). Jody M. Greene *et al.*, “Prevalence and Correlates of Survival Sex among Runaway and Homeless Youth”, *American Journal of Public Health*, 89 (1999), pp. 1406–1409.

9 Note that the position of slave will not be described under a specific subheading, as it appears that women could be owned and used as slaves in different labouring contexts such as within the family economy or in a brothel; each time a relation similar to slave work can develop, it will be discussed.

10 See for example, Sandy Bardsley, *Venomous Tongues: Speech and Gender in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia, 2006).

11 Absi, this volume, Bolivia.

these women try to get rid of the stigma of immorality linked to this expression. Even the term “prostitute”, which appeared in western legislation only in the nineteenth century, is subject to questioning: in eighteenth-century France, the *Encyclopédie* claimed that “une prostituée est celle qui s’abandonne à la lubricité de l’homme pour quelque motif vil et mercenaire”,¹² accentuating both the immoral behaviour and the financial gain. But definitions of prostitution are still in a state of flux and prostitution has not been broadly accepted as a form of labour; abolitionist states and some non-state actors today refuse to consider prostitution to be a legitimate type of labour and they compare it to slavery, with women working under exploitative labour conditions. Facing this impossible neutral definition and the burden of social stigma carried by the word “prostitute”, in the 1970s the expression “sex worker” appeared (the *Oxford English Dictionary* included it in 1971)¹³ and it was reused later by Carol Leigh, a prostitute and feminist, and popularized by her book *Sex Work: Writings by Women in the Sex Industry*.¹⁴ The expression sex worker refers to much more than the simple recognition of the labour-power of prostitutes; by using this expression, some prostitutes ask for the right to be treated like any worker. They are selling a service¹⁵ and as a consequence, demand workers’ rights, including written contracts when dealing with employers, retirement funds, health care, child support, the right to pay taxes, and to be free from state and social harassment. These claims for rights proceed from the same motivations that pushed workers in the nineteenth century to gather in unions and denounce their working conditions. Because of the social and legal aspects underlying the notion of sex workers in relation to the state and their employers, this expression seems better suited when applied to the recent history of prostitution, when a group mentality and collective actions were developed to stake claims to common rights.¹⁶ For that reason I have opted to use the word “prostitute” in this paper in discussing the labour relations created by women involved in selling sex over the centuries.

12 “A prostitute is a woman who abandons herself to the lubricity of man for wrong and mercenary reasons”, Diderot and D’Alembert, *L’Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers* (Paris, 1775), p. 450.

13 Available at: <http://www.oed.com>; last accessed 10 July 2017.

14 Frederique Delacoste *et al.*, *Sex Work: Writings by Women in the Sex Industry* (1997).

15 van der Veen, “Rethinking Commodification and Prostitution”, p. 32.

16 Holly Wardlow, “Anger, Economy, Female Agency: Problematizing ‘Prostitution’ and ‘Sex Work’ among the Huli of Papua New Guinea”, *Signs*, 29 (2004), pp. 1017–1040, 1018. “Sex worker” is far from being a neutral expression and academics have often discussed the implications underlying this term, not always being able to reach a consensus.

Prostitution and the Family Economy

The family economy is not always the first issue that comes to mind when talking about commercial sex and labour relations; however, the importance of the family when a woman decides (or is obliged) to enter prostitution often first comes into play, before the involvement of third parties. Too often and for too long the role of women and prostitutes in particular has been neglected in research on the family economy. In reality, very different structures have been put in place that include prostitution in the family economy, and based on the information provided in the urban overviews, it becomes clear that the surplus produced by prostitutes was included in the family economy in six different ways. As an household kin producer: A subordinate kin, such as a spouse or children of the head of household who live mainly through self-subsistence and contributes to the maintenance of the household by performing productive work for the household. As an household kin non-producer: subordinate kin such as a spouse (man or woman) and children of heads of households who can support the household (under either reciprocal or commodified labour relations), so the spouse and kin dependants are free from productive work but they contribute to the maintenance of the household by performing reproductive work for the household. Other labour positions in a family economy include being an indentured worker, a leading household producer, a self-employed worker or a wage-earner.¹⁷

Analyses of the labour relations in a family economy are based on four variables: Who claims the money earned by the woman? What type of labour relation is put in place? Is it part- or full-time labour? And what is the surplus value used for? In most of the overviews collected here, the social structures are based on a patriarchal society and based on this basic family structure, a wide array of labour relations exist in which women produce reciprocal and commodified labour, from slave work to independent wage work. The difficulty of studying labour relations in prostitution in a family economy is based on the fact that a woman often carries out unpaid services for her father or husband, upon which prostitution can be superimposed. For instance, a daughter can contribute directly towards the earnings of the household by being a prostitute, with her mother or parents being the brokers. The daughter lives with the family but her earnings are taken by the head of the household, and thus she directly contributes to the family needs, whilst she is also requested to carry out domestic chores. In 1753 in Nantes for example, neighbours complained

17 Available at: https://collab.iisg.nl/c/document_library/get_file?p_l_id=273223&folderId=277142&name=DLFE-186110.pdf; last accessed 10 July 2017.

that a widow named Jacqueline kept a disorderly house on the place Ste Catherine, St Nicolas parish, where her daughters worked as prostitutes. In 1761, La Couillaud was sentenced to a house of correction for six months after being denounced by her neighbours for living a debauched life and disturbing the peace in an apartment on rue du Bois-Tortu, St Nicolas parish, where she was living with her father and mother. In both cases, the daughters played an active part in the family economy; La Couillaud seemed to have been the only member of the household to earn any money. Their occupation was therefore essential to the maintenance of their family unit.¹⁸ Playing such an active part in the family economy, the young woman can be caught up in an exploitative framework; with no contract or means to get help or escape (as the money is collected by supervising kin), she is trapped in a highly dependent labour relation. This form of sex work is seen in cases of extreme poverty but also in societies where access to the labour market for women is restricted such as in early Johannesburg, where mining exploitation was at the core of the labour market.¹⁹ Women in these situations are forced to live off on an economy of makeshifts to survive in the urban environment.

A more reciprocal labour relation can be developed when a prostitute works with a sister or another member of a family and they form an independent household; this leaves them more freedom to dispose of the surplus value as wish. In Nigeria in the Hausa culture, kinship networks become an important tool for negotiating the difficult space of prostitutional work; it offers protection and “know-how” for adapting to and being integrated in the world of commercial sex.²⁰

Another type of labour relation found in a family economy is based on indentured work and the pawning of wife and daughter into the sex trade. This type of contract seems to have been especially developed in the Middle East (in Istanbul until recently) and Asia (China, Singapore and India) but cases of brothers pimping their sisters have also been found in Havana.²¹ The family makes the first move to get the wife or daughter involved in the trade and finds a suitable broker, either to get a loan or to repay a debt. The woman works most likely on a full-time basis and all of her earnings are used to repay the debt.

18 Marion Pluskota, *Prostitution and Social Control in Eighteenth-Century Ports* (Abingdon, 2015).

19 Ziyad Choonara, “Selling Sex in Johannesburg: From 1886 to the Present”, unpublished paper collected for the project “Selling Sex in the City”, 2013.

20 Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria.

21 Wyers, this volume, Istanbul; Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai; Herzog, this volume, Singapore; Dasgupta, this volume, Calcutta; Cabezas, this volume, Havana.

Securing the release of the woman after payment has been made is not always an easy task. This form of work can be found throughout the period studied.

Wives working as part-time prostitutes and whose earnings partly contribute to household revenues or are the only revenue in the family are in a particularly difficult situation. Family labour relations place intense pressure on women, and even though they earn enough to be more independent, they are forced to remain in the household structure. This situation can also trigger tensions relative to gender expectations in the household. By contributing actively to the earning of monetary capital for the household, the woman goes against the traditional pattern confining her to domestic duties and an economic situation of dependence. Ghosh, who studied such women in Kolkata, claims that their “gendered identity of housewife contradicts [their] class identity as a worker.”²² By confiscating her income or not acknowledging these essential resources, as is the case in India for the “Flying Prostitute”, male relatives succeed in keeping the woman in an exploitative relation. Approval and recognition within the family is not always easy and many women have been struggling to find a compromise between their domestic position (i.e. as a married woman) and their working position. Women who have to complement the income of the family by selling their bodies intermittently are neither recognized as full-time prostitutes (registered officially in certain countries) nor as full-time housewives. This puts them in a difficult social situation and leaves them isolated as they struggle to be socially recognized and identified as workers. They remain part of the familial economy and their wages are the basis for the survival of the family, but through the denial of their work and the source of their wages, they are “excluded even from the category of marginal worker.”²³ In many ways, the situation of these women can be compared with the “housewifization” of garment workers studied by Mies, in the sense that their contribution to the household is not recognized by the community, their family, or their “employer”.²⁴ It is also interesting to note that if a woman’s job is well-integrated in the family economy and is accepted, the power relation between gender in the house remains unaffected by the fact that the woman is earning more than the man; expectations from male kin and the community remain the same (respect for the male head of the household and carrying out required female domestic duties) even if she is active in the labour market.

22 Swati Ghosh, “The Flying Prostitute: Identity of the (Im)possible Other”, *Hecate*, 29 (2003), pp. 199–214.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 202.

24 Quoted in Peter Custers, *Capital Accumulation and Women’s Labour in Asian Economies* (New York, 2012), pp. 170–177 and 190–191.

Only in the case of self-employment or in the situation of independent wage-earners outside the boundaries of the family setting can a woman get out of this subordinate position within the family and community, as she is able to renegotiate her place in society. Social pressure to fulfil family expectations of earning a living can also lead young women to prostitution; in the case of Thailand for example, Muecke argues that Thai prostitutes are the foundation for keeping traditional institutions alive, as “through home remittances and merit-making activities, it enables women to fulfil the traditional cultural functions of daughters.”²⁵ The food-vending activities (also a female activity) of former generations are thus compared to prostitution and the same process of home remittances is put in place by prostitutes, and these young women are able to send money home per the terms of Buddhist belief. It is not always known back in the village that they are working as prostitutes but in some instances their families are aware of it and condone their actions.²⁶ In Nigeria, remittances are also expected, especially if their children are staying in the village.²⁷ This also shows that the notion of immorality in prostitution is flexible, as we can see in the case of eighteenth-century European labouring classes.²⁸ By being a bond between the girl and the sex trade, the family can create a morally and economically sustainable environment for its daughters and wives. The economic necessity of sustaining a family in an environment that has limited job opportunities for women sometimes makes it all the easier to accept.

The Brothel Economy

If the woman is not working at home, she is either working indoors or outdoors; these situations lead to different labour relations with the people that employ her. In an indoor setting that is not privately rented, such as a brothel, karaoke bar, or massage parlour, women’s work is often based on an oral contract with the brothel owner or the manager of the place, although written contracts can also be drawn up—but they are of little value if prostitution has not been legalized and subjected to employment laws. The employment status of a prostitute

25 Marjorie Muecke, “Mother Sold Food, Daughter Sells her Body: The Cultural Continuity of Prostitution”, *Social Sciences and Medicine*, 35 (1992), pp. 891–901.

26 See also Lisa Taylor, “Dangerous Trade-offs: The Behavioral Ecology of Child Labor and Prostitution in Rural Northern Thailand”, *Cultural Anthropology*, 46 (2005), pp. 411–435.

27 Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria.

28 Pluskota, *Prostitution and Social Control*, pp. 25–48.

in a brothel is difficult to define if she is working in a country where running a brothel is illegal; ideally, the woman should be able to sign a contract and denounce any misconduct by her employer, the brothel owner. In Israel, the Labour Court recognized the employment relationship between procurers and sex workers when in 2005 a sex worker succeeded in getting compensation after being injured in a blaze while at work in the brothel.²⁹ This is an important step for the recognition of prostitutes' rights, as contractual employment rights are rarely respected (as in modern Istanbul, Rio, and Kolkata) and the women are forced into a position of dependency.³⁰ Women have little say over the price of the transaction or what is done during this transaction. The price and time are set by the brothel owner but some stipulations can be made concerning how they could increase their wages by getting a percentage of drinks sold or by offering hourly or nightly services at a high fixed price.

Regardless of whether a man or a woman owns and supervises the working space, the monetary aspect remains the basis of the labour relation; a third to half of the money earned by the woman goes to the brothel keeper to pay for rent, clothes, laundry, and food. A debt system is commonly put in place, which limits the possibility of exiting prostitution or leaving the establishment. By living in the brothel, the woman loses most of her negotiating power in dealing with the owner. This debt-bondage can be added to a family's debt if the daughter or wife has been pawned. By putting in place a debt system, the labour relation of employer-wage earner is biased and becomes an indentured relation.

This situation, however, should not occur in countries or states where prostitution and the running of brothels are legal and regulated. For example in contemporary Amsterdam, prostitutes working in brothels are to be duly registered and are most often wage-earners.³¹ They do not live in the brothel, and in practice, only rent a room from the establishment's owner. In this case, no employment contract exists between the owner and the woman as she is not working for him/her.³² By legalizing brothels, the Dutch government sought to limit the exploitation of women and the development of clandestine establishments by putting in place, at a local level, a licensing system and therefore

29 Amir *et al.*, this volume, Tel-Aviv/Jaffa.

30 Blanchette and Schettini, this volume, Rio; Wyers, this volume, Istanbul; Dasgupta, this volume, Calcutta.

31 Pluskota, this volume, Amsterdam.

32 Available at: <http://prostitution.procon.org/sourcefiles/NetherlandsPolicyOnProstitutionQ&A2005.pdf>, from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs; last accessed 10 July 2017.

opening the doors of these establishments to official controls. This was, however, not the case in the nineteenth century, when women often had to incur debts to pay for medical fees and registration; only recent legislation, which includes labour regulations, has been brought into being to prevent, to certain degrees of success, the system of debt bondage.

Pimps and Brokers

Intermediaries aside from the family can take part in the negotiation of prostitutes' work. Working with a pimp, especially when soliciting outdoors, offers protection and facilitates making contact with customers. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), the term "pimp" originally meant "procurer", someone who facilitates illegal encounters; nowadays it refers to someone living off the earnings of a prostitute in exchange for protection and setting up meetings with clients.³³ The difference between a pimp and brothel owner lies in the environment, the spatial context; while a brothel owner negotiates labour conditions in connection with a specific place, a pimp does not own a place for the woman to work, and he can be working or hired just as a temporary broker. Different intermediaries can be used by migrants to negotiate working contracts. In Buenos Aires, *casas de comisionistas*, or agent houses, made the link between rural and urban work placement; women were often aware of the work they were going to do, and the agencies made the arrangements with brothel owners in the city.³⁴ Reciprocal dependence can sometimes be the basis of a labour contract. In Argentina, for certain self-employed women pimps were used to get them out of the system put in place by employment agencies and they "helped" prostitutes gain more independence.³⁵ In Nigeria, women use Jaguda boys to interact with clients and give them protection but these men have no control over the more experienced women.³⁶ Relations with a pimp are based on two factors: the experience of the woman (young prostitutes in Cairo were said to pay fixed wages to pimps whereas this was not economically viable)³⁷ and if a woman has been coerced and therefore is in a relation of dependence with the pimp. The situation of prostitutes working in cabarets and

33 <http://www.oed.com>.

34 Schettini, this volume, Buenos Aires.

35 Schettini, this volume, Buenos Aires.

36 Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria.

37 Hammad and Biancani, this volume, Cairo.

theatres is particularly interesting from a labour and migration history point of view. With the revolution of transport and increased transnational female migratory movements in the nineteenth century, European prostitutes left for Asia, South America, and the US, hoping to find good wages abroad. Racial preferences and stereotypes in the sex market were encouraged (and still are) and women's ethnicity or nationality could add extra value to their assets.³⁸ The hiring of singers and actresses also serving as prostitutes could already be found in Cairo at the beginning of the early modern period, but that was also common practice in China, in Argentina in the nineteenth century, and in Switzerland at the end of the twentieth century.³⁹ The particularity of this kind of prostitution is that a written contract exists between both parties; ideally, the employee should be able to see that her rights are respected. However, it appears that through artistic contracts, entrepreneurs, directors of theatres, and managers directly benefitted from the artists' talents and sexual favours but forced them into a situation of dependency and indentured work. Managers and other brokers developed systems of debt bondage which downgraded the initial contracted relation into indenture. According to the UN, the main issues lay in the immigration laws that prevent trafficked women from asking for help and threaten indirectly to send them back to the hands of their traffickers.

The economy of prostitution became part of the global or at least transnational economy and market at a very early stage. Migrant women have almost always been the main contingent of prostitutes in cities. In eighteenth century Nantes for instance, only 40 per cent of the prostitutes were born in the city, a figure similar to London and Paris. Female migrants who became prostitutes in early modern Europe were usually from the surrounding villages, often from the same region and almost always from the same country; only capital cities such as London and Paris and "touristic" cities such as Florence and Venice had foreign prostitutes. Colonial cities and penal colonies also drew female migrants from surrounding countries. European prostitutes could be found in Singapore, though these women mainly entertained (white) officials only and had relatively good living conditions compared to indigenous women; they were able to negotiate with their customers and came to those areas with the aim of working as prostitutes. In parallel with free migration, the trade in women existed already at the beginning of the early modern period in cities such as

38 Tracol-Huyn, this volume, Hanoi.

39 Hammad and Biancani, this volume, Cairo; Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai; Schettini, this volume, Buenos Aires; on Switzerland, see Marjan Wijers and Lin Lap-Chew, *Trafficking in Women* (Utrecht, 1997), p. 143.

Cairo, Istanbul, and seventeenth-century Singapore. In relation to slavery, it is unclear if raids were organized solely to kidnap women for sexual exploitation, but the sources show that there was a market for female slaves for domestic and sexual exploitation already in place in the pre-modern period and at the beginning of the colonial period (seventeenth century).

It should be noted that on a global level, there exists some confusion about the definition of trafficking; coercion or an exploitative relation is the basis of trafficking according to some but for others, the crossing of borders is the key; another definition relies on a third party as a necessary element of trafficking. In between these migrant categories (voluntary and coerced), we can find women who are not being trafficked but smuggled across borders to work in prostitution. Indeed, transnational prostitution is characterized by economic inequalities and it flourishes in socially unstable countries (e.g. eastern European trafficking after the collapse of the Soviet regime).⁴⁰ Women's motivations for leaving their home countries are often economic and/or a desire to escape a situation of violence, either domestic violence or warfare. To be able to cross borders they rely on criminal organizations which take care of their transport for a certain fee, payable in advance or by working for them at the final destination. These women usually have a certain amount of control over their earnings and should be free to leave once their debts are paid,⁴¹ but some are forced into very coercive working conditions that prevent their release, such as migrants from North Africa and eastern Europe in Jaffa/Tel Aviv at the beginning of the 2000s.⁴²

Union movements have called for national and international changes and they often challenge the role of the state in discrimination against prostitutes and condemn the alienating conditions in which they work, conditions that could be improved by legal requirements and the recognition of business relations between prostitutes, clients, and brokers. But the role of the state in labour relations in prostitution is very complex as policies vary. As Conner points out, even in France where the state has defended abolitionist policies since 1960, its actions regarding prostitutes are very uncertain and even contradictory.⁴³

40 Amir *et al.*, this volume, Tel-Aviv/Jaffa.

41 See Rutvica Andrijasevic, *Migration, Agency and Citizenship in Sex Trafficking* (Amsterdam, 2010) on eastern European women migrating to Italy to work as prostitutes.

42 Amir *et al.*, this volume, Tel-Aviv/Jaffa.

43 Conner, this volume, Paris.

Self-employment

With the development of the internet and mobile phones, communications have been made sex work easier and offers for private sex are increasing; the number of self-employed women is on the rise, as procurers are not needed to get in touch with clients.⁴⁴ Historically, self-employed women were mostly from the labouring class and engaged in survival sex, and prostitution was part of their makeshift economy. Nowadays, these women are from different social classes and some of them have university educations, though women from the labouring class remain the most numerous. Voluntary migrants (with or without papers) can also be self-employed; often they have previous experience in prostitution and can travel alone more easily from one city to another. Demand fluctuates and as customers may get “tired” of the same women, it is therefore more profitable to move to another city. These experienced women are self-employed, though they can stop at a specific brothel for a while (i.e. in Bolivia where registration is on a national basis)⁴⁵ and be in a position to negotiate with the brothel owner and the customers for fair prices and inexpensive accommodations. Another example of women’s migration motivated by demand was observed by Bradley in the 1970s; the number of sex workers increased around the Persian Gulf after the oil boom and there was an increasing number of wealthy Arab men in the region.

Being self-employed does not always entail security and choice, and in the case of streetwalkers working on their own, it can even be dangerous. The living conditions of self-employed women are therefore defined on a large spectrum; a relatively wealthy student in Nigeria taking up escorting so she can afford luxury items is not as vulnerable as a drug addict in Paris Bois de Boulogne. Negotiating power over price, security, and safety, or the possibility of being able to refuse a client, is increased only if the self-employed prostitute is not in a dire economic and/or physical situation (perhaps suffering from an addiction). Research shows that self-employed women are more likely to suffer violence at the hands of their customers than prostitutes in brothels or those under the protection of a pimp.⁴⁶ The poorest of these women, those who are self-employed but practicing survival sex, suffer the long-lasting

44 Scott Cunningham and Todd Kendall, “Prostitution 2.0: The Changing Face of Sex Work”, *Journal of Urban Economics*, 69 (2011), pp. 273–287, 274.

45 Absi, this volume, Bolivia.

46 Gail Pheterson, “The Whore Stigma”, *Social Text*, 37 (1993), pp. 39–64, 40.

effects of illnesses and diseases, as they are unable to pay for doctors and treatment.⁴⁷

The motivations given for their entry into prostitution are wide-ranging; historically, economic needs were the most common reason given for getting involved in prostitution (whether self-employed or not) and this could have been triggered by a traumatizing event such as rape (sometimes by employers), violence, and domestic abuse. The risk of being a target of bosses and co-workers has also pushed women into prostitution; rather than enduring work harassment, they leave their place of work and choose prostitution instead. But recently, more and more self-employed women have another middle-class job (in business, management, or in teaching) and say that they have chosen prostitution not out of necessity, but because they are hoping to earn enough money so they can take part in consumer society. This seems to be a new trend in the current market as women who are already financially secure use prostitution as a source of extra income. Bernstein also found that “a new ethic of fun, sexual experimentations and freedom” led middle-class European women to take up prostitution.⁴⁸

Negotiating with Customers

So far customers have been absent from this discussion, but that is for a reason; even though prostitution exists where there is demand, it is important to consider the network that is in place before the prostitute reaches the client. But the interaction with the client is also the result of a set of negotiations based on power relations between genders. These power relations can be distorted or even culturally inversed from the usual man-woman relation. In local brothels in Bolivia, women can mock customers with the blessing of the brothel owner when customers refuse a drink or ask for a bargain.⁴⁹ For “passenger women” in the Papua New Guinea Huli culture, the fact that the man offers money for sexual intercourse is proof that the woman has vanquished him and debilitated his integrity.⁵⁰ In the case of internet dating and self-employment,

47 Lin Leam Lin also notes that children are often self-employed in the Philippines, selling sex as well as other services. *The Sex Sector*, p. 5.

48 Elizabeth Bernstein, *Temporarily Yours: Intimacy, Authenticity, and the Commerce of Sex* (Chicago, 2007) quoted in Ine Vanwesenbeeck, “Prostitution Push and Pull: Male and Female Perspectives”, *The Journal of Sex Research*, 50 (2013), pp. 11–16, 13.

49 Absi, this volume, Bolivia.

50 Wardlow, “Anger, Economy, Female Agency”, p. 1032.

a sex worker can also refuse certain clients, proving again that she is in a position to make her own choices. In Shanghai, contemporary forms of prostitution in karaoke bars still force the clients to respect a certain code of conduct, an echo from ancient relations with high-class courtesans.⁵¹ In Amsterdam, Aalbers studied the hunting “techniques” of clients and window prostitutes: the initial step is not always taken by the man and the woman plays an active role in starting the negotiation process by tapping on her window or smiling at a customer.⁵² She is also free to refuse the customer’s proposal and to close her door on him. These are the main instances in which women remain in control and are able to dictate their will and price.

However, the customer is not always a simple consumer. The possibility of choice for customers for example is greatly reduced when the women are under the control of a pimp or brothel owner. Similarly, women in dire economic situations or in need of money to fuel their addiction are not in a position to choose or to negotiate the terms of the transaction. This puts them in a situation where the client, who should only be a consumer, has sufficient power to negotiate the sexual transaction to his advantage, by asking more for less, by refusing to wear a condom, or in particularly violent situations by refusing to pay or by forcing the woman to provide sexual acts that were not part of the initial deal. Donovan and Harcourt drew tables on “risk levels” linked with certain types of prostitution and labour relations which summarize well the power relation in place between prostitutes and clients according to location.⁵³ For instance, they argue that women working in a legal brothel or behind a window are at lower risk of violence as a relatively similar status existed between the customer and the woman (also a wage-earner). Besides, massage-parlours where non-penetrative sex is the norm lower the health risks for the women working in these establishments. Security mechanisms may vary but they are not accessible to every prostitute, and the context and location of the sexual intercourse have a major impact on women’s power to negotiate and thus on their health and safety as well. In this way, customers create a labour relation with prostitutes as soon as they are able to bargain during a transaction; negotiating a deal can also often lead to a dangerous situation for prostitutes (also

51 Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai.

52 Manuel B. Aalbers, “Big Sister Is Watching You! Gender Interaction and the Unwritten Rules of the Amsterdam Red-Light District”, *Journal of Sex Research*, 42 (2005), pp. 54–62, 57–58.

53 Christine Harcourt and Basil Donovan, “The Many Faces of Sex Work”, *Sexually Transmitted Infections*, 81 (2005), pp. 201–206, 202–204.

in the long term as regards the risk of catching a disease) and when negotiating with the police, as has been widely decried by NGOs in recent years.

Factors Influencing Labour Relations in Prostitution

The Regulation System

In order to rationalize the labour market and control the economic and social environment surrounding prostitutes, early modern states/cities implemented different acts of legislation that recognized prostitutes as workers. In early modern Cairo, though no state-run brothels existed, pimps were organized in a type of guild; this meant that women had to pay taxes but it also allowed them to have access to the court and be able to participate in the traditional parade of the guilds every year.⁵⁴ In early modern Florence, a court for prostitutes was instated and women were required to pay taxes; they enjoyed more freedom and had more opportunities to use the city's institutions and had larger properties than other women.⁵⁵ In imperial China, the whole market of prostitution was *de facto* regulated and categorized, offering a relatively safe environment for prostitutes.⁵⁶ By recognizing and also taxing prostitutes, these states and cities allowed prostitutes to live in an economically and legally bound environment, which was preferable to a hazy and blurred legal setting, as was the case in European countries. However, with the rise of the state and nineteenth-century colonial expansion, new regulation systems were put in place and exported to the colonies. The French system of regulation was tried in Cairo when Napoleon's troops were stationed in Egypt, and it was implemented for a longer period than in other colonies.⁵⁷ Later in the century, England imposed the Contagious Disease Act on its colonial territories.⁵⁸ These legislations restricted the movement of prostitutes and implemented stricter controls on their health; these regulations were created in response to increasing fears over venereal diseases but could only be implemented effectively with the development of bureaucratization and the strict policing of urban environments. The system relied on the will to protect customers and society in general from being "infected" (physically and morally) by prostitutes; this fear

54 Hammad and Biancani, this volume, Cairo.

55 Turno, this volume, Florence.

56 Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai.

57 Hammad and Biancani, this volume, Cairo.

58 Rhys Glyn Llwyd Williams, "Towards a Social History of London Prostitution", unpublished paper collected for the project "Selling Sex in the City", 2013.

of contagion was accentuated in colonial territories, where interracial sexuality was widely disapproved of by official standards.⁵⁹

Distinctions were made in cities that had a system of regulation between registered and non-registered prostitutes. In terms of labour relations, non-registered women, whose number had always been higher than the number of registered prostitutes, could engage in less oppressive forms of work in the sense that they could move in and out of prostitution more easily. But they risked being arrested, harassed by the police, or denounced by their neighbours, and thus they lived in a socially tense situation. Registered women (often registered by force) had to endure discrimination and suffered major spatial and physical restrictions.⁶⁰ They were also harassed by the police (i.e., to submit to health checks) and became dependent on brothel owners, the unofficial agents of the state. This had a long-term effect on the development of labour relations in prostitution both in Europe and in the colonies; clandestine prostitutes had to go underground whilst registered prostitutes had to submit to harsh legal requirements. The regulatory system can indeed create oppressive labour conditions for prostitutes, still visible today in certain countries: leaving prostitution is made extremely difficult due to the registration process in Istanbul, whereas in the Netherlands, even though the registration process is reversible, a certain wariness remains among sex workers.⁶¹

Space and Negotiating Power

By confining and restricting prostitutes' use of the urban space, the state weakened their negotiating power and limited both their independence and their use of urban areas; first, prostitutes were unable to negotiate their working conditions as they were forced to work under the supervision of the police or brothel owners. Secondly, the use of space in prostitution is extremely meaningful in the negotiating process; in mid-nineteenth century Shanghai, when high class courtesans migrated to the city, "they redefined their use of time and space, to attract customers (rather merchants than literati), to take their own lovers in their private houses and to use parks and carriages as newly defined public spaces for their own purposes."⁶² The importance of the spatial context is clearly underlined here: by reshaping their use of space, both private

59 See Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race, and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (New York, 2003).

60 Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society* (Cambridge, 1980).

61 Wyers, this volume, Istanbul; Pluskota, this volume, Amsterdam.

62 Catherine Yeh, "Playing with the Public", in Wendy Larson (ed.), *Gender in Motion* (Lanham, 2005), pp. 145–156.

and public, courtesans put themselves in a better position to negotiate their contracts and prices with customers. Similarly, by being restricted to an official brothel, prostitutes had to comply with the will and wages of the brothel owner. In cities where regulation was implemented, prostitutes lost control of their own working spaces, and their negotiating power was strongly affected as well. By confining them to specific spaces and restricting their use of public space in addition to compulsory registration, the state led the way to exploitative labour relations and dependence on third parties.⁶³

The figure of the brothel keeper has changed over time, mostly according to the legislation in place; in Europe, before the development in the nineteenth century of the regulation system which generally forbade men from living off the wages of prostitutes, men, women, and couples were tenants of “disorderly houses” where prostitutes could be found. Prostitutes either lodged there on a full-time basis or were called in by the owner when needed. Contemporary interviews as well as eighteenth- and nineteenth-century reports have noted that a process of mimetization of family relations was sometimes visible within the brothel, notably in small establishments (with 3 to 4 prostitutes). This was often seen when a madam was in charge, a woman who played the role of a surrogate mother and took part in the prostitutes’ life experiences such as pregnancy or illnesses (at least as long as the women remained an economic asset). In Florence, for example, until recently and due to the large amount of migrants and trafficked women, prostitution was an all-woman trade.⁶⁴ Observers also noticed that madams were often former prostitutes who had managed to earn enough money to reinvest it in a business (as in eighteenth-century London and twentieth-century Mexico City and Cairo).⁶⁵ The gendering process in labour relations is important when working indoors because it can change the basic employer-wage earner relation into a relation comparable to a family economy and dependence; as noted for Shanghai, “powerful ties existed within these establishments, though many verged on the abusive.”⁶⁶

The domination of brothel keepers over prostitutes in western Europe diminished by the beginning of the twentieth century but labour relations were

63 Registration does not always mean confinement in a brothel. The Chinese system and early modern Florentine system, which sought to supervise prostitutes, did not have such an oppressive impact on women engaging in sex work.

64 Turno, this volume, Florence.

65 Nuñez and Fuentes, this volume, Mexico City; Hammad and Biancani, this volume, Cairo.

66 Sue Gronewold, *Beautiful Merchandise: Prostitution in China 1860–1936* (New York, 1985).

profoundly affected by the change of legislation. In former colonial territories where forms of regulation remained such as in Indonesia, brothels now operate on a large scale, employing mainly smuggled women working in a debt bondage system.⁶⁷ By repealing the Contagious Disease Acts (CDAs), the British government left the prostitutes in its colonies in an undefined legal situation, and as such these women were at the mercy of traffickers, police, and pimps with little means to defend themselves. In Sydney, for example, outdoor prostitution greatly diminished after World War I as regulation was put into place, and clandestine prostitutes had to look for the protection of a pimp to avoid being harassed by the police.⁶⁸

A Homogenous Group of Workers? Labour Relations between Prostitutes and a Sense of Belonging

Labour relations are also affected by distinctions within the prostitutes' group; these can be based on social class, ethnicity, or services provided and be fuelled by officials and prostitutes' attitudes. By turning a blind eye to European prostitutes in colonial times and the owners of luxurious brothels, officials created a double standard that accentuated the tensions between sex workers who struggled to recognize themselves as members of a singular group. We can therefore see a double dynamic in state efforts to define prostitution; historically it has accepted some forms of prostitution whilst denigrating others. By implementing regulation, the state tried to create a homogenous group of prostitutes but officials continued to discriminate against certain women and so did society. This double standard was accentuated by the ethnicity, age, and economic situation of the prostitutes.⁶⁹ As a result, the dynamics within a group of women working in the same trade is also dual. Aims and motivations do not always mesh and labour relations clearly reflect the impact of this discontinuity between sex workers' identities, and exploitative agents can benefit from these discrepancies.

67 Lim, *The Sex Sector*, p. 29.

68 Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth.

69 Researchers working on British colonial prostitution have been particularly active. See for example Philip Howell, *Geographies of Regulation: Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Britain and the Empire* (New York, 2009); Levine, *Prostitution, Race and Politics*; Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago, 1990).

The implementation of regulatory laws in the colonies and in Europe also had an impact on the social definition and recognition of prostitution. Prostitutes were segregated and discriminated against; even if prostitution as such was not illegal, the activities surrounding it often were. Because of the latter, prostitutes were in a grey zone and immersed in the context of crime. This was particularly relevant in the colonies as this definition went against the traditional view of prostitution and lowered the position of prostitutes within society, be it in India, Singapore, or Nigeria. By institutionalizing prostitution in cities such as Lagos, Johannesburg, Perth, and Sydney, the colonial administration took from women their negotiating power and often their recognition by the community. The first collective forms of resistance appeared during this time of tensions in Europe and in the colonies; in India the women complained to the court about the CDA's legal requirements and wrote petitions; in Europe, the first feminists took the side of prostitutes to defend their freedom and denounce harassment by the police, and at the same time other groups of workers were fighting for their rights and renegotiating their working conditions.

Further collective actions were carried out in the course of the twentieth century; in 1970 in France, after an increase of police harassment, sex workers demonstrated in Lyon and Paris side by side with feminist activists. But it was only with the AIDS pandemic, the fear of global trafficking due to the high number of women being smuggled across borders to work in prostitution, and the development of women's rights groups that prostitutes finally made their voice heard internationally as a group in the 1990s and early 2000s. In order to respond to the physical risks faced by sex workers and to be recognized as workers, different movements were born with the aim of defending prostitutes' rights at the national level. Two trends have motivated these groups; first, the abolitionist trend considers prostitution to be a form of slavery and sees it as the ultimate commodification of women. They fight with the aim of eliminating prostitution by condemning traffickers, customers, and anyone living off the money made through prostitution; they also describe prostitutes as victims who should not be condemned for the economic situation that pushed them into the trade. The second trend is motivated by groups who support decriminalization and call for the legalization of prostitution so that it can be recognized as a legitimate form of labour (as is the case in Australia, the Netherlands, Curacao, and Bolivia to some extent). Movements uniting sex workers (the choice of expression has a strong significance) demand improvements in working conditions, ask for the same social benefits as other workers, and call for a halt to police harassment and discrimination. Their voice is being echoed by human rights NGOs at the national and international level. In some instances, results can already be seen; in Bolivia, the police lost the power to

supervise prostitution in 2000 and this greatly reduced the number of bribes and forced sexual favours.⁷⁰

At a local level, the relations between sex workers have an influence on their daily lives, their work, and the security mechanisms they can put in place. On a daily basis, it is common to see women working in the same area talking together, even looking after each other, for example by keeping track of how long a woman is with a customer. Even before the expansion of the use of cars, prostitutes tended to walk in groups of two or three to create a feeling of security. However, such labour arrangements do not indicate the existence of a group mentality or the feeling of belonging to a large workers' group. They are the result of private negotiations on a one-to-one basis. Sex workers often see themselves as part of different categories based on the type of work they do and the wages they receive. This distinction is key to understanding labour relations in these networks: elite escorts would not compare themselves to streetwalkers, as they claim that they provide both entertainment and company to their customers, not exclusively sexual intercourse. Labour relations are therefore based on the economic value of the women but also on the spaces in which they work. Both factors affect the network and the labour relations they develop by framing their expectations and the people surrounding them.

The Globalization of Prostitution: Homogenization?

This reflection on the labour relations in prostitution had two aims. First, to show the intricacies of the labour relations in prostitution and to reveal how prostitutes have negotiated these relations. Secondly, it sought to outline the effects of the globalizing process and the role of the state in the creation of group identities. Over the centuries, prostitutes, like most labouring women, have mostly been engaged in dependent labour relations, from slave work to wage earning in combination with domestic duties. However, some prostitutes have been able to negotiate their working conditions and have engaged in reciprocal or independent relations with brothel owners, pimps, and even the state. In parallel with this, the number of women working part-time in prostitution in order to build up capital and not only as a means of subsistence has exploded in the course of the last century as they are motivated by a desire to enter consumer society. In the past, however, prostitution was part of a make-shift economy and was clearly dominated by the poor working class but we see nowadays a multiplication of middle-class women using prostitution as a

70 Absi, this volume, Bolivia.

supplementary source of revenue so they can have access to goods which are not of the first necessity.

Sheila Jeffreys claims that

[...] in recent decades prostitution has been industrialized and globalized. [...] [T]raditional forms of organization of prostitution are being changed by economic and social forces to become large scale and concentrated, normalized and part of the mainstream corporate sphere. Prostitution has been transformed from an illegal, small scale, largely local and socially despised form of abuse of women into a hugely profitable and either legal or tolerated international industry.⁷¹

I believe this statement should be re-evaluated as regards the previous arguments. It is undeniable that the profits made through the sex trade and the number of women trafficked or smuggled purposely for this trade reached, during these past decades, unprecedented levels,⁷² which meshes with Jeffreys' notion of industrialization. But it also appears that prostitution has been part of the transnational economy for centuries; voluntary female migration and women forced into prostitution could already be seen integrating with the international market in the early modern period and it boomed with colonization and the revolution of transportation. Prostitution can neither be considered an "illegal, small scale, largely local form of abuse" in the period preceding the 1970s, firstly because it is only since the twentieth century via prohibitionist policies that prostitution became illegal in countries such as Egypt, China, the US (Nevada excepted) and Russia.⁷³ Certain prohibitionist countries such as Norway and Sweden have made purchasing sexual acts illegal, but they have targeted clients and do not condemn the women who sell sex. Even in abolitionist countries, prostitution itself is not illegal, only the activities surrounding it are. Secondly, though we are lacking definite figures here, prostitution was probably not "small scale"; it had become part of the makeshift economy for many single women in urban environments already in the eighteenth century when the job market for women started to shrink. It was also part of the makeshift economy of women who moved to newly built colonial towns such

71 Sheila Jeffreys, *The Industrial Vagina* (London, 2008), p. 3.

72 Paola Monzini, *Sex Traffic: Prostitution, Crime, and Exploitation* (London, 2005).

73 This is a non-exhaustive list.

as Johannesburg, Sydney, Perth, and Lagos.⁷⁴ The job markets in those towns did not require women's participation nor encourage their migration, therefore leaving them with few opportunities to work except in prostitution. As regards trafficking, as the result of the economic development of Hanoi, Shanghai, and more particularly Singapore in the nineteenth century, colonial capitals and international ports favoured the creation of well-organized slave-trade systems that brought ashore women from Japan and China.⁷⁵ It can be argued that the colonial system, with its double-standard regarding prostitution, encouraged the development of transnational prostitution on a larger scale,⁷⁶ but this must be analysed in comparison with the increasing number of economic exchanges on a global scale. By considering only the last forty decades as being significant for the integration of prostitution into the global economy, Jeffreys (and Barry) misconstrue the evolution of labour relations in prostitution and the scale of this trade.⁷⁷ Labour relations in prostitution over the last forty years have not been widely different from the previous centuries; indentured work, debt bondage, wage earning, slave work, and even self-employment are categories that have existed since the early modern period. Similarly, new migrants are still in the most vulnerable position and they are the most likely to enter a dependent labour relation in which they have little negotiating power over a brothel owner or client. Only the places where prostitutional exchanges occur have changed to a certain degree (karaoke clubs, strip clubs, and vans) with a preponderance of male owners/managers, and this stands in contrast to the regulated colonial brothels that were supervised by women. Admittedly, in a global context organizations that support the rights of sex workers and are opposed to trafficking tend to address their demands to international organizations such as the UN, but the locus of power has not shifted to a global level yet; it is at the national level that decisions are being made and responsibility is taken, sometimes even at a local level (the legalization of prostitution in Australia for instance was done at a county level), and on a daily basis, negotiations occur at the level of the community.

It has become clear that there are various types of sex workers (not to mention the other aspects of the sex trade such as pornography and lap dancing) and these differences have been recognized and promoted by sex workers

74 Choonara, "Selling Sex in Johannesburg"; Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth; Herzog, this volume, Singapore.

75 Tracol-Huynh, this volume, Hanoi; Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai; Herzog, this volume, Singapore.

76 Ashwini Tambe, *Codes of Misconduct* (New Delhi, 2009).

77 Kathleen Barry, *The Prostitution of Sexuality* (New York, 1995), p. 122.

themselves. This puts into question the politics of states and NGOs: Are they taking into consideration every kind of sex worker or are they reflecting only the will and need of the loudest? Sex work is an expression which is meant to reflect more accurately what women feel they are doing when selling their body in terms of the monetary exchange (working) and the reasons for doing so (economic needs). But what stands out in this article is also how individualistic the reality of sex work is. Huli passenger women and the flying women of Kolkata are ramparts against the normalization, the uniform shaping of sex work due to the globalization of sex workers' movements; so, different socio-economic statuses and different life experiences need to be taken into account to avoid confining women in oppressive labour relations.⁷⁸

78 See also Jackie West, "Prostitution: Collectives and the Politics of Regulation", *Gender, Work and Organization*, 7 (2000), pp. 106–118.

Working and Living Conditions

Raelene Frances

Introduction

This chapter surveys the ways in which working and living conditions for women in the sex industry have varied across the globe since 1600. It draws on the city-specific studies in this volume as well as primary research and the broader secondary literature on prostitution. Unless otherwise indicated, information about particular cities is taken from the relevant urban case studies in this volume.

This chapter argues that five key factors have shaped the working and living conditions of sex workers across the globe since the beginning of the seventeenth century.¹ These include the degree to which women were bound or “free”, or were able to exercise power in relation to employers and clients. Related to this is the location of individual women within the sex industry—where they existed within any particular hierarchy based on the class of clients, ethnicity, and so on.

Market forces have also been major determinants of the pay and working conditions in the sex industry. Shifts in the economy have impacted sex workers as well as other workers, affecting both the demand for sexual services and the supply of women willing to sell sex.

A third major influence on sex workers’ lives has been the responses to prostitution of the community in which they worked. This has included both informal and official responses which often determined where and how women could sell sex and under what circumstances.

1 I have used the terms “sex worker” and “prostitute” interchangeably, while being aware that both are contested terms and “sex worker” is in many cases anachronistic. Both of these terms are shorthand for the more accurate term: “a provider of sexual services for material gain.” Similarly, the designations “pimp” and “madam” are charged terms, but they are used here because of their common usage in the places and times under discussion. “Pimp” refers to males who act as intermediaries between client and worker in the exchange of sexual services; he may or may not be in an additional relationship to the woman. “Madam” refers to a female brothel-keeper.

The formation, expansion, and disintegration of nations and empires have had a similar impact on the market for sex and have contributed to official responses to prostitution. Finally, developments in technology and medicine, especially since the early twentieth century, have contributed to significant changes in the ways in which sexual services are delivered and also impacted the health of sex workers.

Degrees of Freedom and Power

Rebecca Scott has employed the concept of “degrees of freedom” in relation to post-emancipation slave societies in the US and Havana, alerting historians to the spectrum of power that emancipated slaves exercised, depending on local circumstances.² One can usefully employ the same concept in relation to women engaged in commercial sex in this survey across time and place.

However, as the chapters on coercion and agency in this volume canvass, the concepts of free will, choice, and agency are extremely complex and difficult to unpack in relation to prostitution, as they are so frequently overlaid with moral and political assumptions and judgements. Nevertheless, historians must recognize that women have had varying degrees of power in their dealings with clients and employers/owners and that the degree of autonomy enjoyed by an individual woman at any particular time has been enormously important in determining how much control she has had over the type and quantity of services she provided and the remuneration she received. And in societies where women could be owned—such in Nigeria/Lagos, Shanghai, Singapore, Calcutta, Japan, and Istanbul—women were more likely to be involved in some kind of unfree sex work.

The most common form of unfree sex labour encountered in the studies in this volume was debt bondage, whereby women were “sold” or pawned to entrepreneurs, usually by their families. These women then had to provide sexual services for the profit of the entrepreneurs until the original price paid for them, plus any additional debts subsequently accrued, was recovered. In such circumstances, women had little control over the number of clients they received, the services they provided, or the conditions in which they worked.

Chinese women working in Singaporean brothels at the turn of the twentieth century could earn five times the amount that had been paid for their purchase price in one year, but were rarely able to pay off the original debt quickly as brothel keepers made sure they continued to accumulate debts for

2 Rebecca Scott, *Degrees of Freedom: Louisiana and Cuba after Slavery* (Cambridge, 2005).

personal items, clothing, food, and medical expenses.³ Similarly in Istanbul until quite recently it was apparently fairly common for a woman to be “sold” into a licensed brothel by a husband, male relative, or male “friend”, and she would then be forced to work off the money, a process which meant that women would have to work for years before becoming free of the debt.⁴

Even women who had not been sold or pawned to brothel keepers often became indebted to their keepers through high-interest loans for clothes or jewellery as part of a deliberate strategy by the keepers to keep women in a dependent relationship.⁵ In some cases it was husbands rather than brothel keepers who directly controlled the sexual labour of their wives or concubines. In Southeast Asia, for instance, European traders put their wives to work sewing, weaving, cleaning, and selling sex, especially if they were slave women. This was similar to the practice of Chinese merchants in Singapore, who imported women from China to sell merchandise, provide for their domestic and sexual needs, and work as prostitutes.⁶

Other examples of the spectrum of unfree labour include the thousands of Japanese prostitutes who were in debt bondage throughout Southeast Asia, Australia, Canada, the US, and as far afield as South Africa in the period from the 1870s to the 1920s. Many of these women did eventually work off their debts and become independent sex workers or brothel keepers, and some married, took jobs, or started businesses outside of the sex industry. But during the time they were in bondage they were very much under the direction of those to whom they were indebted.⁷

3 Herzog, this volume, Singapore.

4 Wyers, this volume, Istanbul.

5 Tracol-Huynh, this volume, Hanoi; Wyers, this volume, Istanbul; Jürgen Nautz, “Urban Overview: Vienna”, unpublished paper collected for the project “Selling Sex in the City”, 2013; Amir *et al.*, this volume, Tel Aviv/Jaffa; Herzog, this volume, Singapore; Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai; Nuñez and Fuentes, this volume, Mexico City; Hammad and Biancani, this volume, Cairo; Blanchette and Schettini, this volume, Rio de Janeiro; Mechant, this volume, Bruges; Absi, this volume, Bolivia; Conner, this volume, Paris.

6 Herzog, this volume, Singapore.

7 James Francis Warren, *Ah Ku and Karayuki-San: Prostitution in Singapore 1870–1940* (Oxford, 1993); Sone Sachiko, “Karayuki-san of Asia 1868–1938: The Role of Prostitutes Overseas in Japanese Economic and Social Development”, (Unpublished M.Phil., Murdoch University, 1980); Hiroshi Shimizu, “Karayuki-san and the Japanese Economic Advance into British Malaya, 1870–1920”, *Asian Studies Review*, 20 (1997), pp. 107–132; David Sissons, “Karayuki-San: Japanese Prostitutes in Australia 1887–1916”, *Historical Studies*, 17 (1976), pp. 323–341; Yamazaki Tomoko, *Sandakan Brothel No. 8* (trans. Karen Colligan-Taylor) (New York, 1999); Clive Moore, “A Precious Few’: Melanesian and Asian Women in Northern Australia”, in Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans (eds), *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation*

The case of Chinese women working on the US frontier illustrates the effects of unfree labour relations on working conditions. While a minority of Chinese women who came to America became wives or concubines of Chinese men, the majority came under a form of debt bondage. According to contemporary reports, their situation often resembled that of slaves, with women kept virtual prisoners in sub-standard rooms and forced to take on all comers.⁸

The practice of debt bondage persists into the present century, especially amongst women who cross national borders to work in the sex industry and accrue debts to those who make the travel arrangements. Itinerant sex workers in this case are especially disadvantaged in their power relationship with their employers as they often do not speak the language of the country in which they are working and are vulnerable to prosecution and deportation by immigration authorities.⁹

Even where more overt forms of coercion such as slavery and debt bondage were not a factor, the general trend towards capitalist labour relations in the sex industry over the last two centuries, which mirrored broader changes within capitalist economies, led to brothel workers in particular being subject to demands to supply more and varied services.¹⁰

One could also include drug dependency as a form of bondage, especially when many employers deliberately encouraged such dependency. This was clearly a strategy used by Sydney's notorious Tilly Devine in the 1920s to increase her control over the working lives of prostitutes.¹¹ And even when drug or alcohol addiction gets started outside the context of an employment relationship, the result is usually a worsening of the working conditions of the

(Sydney, 1992), pp. 59–81, 67; John Ramseyer, "Indentured Prostitution in Imperial Japan: Credible Commitments in the Commercial Sex Industry", *Journal of Law Economics and Organisation*, 7 (1991), pp. 89–116; Bill Mihalopoulos, "The Making of the Prostitutes: The *Karayuki-san*", *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 25 (1993), pp. 41–56; Motoe Terami-Wada, "Karayuki-san of Manila: 1880–1920", *Philippine Studies*, 34 (1986), pp. 287–316; Ichioko Yuji, "Ameyuki-san: Japanese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-century America", in Mark Caprio and Matsuda Koichiro (eds), *Japan and the Pacific, 1540–1920, The Pacific World: Lands, Peoples and History of the Pacific, 1500–1900*, 10 vols (London, 2006), 1, pp. 355–376; Bill Mihalopoulos, "Ousting the 'Prostitute': Retelling the Story of the 'Karayuki-san'" in *Postcolonial Studies*, 4 (2001), pp. 169–187; Motoe Terami-Wada, "Karayuki-san of Manila: 1890–1920", *Philippine Studies*, 34 (1986), pp. 287–316; Bill Mihalopoulos, *Sex in Japan's Globalization, 1870–1930: Japanese Prostitutes Abroad and Nation Building* (London, 2011).

8 Jan MacKell, "Frontier Prostitution in the United States", unpublished paper collected for the project "Selling Sex in the City", 2013.

9 Raelene Frances, "White Slaves/White Australia: Prostitution and the Making of Australian Society", *Australian Feminist Studies*, 19 (2004), pp. 185–200.

10 Williams, this volume, London; Conner, this volume, Paris.

11 Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth.

individual concerned, as they are more likely to take on dangerous, unsanitary, and lower-paid work. Drug-affected workers have also been less likely to show solidarity with other sex workers in their attempts to exert collective pressure to maintain standards of pay and conditions.¹²

The extent to which such collective organisation occurred must also be considered in evaluating power relationships and their impacts on the lives of sex workers. In some places, such as Mexico City, the hostility of different groups of prostitutes to each other has been more noticeable than their solidarity.¹³ A few exceptions include the petitions of women in India in the nineteenth century against the Contagious Diseases Acts, a petition by Russian prostitutes in 1910 seeking official health inspections of clients for diseases, and collective appeals for better working conditions through the newspapers by sex workers in Argentina in the 1930s.¹⁴

More formal and representative organisations of sex workers are a product of the late twentieth century, beginning with street demonstrations by sex workers in Paris and Lyon in the 1970s.¹⁵ In Sydney in the late 1970s, sex workers allied with feminists and civil libertarians to decriminalise street soliciting, while in Johannesburg both black and white sex workers united to call for legalization concerning prostitution starting in the 1970s.¹⁶ Such collective action can be effective not just in increasing workers' bargaining power in relation to employers but in lobbying for improvements in the official treatment of prostitution and prostitutes.

Perhaps the most effective example of the latter is the impact that sex worker organisations had on the response of the Australian government to the AIDS pandemic. What this study clearly shows is that the most effective responses to the HIV/AIDS pandemic occurred in cities like Sydney and Perth where sex worker organisations worked closely with state health departments to mount very successful education and support campaigns. Not only did these campaigns dramatically reduce the spread of infection through commercial sexual contacts, but also the campaign had flow-on effects to the population as

12 Raelene Frances, *Selling Sex: A Hidden History of Prostitution* (Sydney, 2007), Ch. 11.

13 Nuñez and Fuentes, this volume, Mexico City.

14 Dasgupta, this volume, Calcutta; Hetherington, this volume, Moscow/St. Petersburg; Blanchette and Schettini, this volume, Rio de Janeiro.

15 Conner, this volume, Paris.

16 Raelene Frances and Alicia Gray, "Unsatisfactory, Discriminatory, Unjust and Inviting Corruption: Feminists and the Decriminalisation of Street Prostitution in New South Wales", *Australian Feminist Studies*, 22 (2007), pp. 307–324; Ziyad Choonara, "Selling Sex in Johannesburg: From 1886 to the Present", unpublished paper collected for the project "Selling Sex in the City", 2013.

a whole through the education of clients.¹⁷ The least effective responses have occurred where states took a punitive approach to the sex industry and sufferers, as in the case of China. Condom use has never been common in China and state crackdowns on prostitution made women more desperate to make up for lost earnings and therefore be more willing to take risks and not insist on condom use. It is estimated that around 1.5 million Chinese are currently infected with HIV/AIDS.¹⁸

Clearly, the degree of control any individual woman has had over her working conditions—where she worked, how many clients she took, what kind of services she provided, and so on—has been enormously important in determining the kind of working life she has as a sex worker. Another important and often related determinant of this experience has been her location within the hierarchy of the sex industry at any given point in time.

In every city surveyed, women have been engaged in commercial sex in a great variety of locations and conditions. At the “higher” end of the occupation, courtesans and high-class escorts entertained their clients in sumptuous surroundings with fine food and wine. At the other end of the spectrum, women had hurried sex in parks or alleyways, or on filthy rags in overcrowded dens. In between these two extremes an endless range of gradations of brothels and private houses, tents, hotels, assignation houses, restaurants, boats, and other means of transport have hosted an almost equally diverse range of sexual services.

The class background of customers, the place of origin of both customers and prostitutes, and the appearance and age of prostitutes structured Shanghai’s hierarchy of prostitution.¹⁹ Thus in Shanghai in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the hierarchy of sex work ranged from the exclusive, cultured, entertaining, and expensive courtesans at one end to the women who served dozens of men a day in unsanitary hovels in the city’s slums. In between these two extremes women negotiated different levels of debt and drug

17 Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth.

18 Tiantian Zheng, *Red Lights: The Lives of Sex Workers in Postsocialist China* (Minneapolis, 2009), p. 62.

19 Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth-Century Shanghai* (Berkeley [etc.], 1997), p. 34. See also Gail Hershatter, “The Hierarchy of Shanghai Prostitution, 1870–1949”, *Modern China*, 15 (1989), pp. 463–498. The precise nature of this hierarchy is the subject of an exchange between Hershatter and Christian Henriot; see Christian Henriot, “From a Throne of Glory to a Seat of Ignominy’: Shanghai Prostitution Revisited (1849–1919)”, *Modern China*, 22 (1996), pp. 1332–1363; Gail Hershatter, “From a Throne of Glory to a Seat of Ignominy’: Shanghai Prostitution Revisited (1849–1949): A Response”, *Modern China*, 22 (1996), pp. 164–169. See also Sue Gronewold, *Beautiful Merchandise: Prostitution in China, 1860–1936* (New York, 1982).

dependency and like the women on the lowest level they provided sex rather than entertainment. The many gradations of prostitutes associated with various forms of entertainment and companionship or concubinage in Shanghai became increasingly commodified by the twentieth century, and street soliciting was introduced as a new form of sex work. But gradations remained, with at least seven different categories recognized by both police and the public in contemporary Shanghai.²⁰

Similarly, in the early twentieth century in the poorest neighbourhoods of Mexico City, and in the area where the government decided to relocate some of the houses of prostitution to create a tolerance zone, older and less attractive prostitutes worked on mosquito-infested, unpaved streets with no sewage system, and had to deal with the hostility of neighbours who did not want them near their houses. At the same time, in first-class brothels the most attractive women serviced their influential clientele in elegant houses with all kinds of amenities and services.²¹

Similar variations occurred in the physical surroundings of Cairo's sex workers in the early decades of the twentieth century, but in this case gradations of status and pay were also associated with racial differences. The majority of the sex workers in the Wass'a and Waugh-al-Birka were local women: Egyptian, Nubian, and Sudanese. They lived in overcrowded and squalid conditions, usually working in the same small room in which they lived and charging one shilling for sex. The European women enjoyed better conditions and pay, usually living five or six to a brothel but had sitting and reception areas separate from the simply furnished bedrooms where they took their clients.²²

In Singapore, the red-light areas were also racially segregated both geographically and in terms of clientele. The small number of European prostitutes lived in the northern part of the city, serviced only European customers, and led lives of relative autonomy. Chinese women serviced only Chinese men, but the Japanese prostitutes were available for all clientele. Chinese sex workers were divided according to class and degree of bondage: voluntary prostitutes were distinguished from those who had been trafficked and sold as they were in a situation similar to those who were pawned, and they could earn back their independence.²³ Chinese brothels were also divided by class: higher-class

20 Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai; Christian Henriot, *Prostitution and Sexuality in Shanghai: A Social History, 1849–1949* (trans. Noël Castelino) (Cambridge, 2001 [first published in French in 1997]).

21 Nuñez and Fuentes, this volume, Mexico City.

22 Hammad and Biancani, this volume, Cairo.

23 Herzog, this volume, Singapore; Lai Ah Eng, *Peasants Proletarians and Prostitutes: A Preliminary Investigation into the Work of Chinese Women in Colonial Malaya* (Singapore, 1986), p. 30.

prostitutes served wealthy Chinese merchants and lower class girls serviced the large numbers of coolie labourers. Both Chinese and Japanese brothels were found in the western part of Singapore.²⁴

Racially-demarcated geographies were a feature of the sex industries of many of the cities in our survey. In Havana, most of the women working in brothels were categorized as white while women of colour exposed themselves at windows or worked on the streets as hustlers or *fleteras*, street prostitutes.²⁵ In Rio, “Poles” generally shared the same run-down central urban spaces as poor black and brown prostitutes, whereas the so-called “French artists” (who may or may not have actually been French) lived in hotels, expensive and elegant boarding houses, or alone in private houses or apartments. Between these two extremes, however, was a wide spectrum of colours and nationalities competing for space and clients in the townhouses and streets of central Rio de Janeiro.²⁶ Examples of racially-demarcated urban geographies of prostitution can be found in many colonial cities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including Calcutta, Hong Kong, and Gibraltar.²⁷

In Istanbul, where the authorities attempted to institute religious segregation, this was reflected in the moral geographies of the city, with registered Christian and Jewish women working mainly on the European side of the Bosphorus and registered Muslim women in the licensed brothels on the Anatolian side (which were closed to non-Muslim men). This attempt was only partially successful, as some women transgressed these boundaries.²⁸

The Market for Sex

It is, of course, very difficult to generalize about the payment for sexual services across five centuries and such a wide variety of locations. Nonetheless, it is consistently the case that selling sex has been more lucrative for women than engaging in almost any other occupation open to them. In all the case studies

24 Herzog, this volume Singapore; Warren, *Ah Ku and Karayuki-San*, p. 43.

25 Cabezas, this volume, Havana.

26 Blanchette and Schettini, this volume, Rio de Janeiro.

27 Stephen Legg, “Stimulation, Segregation and Scandal: Geographies of Prostitution Regulation in British India, between Registration (1888) and Suppression (1923)”, *Modern Asian Studies*, 46 (2012), pp. 1459–1505; Philip Howell, “Sexuality, Sovereignty and Space: Law, Government and the Geography of Prostitution in Colonial Gibraltar”, *Social History*, 29 (2004), pp. 444–464; Philip Howell, “Race, Space and the Regulation of Prostitution in Colonial Hong Kong”, *Urban History*, 31 (2004), pp. 229–248.

28 Wyers, this volume, Istanbul.

surveyed in this volume, everyone was marked by highly gender-segmented labour markets, which meant that women had access to a very limited range of jobs. Low rates of pay and high levels of insecurity invariably characterized these jobs. In many cases, gender segmentation was accompanied by ethnic/racial segmentation, with minority, migrant, and colonized women having access to an even more restricted range of jobs. In practice, the occupations open to most women were the so-called unskilled work associated with women's domestic roles: housework, sewing, spinning, weaving, and preparing and serving food and drink. In some cases, such as in nineteenth-century South Africa, domestic service was also closed to women as it was performed by black men, making women's economic options even more limited.²⁹ In these circumstances, selling sex was and is a relatively lucrative option for women, with some women doing this on a full-time basis and others combining the sale of sex with other forms of economic activity.

Where women's wages were generally a half or less than men's, it was common for a sex worker to charge the equivalent of around a male labourer's daily wage for a "short time", while some would charge a little less and others considerably more. This meant that women could earn many times more for selling sex than for any other kind of work, assuming they could even secure other kinds of work. In many cases, alternative work was either not available or was so erratic that selling sex was the only option.

Over the last century, economic opportunities for women have expanded to varying degrees in all the cities surveyed, but the discrepancies between women's and men's earnings have persisted. In the early twentieth century, Cairo's lowest paid prostitutes were paid more than ten times the daily wage of an unskilled male labourer for a single sex act. A century later, even the cheapest prostitutes in Rio could earn as much for one sex act as a male on the minimum wage could earn in a day.³⁰

And although the relative price for sexual services has declined over the last four decades, it is still the case that sex work is more lucrative than almost any other occupation open to women. As in the past, for some women sex work provides the only viable economic option, while for others it is a way of accessing a greater quantity and range of consumer goods and services and/or of

29 Black women were only drawn into domestic service and sex work after the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, when they also lived in "slumyards" and mining compounds as the "wives" of miner and labourers.

30 Hammad and Biancani, this volume, Cairo; Blanchette and Schettini, this volume, Rio de Janeiro.

achieving a greater degree of long-term financial security through accumulation of savings or investments.³¹

While this generalization about the value of women's sexual labour compared to other forms of labour holds true, the picture is complicated by the enormous variation in prices charged among different groups of sex workers. In the case of Rio cited above, the city's most expensive women charged up to seven times the amount paid to the cheapest prostitutes while in nineteenth century Moscow they were paid around ten times as much.³² Ethnicity as well as class have also affected prices and earnings. Cairo's licensed brothels in the early twentieth century provide a good example of such differences in the sex industry where European women earned twice as much as natives.³³ In contemporary Moscow, the highly paid hotel prostitutes tend to be ethnically Russian while those who sell cheap sex in the rail stations and truck stops tend to be non-Muscovites and often non-Russian migrants from former Soviet states.³⁴

In French colonial Hanoi, even more extreme racially-based differences occurred, with Japanese prostitutes being paid more than Chinese and Vietnamese women. But while they were paid up to ten times the price paid to a Vietnamese, Japanese women still received considerably less than the prices paid to European prostitutes.³⁵

The biggest differential was usually between white and black women in countries colonised by Europeans, with Europeans being paid much more than others. But this was not the only distinction. In Rio de Janeiro the immigration of large numbers of eastern European women in the first half of the twentieth century led to the formation of a sub-class of European prostitutes referred to as "Poles", who were considered to be more or less on par with local black and brown prostitutes. "Poles" were paid less than women identified as being "French" (even though both categories were rather flexible in the actual nationalities included).³⁶

In Istanbul under the Ottoman Empire, distinctions were based on religion rather than ethnicity. While the authorities attempted to prevent non-Muslim men from accessing Muslim sex workers, the prices charged by Muslim women

31 Note the students in Lagos who use their earnings to finance small businesses such as hair salons, bars, and boutiques. Ekpootu, this volume, Lagos.

32 Hetherington, this volume, Moscow/St. Petersburg.

33 Hammad and Biancani, this volume, Cairo.

34 Hetherington, this volume, Moscow/St. Petersburg.

35 Tracol-Huynh, this volume, Hanoi.

36 Blanchette and Schettini, this volume, Rio de Janeiro.

were considerably higher than those commanded by Christian and Jewish prostitutes.³⁷

As well as differentials based on the ethnicity of the sex worker, considerable variations could also occur in the prices charged for services depending on the “class” of the worker and the clients. Virgins have always attracted a premium, in some cultures more than others, such that in Egypt today women undergo surgery to reconstruct their virginity in order to increase the price of their sexual labour.³⁸ Youth and beauty in general have been more highly valued by clients, but the ability of individual women to capitalize on these assets has depended very much on their position in the sexual labour market and their relationship to intermediaries in negotiating the price. While there is a general trend in which younger, more attractive, and better educated women can demand higher prices for their services, in some instances the same woman would charge a different fee depending on the social status of the client—apparently based on the client’s capacity to pay. In Rio, for instance, what determines the price in a commercial sexual venue is not the attractiveness of the women so much as the attractiveness or luxury of the surroundings and, more importantly, the social class of male clients.³⁹

How much of this money women have been able to keep has depended very much on their individual situation. Those in brothels usually gave half their earnings to the brothel keeper as commission, board, or rent. They also had to pay a range of other expenses, including medical fees and the cost of maintaining an attractive wardrobe and grooming. In officially regulated brothels, they often also had to pay medical examination fees.

The contemporary situation in Istanbul is representative of a long history of brothel prostitution in this city and elsewhere. In 2011, the rate at the Istanbul licensed brothel was 35 Turkish Lira per visit, approximately 15 Euro. Registered women are often required to purchase food, beverages, and cigarettes at inflated rates in the brothel, in addition to paying for electricity, water, and cleaning, and so they are forced to accept large numbers of clients to make a profit—up to 50 clients in a day. Additionally, the owner and manager of the house takes a large cut of each payment, the precise amount varying.⁴⁰

In some places and times, such as Istanbul under the Ottomans, Cairo, and Shanghai, and more recently where prostitution has been legalised or

37 Wyers, this volume, Istanbul.

38 Hammad and Biancani, this volume, Cairo.

39 Blanchette and Schettini, this volume, Rio de Janeiro.

40 Wyers, this volume, Istanbul.

decriminalised, the government has also taxed prostitutes.⁴¹ Even in cases where prostitution was illegal, such as Perth and Sydney, the government taxed workers and brothel keepers from World War II on.⁴²

Women working privately have been able to keep a much larger proportion of their earnings but have often found that their rent was inflated once the landlord became aware of their occupation. And where they worked in association with pimps or protectors, they were required to share their earnings, usually on a fifty/fifty basis or more. The exact amount that individual women received also depended on their employment relationship, i.e. whether they were self-employed, indentured, enslaved, or under a form of debt bondage, as noted earlier in this chapter.

Within the broad picture sketched above, there was also considerable variation in earnings over time. Periods of economic depression put pressure on earnings as more women engaged in commercial sex at a time when men could afford to spend less. In Shanghai as well, fierce competition for customers over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries led to a reduction in prices.⁴³

On the other hand, sudden increases in the male population occasioned by such factors as wars or mining booms could lead to temporary increases in both prices and earnings. Wars could also depress prices by disrupting local economies and when conflicts led to large numbers of impoverished female refugees or war widows, as was the case in Istanbul in the turbulent years between 1912 and 1923 and in Havana during the wars of independence.⁴⁴

Other factors affected the demand side of the sex market, which in turn affected prices and earnings. Thus, in many western countries since the 1960s the ready availability of safe contraception and greater sexual permissiveness have increased the willingness of women generally to have sex outside of marriage, which in turn has reduced demand for commercial sexual services.⁴⁵

The advent of mass sex tourism in the twentieth century has also had a major impact on the demand for commercial sexual services and the working conditions of those supplying them in many cities. Havana became the ultimate pleasure escape for US travellers in the early twentieth century with sex provided in casinos, pornographic theatres, and clubs as well as in hundreds of brothels before the sex industry virtually came to a close with the communist

41 Prostitutes had been taxed for centuries in China as part of the official regulation of prostitution.

42 Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth.

43 Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai.

44 Wyers, this volume, Istanbul; Cabezas, this volume, Havana.

45 Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth.

revolution in 1959. In recent decades, however, the industry has been revived in the wake of the collapse of the Russian economy in the early 1990s.⁴⁶

Cairo opened up to the global economy after the 1973 war with Israel and became a particularly attractive destination for Arabs seeking commercial sexual services. Other places that have become notable sex tourism destinations in recent decades include Morocco, Cambodia, the Dominican Republic, Japan, Amsterdam, Kenya, the Philippines, Colombia, Thailand, and Indonesia.⁴⁷ Nairobi has also become one of the world's top sex tourism destinations and as in Rio de Janeiro, these tourists often seek a kind of "girlfriend experience" where sexual services are provided in the context of a manufactured romance. Modern sex tourists include women as well as men seeking both same sex and heterosexual encounters.⁴⁸

The increased mobility of clients has its counterpart in the increasing mobility of young working class women. This in turn has given rise to a kind of reverse of the "white slave" narratives of the early twentieth century, as black women from South America migrate to Europe and African women find their way onto the streets of cities like Florence.⁴⁹ And in Australia, as we have seen, a new wave of Asian sex workers, many of them in debt bondage, follow in the tradition of Japanese women who came in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In all these cases it is probably fair to say that the conditions under which these migrants work are less favourable than those of local women.⁵⁰

Nations and Empires

The formation, expansion and disintegration of nations and empires over the last 500 years has had profound repercussions for sex workers, affecting both

46 Cabezas, this volume, Havana.

47 Kemala Kempadoo (ed.), *Sex, Sun and Gold: Tourism and Sex Work in the Caribbean* (Oxford, 1999); Michael Hall and David Harrison, "Sex Tourism in South-east Asia" in David Harrison (ed.), *Tourism and the Less Developed Countries* (Chichester, 1992) pp. 64–74; Martin Opperman, *Sex Tourism and Prostitution: Aspects of Leisure, Recreation and Work* (New York, 1998); Nancy Wonders and Raymond Michalowski, "Sex Tourism in a Globalised World: A Tale of Two Cities—Amsterdam and Havana", *Social Problems*, 48 (2001), pp. 545–571.

48 Babere Kerata Chacha, "An Over-view History of Prostitution in Nairobi: From the Pre-colonial Period to the Present", unpublished paper collected for the project "Selling Sex in the City", 2013; Blanchette and Schettini, this volume, Rio de Janeiro.

49 Turno, this volume, Florence.

50 Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth.

the supply of workers and clients and the location and conditions of work. In China, the aggressive expansion of the Qing dynasty drew thousands of people from captured territories to Shanghai where men increased the demand for sexual services at the same time as immigrant women (and some men) engaged in prostitution and other forms of work in the modernizing city.⁵¹ The expansion of the Japanese empire into mainland Asia and Southeast Asia in the 1930s and '40s had similar impacts, which included the formation of the notorious system of "comfort women" forced to work in military brothels.⁵²

The most widespread impacts, however, occurred in conjunction with the major expansion of European empires in the nineteenth century. New forms of commercial sex arose in the context of new material circumstances created by colonialism. Most importantly, sex workers were increasingly drawn into the massive migration of labour, both free and unfree, around the world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Millions of Indian, African, Chinese, and Pacific Islander labourers travelled to work in the cities and on the rural estates mushrooming in European colonies. They migrated to build railways, ports, and other infrastructure, as well as to work in factories, mines and on rubber, sugar, and tea plantations. The overwhelming majority of these labourers were single men and this created huge imbalances in the ratios of men to women amongst these ethnic groups and in the receiving colonies in general. In some cases, up to 98 per cent of the migrant communities were male.⁵³ These male enclaves created in turn a huge demand for sexual services and women and children were brought in to meet the demand. Large-scale prostitution thus arguably emerged as "the feminized auxiliary service industry to

51 Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai.

52 George Hicks, *The Comfort Women: Japan's Brutal Regime of Enforced Prostitution in the Second World War* (New York, 1999); Maria Rosa Henson, *Comfort Woman: A Filipina's Story of Prostitution and Slavery Under the Japanese Comfort Woman* (Oxford, 1999); Sangmie Choi Schellstede and Soon Mi Yu, *Comfort Women Speak: Testimony by Sex Slaves of the Japanese Military* (Oxford, 2000); Chunghee Sarah Soh, *The Comfort Women: Sexual Violence and Postcolonial Memory in Korea and Japan* (Chicago, 2009); Yoshiaki Yoshimi, *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military During World War II* (trans. Suzanne O'Brien) (New York, 2002).

53 Lenore Manderson, "Colonial Desires: Sexuality, Race, and Gender in British Malaya", *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 7 (1997), pp. 372–388, 374; Lenore Manderson, *Sickness and the State: Health and Illness in Colonial Malaya, 1870–1940* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 166. Of the 5,580 Chinese residents of Manila in 1855, only ten were female; Luis C. Dery, "Prostitution in Colonial Manila", *Philippine Studies*, 39 (1991), pp. 475–489, 447.

changing male work patterns” which accompanied imperial expansion.⁵⁴ In Calcutta alone the number of prostitutes reportedly increased from around 12,000 in the early 1850s to around 30,000 in 1867, despite no significant increase in the total population of the city.⁵⁵

The colonizers also fuelled this demand for commercial sex as government officials, entrepreneurs, workers, and soldiers accompanying the spread of empires were also overwhelmingly male. For some of these, at least, the prospect of exotic sexual experiences was part of the attraction of the empire.⁵⁶ European colonial economies therefore increased the total demand for commercial sexual services, drawing new groups of women into prostitution and requiring that sex workers be much more mobile. At the same time, the infrastructure that supported modern empires—communications systems such as telegraph services and the opening of the Panama and Suez Canals, together with the use of steamships—facilitated this movement of both sex workers and clients from one part of the world to another.⁵⁷

The individuals who met this burgeoning demand for commercial sex came from many parts of the world, augmenting the local supply of sex workers drawn from both rural and urban areas, both male and female. In colonial Malaya, for instance, they came from Japan, China, Java, India, Thailand, and eastern Europe to work in brothels in the cities and smaller settlements that grew up around the plantations and mines.⁵⁸ Japan and China supplied the

54 Philippa Levine, “‘Rough Usage’: Prostitution, Law, and the Social Historian”, in Adrian Wilson (ed.), *Rethinking Social History: English Society 1570–1920* (Manchester, 1993), pp. 266–292, 276; Raelene Frances, “Prostitution: the Age of Empires”, in Chiara Beccalossi and Ivan Crozier (eds), *A Cultural History of Sexuality in the Age of Empire* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 145–171.

55 Sumanta Banerjee, *Under the Raj: Prostitution in Colonial Bengal* (New York, 1998), p.77.

56 Kenneth Ballhatchet, *Race, Sex and Class Under the Raj: Imperial Attitudes and Policies and their Critics, 1793–1905* (London, 1980); for a debate about the coercive nature of this sexual adventuring, see Ronald Hyam, “Empire and Sexual Opportunity”, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 14 (1986), pp. 34–90; Mark T. Berger, “Imperialism and Sexual Exploitation: A Response to Ronald Hyam’s ‘Empire and Sexual Opportunity’”, *Journal of Imperial Commonwealth History*, 17 (1988), pp. 83–89; Ronald Hyam, “‘Imperialism and Sexual Exploitation’: A Reply”, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 17 (1988), pp. 90–99. See also Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (Manchester, 1991).

57 Frances, “Prostitution: The Age of Empires”, pp. 145–171.

58 Manderson, *Sickness and the State*, p. 166. See also Lenore Manderson, “Migration, Prostitution and Medical Surveillance in Early Twentieth-century Malaya”, in Lara Marks and Michael Worboys (eds), *Migrants, Minorities and Health: Historical and Contemporary Studies* (London [etc.], 1997), pp. 49–69; Lai Ah Eng, *Peasants, Proletarians and Prostitutes:*

majority of women operating in in the Asia-Pacific region, while French nationals, Italian nationals, and eastern European Jews (principally from Poland and later Russia) were involved in an international movement of procurers, pimps, and workers that followed the trade routes west to South America, especially Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay, and on to South Africa and Australia. Another route ran to the east through North Africa, Egypt, and Constantinople, and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 provided easy access to Bombay, Colombo, Singapore, Saigon, Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Manila. A further traffic existed between Russia, Manchuria, and North China, especially through the rail-head at Harbin.⁵⁹ This highly mobile itinerant workforce moved not just within empires but also across imperial and national borders, seeking out new opportunities wherever they existed.⁶⁰

A Preliminary Investigation into the Work of Chinese Women in Colonial Malaya, Research Notes and Discussion Paper No. 59 (Singapore, 1986), pp. 29–30.

59 Hyam, *Sexuality and Empire*, pp. 142–145.

60 Harald Fischer-Tiné, “White Women Degrading Themselves to the Lowest Depths: European Networks of Prostitution and Colonial Anxieties in British India and Ceylon ca. 1880–1914”, *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 40 (2003), pp. 163–190, 172; Raelene Frances, *Selling Sex: A Hidden History of Prostitution* (Sydney, 2007), Ch. 11; Tamara Adilman, “A Preliminary Sketch of Chinese Women and Work in British Columbia 1858–1950”, in Barbara K. Latham and Robert J. Pazdro (eds), *Not Just Pin Money: Selected Essays on the History of Women’s Work in British Columbia* (Victoria, 1984), pp. 53–78, 59; Lucie Cheng Hirata, “Chinese Immigrant Women in Nineteenth-century California”, in Carol Ruth Berkin and Mary Beth Norton (eds), *Women in America: A History* (Boston, 1979), pp. 223–224; James Francis Warren, *Ah Ku and Karayuki-San: Prostitution in Singapore 1870–1940* (Oxford, 1993), Ch. 2; Ah Eng, *Peasants, Proletarians and Prostitutes*; Elizabeth Sinn, “Chinese Patriarchy and the Protection of Women in 19th-century Hong Kong”, in Maria Jaschok and Suzanne Miers (eds), *Women and Chinese Patriarchy, Submission, Servitude and Escape* (Hong Kong, 1994), pp. 161–170; Julia Martinez, “La Traite des Jaunes: Trafficking in Women and Children across the China Seas”, in Cassandra Pybus, Markus Rediker and Emma Christopher (eds), *Many Middle Passages: Forced Migration and the Making of the Modern World* (Berkeley, 2007), pp. 204–221; Julia Martinez, “The Chinese Trade in Women and Children from Northern Vietnam”, in Pierre le Roux, Jean Baffie, and Gilles Faure (eds), *The Trade in Human Beings for Sex* (Bangkok, 2010), pp. 47–58; see also Paul Monet, *Les Jaunières, Histoire Vraie* (Paris, 1930); Henriot, *Prostitution and Sexuality in Shanghai*; Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago [etc.], 1990); Charles van Onselen, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand 1886–1914*, 2 vols (New York, 1982), 1, pp. 109–164; Elizabeth B. van Heyningen, “The Social Evil in the Cape Colony, 1868–1902: Prostitution and the Contagious Diseases Acts”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 10 (1984), pp. 170–197. See also references to Japanese prostitutes (*karayuki-san*) in note 5 above.

European colonialism also redefined some female occupations as “prostitution” which in precolonial times had enjoyed a much more complex status. This was the case in India where temple-dancers were criminalized as prostitutes in the 1860s.⁶¹ Courtesans in China, Japan, and other parts of Asia underwent a similar kind of commodification.⁶² Australia’s indigenous population had no concept of prostitution prior to European colonization but its women were quickly drawn into commercial sexual transactions with the colonizers and treated as prostitutes, as was also the case in Canada and New Zealand.⁶³

Finally, the existence of prostitution in European empires, while in some ways assisting the colonial project, also created issues for colonizers’ power as regards the health of their subjects and the maintenance of racial hierarchies in colonized societies. The issues and the responses varied from empire to empire and even within empires, but in each case they had significant impacts on prostitutes’ working lives. These impacts could include restrictions on where they lived and worked, as well as new levels of policing, medical surveillance, and incarceration. In the case of Bangalore, women identified as prostitutes had their hair cut off and were then publicly expelled.⁶⁴

Community and Government Responses

A major factor influencing the working lives of prostitutes has been the approach of governments in responding to prostitution. The cities in this study exhibit a wide range of both community and government responses, ranging from extreme forms of repression to direct control to regulation, legalization, and decriminalization. Sue Gronewold’s chapter in this volume ably charts these complex state interventions in prostitution. Rather than replicate that

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- 61 Kunal M. Parker, “A Corporation of Superior Prostitutes’: Anglo-Indian Legal Conceptions of Temple Dancing Girls, 1900–1914”, *Modern Asian Studies*, 32 (1998), pp. 559–633, 559–560; Veena Talwar Oldenburg, “Lifestyle as Resistance: The Case of the Courtesans of Lucknow, India”, *Feminist Studies*, 16 (1990), pp. 259–288; Dagmar Engels, “The Changing Role of Women in Bengal, 1890–1930” (Unpublished Ph.D., School of Oriental and Asian Studies, London, 1987), pp. 90–92; Frederique Appfel-Marglin, *Wives of the God King* (Delhi, 1984).
- 62 Hanneke Ming, “Barracks-Concubinage in the Indies, 1887–1920”, *Indonesia*, 35 (1983), pp. 65–94, 70–71; Ah Eng, *Peasants, Proletarians and Prostitutes*, pp. 29–30.
- 63 Frances, *Selling Sex*, Ch. 4; Jo-Anne Fiske, “Colonization and the Decline of Women’s Status: The Tsimshian Case”, *Feminist Studies*, 17 (1991), pp. 509–535, 523.
- 64 Sundara Raj, *Prostitution in Madras: A Study in Historical Perspective* (Delhi, 1993), p. 25.

analysis, however, I will highlight some of the major impacts that different policy regimes have had on living and working conditions in the sex industry.

Repression

Wherever prostitution and related activities have been criminalised, the effect has been not to eradicate prostitution but to expose those involved in the sex industry to varying levels of police corruption and violence.⁶⁵ And this historical situation persists into the present. In contemporary Istanbul, bribery or sexual favours appear to be a common occurrence in interactions with the police, as well as police violence, regardless of whether the sex workers are registered or not.⁶⁶

While most forms of repression have resulted in fines or imprisonment, more extreme forms have included execution, which happened from time to time in Istanbul when particular regimes launched campaigns against vice. On a larger scale was the drowning of 400 prostitutes in the Nile by the French authorities because they had allegedly infected the invading French troops.⁶⁷ The French authorities also mutilated prostitutes in Paris in the seventeenth century by clipping their ears, as did authorities in Stockholm in the early modern period. In Stockholm and Vienna at that time it was also common to flog prostitutes and repeat offenders in Stockholm could be executed. Sweden in the 1920s also introduced programmes of forced sterilization of prostitutes in an attempt to eradicate what was seen as an inherited moral weakness.⁶⁸

These measures pale into insignificance when compared to the state violence meted out to prostitutes and others involved in the sex industry by twentieth century totalitarian regimes in the USSR, China, Japan, and Germany. This included executions as well as forceful removal to labour/reform camps and virtual slavery in military brothels.⁶⁹

65 Choonara, "Selling Sex in Johannesburg"; Turno, this volume, Florence.

66 Wyers, this volume, Istanbul.

67 Hammad and Biancani, this volume, Cairo.

68 Conner, this volume, Paris; Svanström, this volume, Stockholm.

69 Golfo Alexopoulos, *Stalin's Outcasts: Aliens, Citizens, and the Soviet State, 1926–1936* (Ithaca, 2003), esp. pp. 62–63; Dagmar Herzog, "Hubris and Hypocrisy, Incitement and Disavowal: Sexuality and German Fascism", *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 11 (2002), pp. 3–21; Julia Roos, "Backlash against Prostitutes' Rights: Origins and Dynamics of Nazi Prostitution Policies", *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 11 (2002), pp. 67–94; Hicks, *The Comfort Women*; Henson, *Comfort Woman*; Schellstede and Yu, *Comfort Women Speak*; Soh, *The Comfort Women*; Yoshimi, *Comfort Women*.

While most forms of repression historically have been directed at female prostitutes, the recent Swedish approach targets the clients. The advantage of this approach for women is that they are not criminalised. However, the reduction in clientele in Sweden has meant that selling sex is no longer a viable economic option for most Swedish women, who must then try to find other employment or resort to social welfare. Their place has been taken by immigrant women from the former Soviet Bloc who have fewer economic alternatives.⁷⁰ It is too early to gauge the impact of the introduction of a similar law in France in 2013.

Regulation

Systems of regulation, along the lines of what was generally referred to as the “French system”, developed in Europe at the turn of the eighteenth century and were introduced in many parts of the world in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁷¹ A system of regulation was present even earlier in China. The French model of regulation generally provided for prostitution to be conducted within officially recognized brothels where the women underwent compulsory medical examinations and treatment.⁷²

And even where such systems were not legislated, some local police and medical authorities imposed a de facto form of regulation. Thus in Perth in the years from World War I to the 1950s, prostitutes were required to live in brothels in the designated red-light area of Roe Street adjacent to the central business district. Conditions in these houses were reported to be comfortable, although not luxurious. Inmates had their meals provided and their washing and cleaning done for them and were allowed one week off in four. Their lives were constrained because they had to abide by the unofficial rules set by the police, which prohibited relationships with men other than clients and enforced medical examinations and treatment, but the women had little reason

70 Svanström, this volume, Stockholm.

71 For a general survey of these measures see Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire*, (New York [etc.], 2003); see also Raelene Frances, “Prostitution: the Age of Empires”, in Chiara Beccalossi and Ivan Crozier (eds), *A Cultural History of Sexuality, in the Age of Empire*, 6 vols (Oxford [etc.], 2011), v, pp. 145–171.

72 Official regulation existed in many parts of the world during this time period, including Bolivia, Bruges, Russia, Sweden, Austria, Turkey, Buenos Aires, Cairo, India, Florence, Hanoi, Havana, Johannesburg, Mexico City, Paris, Florence, Malta, Hong Kong, Gibraltar, the Philippines (under both Spanish and American rule), the Netherlands, Dutch East Indies, Cape Colony, Tasmania, Queensland, New Zealand, Canada, Ceylon, Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad, Penang, Malacca, Labuan, and Fiji.

to fear violence from clients or extortion from criminals. And in Perth as in other places where regulation operated, there was always a smaller number of “high-class” women who were allowed to operate independently of the police rules.⁷³ A similar situation existed in Rio de Janeiro in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when police introduced a form of regulation without legislative sanctions. In Buenos Aires the police continued to enforce a de facto form of regulation despite the official repeal of this system in 1936.⁷⁴

This kind of unofficial regulation mirrored in many respects the classic French system, which provided a degree of physical security for inmates of brothels at the cost of close surveillance and compulsory medical scrutiny and treatment. In some versions of this system women were required to live on the premises of licensed brothels, but the trend has generally been for this practice to be relaxed over time, so that women could live privately and still work in the brothels. In Paris, the requirement to live on the premises was falling out of favour at the same time as it was being instituted in Perth. By 1903, less than 1 per cent of Paris’s sex workers lived in regulated houses known as *maisons de tolérance* and more practised their trade in what were called *maisons de rendez-vous*, which were non-residential houses of prostitution. The women were still registered and monitored by their employers and the medical authorities, but had more of a sense of a private life than those living and working in a brothel. While this was a positive development for Paris’s sex workers, other changes were more negative. A new type of prostitution known as *maisons d’abattage*—or slaughter houses—was introduced in the interwar period and women allegedly offered any service and typically served thirty to fifty clients a day. One can only imagine the toll that such a high turnover of clients had on the women concerned.⁷⁵

In the French colony of Hanoi, prostitutes also initially had to work inside the brothels, since that was the only authorized form of prostitution. Later on, they could also work in their own homes, but brothels remained the ideal for the colonial authorities because surveillance was easier that way. In this case, as in all cases where officials restricted where women could sell sex, workers lost a certain amount of control over their own working space, which in turn affected their ability to negotiate with clients over prices and services.⁷⁶

In Florence, regulations first introduced as long ago as 1403 allowed women to work either in groups in the tolerated brothels or alone. Florence had a

73 Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth; Tracol-Huynh, this volume, Hanoi.

74 Blanchette and Schettini, this volume, Rio de Janeiro.

75 Conner, this volume, Paris.

76 Tracol-Huynh, this volume, Hanoi.

large number of individual women who operated independently. Such women valued their autonomy from both clients and pimps, and the opportunity to escape the stigma and imposed pace of work that inevitably impacted those who worked in brothels.⁷⁷

However, the continued existence of registration, whether it involved women living and working inside brothels or not, usually also made it more difficult for registered women to leave prostitution. There has been a general tendency for sex workers under systems of legal and de facto regulation to become increasingly full-time and to stay in prostitution for longer periods of time in their lives. This was especially the case where the regulations required women to give their identification cards to the regulating authority, which was the case in Stockholm after 1875. It was very difficult to find other work without an identity card. Even the fact of registration tended to mark women out from the rest of the working class in a way they had not been previously done, making it more difficult for them to take on other part-time work or to leave prostitution.⁷⁸

However, this generalization does not always apply. Even within the small legal red-light district in Istanbul, it seems that working conditions differ, and some sex workers claim that they work on their own schedule, choosing to work part time or full time based on their financial needs. Until the early 2000s, when a series of raids were conducted, it was reported that women worked part-time illegally (without registering) in the licensed houses of Istanbul to offset their salaries in times of financial duress, and that some of these women were teachers, bank workers, and government employees.

Registration also entailed a considerable loss of personal freedom and additional expenses for workers in other places as well. In Havana, for instance, a system of regulation instituted by the metropolitan government involved registration, compulsory medical checks, and hospitalization in the event a woman was diagnosed with a disease.⁷⁹ In Rio, all the costs were borne by brothel prostitutes and those who could not afford to pay were punished. The fees paid by brothel workers were also used to employ special police to enforce the legal obligations as outlined by the *Reglamento*, and these rules multiplied as time passed, resulting in increasing restrictions on the way women carried out their work and interacted with the public.⁸⁰

77 Turno, this volume, Florence.

78 Svanström, this volume, Stockholm.

79 Cabezas, this volume, Havana.

80 Blanchette and Schettini, this volume, Rio de Janeiro.

Under the Florentine system, prostitutes and pimps were licensed. This system restricted prostitutes' freedom but also granted them protection from other magistracies, gave them immunity from prosecution for debt, and granted them the right to bring cases of injustice before the *Onestà* (the licensing body). Fines and taxes on prostitutes were used to fund refuges. Heavier taxes on unregistered women meant that they didn't have to bear the sign of the prostitute that women under the *Onestà* had to wear.⁸¹

The medical surveillance that usually accompanied systems of regulation was often experienced as a further intrusion over the bodies and lives of prostitutes. Lock hospitals were particularly dreaded, as they were akin to prisons, held the women to harsh routines, and prevented them from working. Wardens and supervisors in the medical dispensaries, notably in the case of Hanoi, also sometimes carried out acts of violence and extortion.⁸²

But while working in regulated brothels involved considerable restrictions for workers, the forceful closure of brothels, whether regulated or not, often led to an increase in street prostitution that was generally more hazardous and less well paid. When the regulated brothels in Cairo closed and prostitution was criminalized in 1951, street soliciting increased, with workers taking clients to cars and boats. Women often went with a group of men and worked more for less payment.⁸³ A similar situation occurred in Florence when its licensed brothels were closed in 1958.⁸⁴ And although London did not have licensed brothels, official attempts to suppress brothels in the late nineteenth century forced women to ply their trade on the streets, shifting the balance of sex work out of doors.⁸⁵ The same occurred in Mexico City after 1945. In many cases this change also meant a change in control over the labour of sex workers from female "madams" to male "pimps".⁸⁶

We should also bear in mind that in all the cases examined in this volume, there were always more women selling sex outside the official regulated system than within it, with numbers outside the official system increasing during times of high demand. In Cairo during the World War II, for instance, estimates put the number of unlicensed women selling sex at over 4,300 compared to 631 licensed women. These women enjoyed more independence than registered women and also escaped the stigma of registration but at the risk of

81 Turno, this volume, Florence.

82 Tracol-Huynh, this volume, Hanoi.

83 Hammad and Biancani, this volume, Cairo.

84 Turno, this volume, Florence.

85 Williams, this volume, London.

86 Nuñez and Fuentes, this volume, Mexico City.

being prosecuted and harassed by the police for working outside the approved system.⁸⁷

Decriminalization/Legalization

Where prostitution is not criminalized—as is the case in some states in Australia as well as in the Netherlands and Bolivia—sex workers are free from the burdens of police harassment and extortion that inevitably accompany illegal activities. Workers also have access to social welfare, superannuation, bank loans, and other benefits that non-prostitute workers enjoy. This has had a profound impact on workers' lives, giving them greater personal and financial security and the ability to plan for retirement. Workers can also call on the law for redress in cases of violence or exploitation.⁸⁸

Sex workers historically have in general been very vulnerable to various forms of violence, whether at the hands of clients, pimps, or the authorities. A survey of sex workers in Paris in 1975 found that one third of the women had been victims of violent physical assault in the previous five months.⁸⁹ In Shanghai, fear of violence at the hands of clients and managers continues to be the major reason prostitutes want to leave sex work.⁹⁰ In early republican Turkey, violence committed by clients against sex workers was a regular occurrence.⁹¹

In addition to violence from clients, sex workers in Turkey could be at risk of so-called "honour killings" if male relatives discovered that they were selling sex. In contemporary Istanbul, violence, including rape and shootings, was reported in interviews conducted by a contemporary researcher; of fifty non-registered sex workers, forty-three reported that they had been victims of violence including rape, battery, abduction, and extortion. But as sex workers have pointed out, they cannot apply to the police for help or bring the perpetrator to justice because they themselves would then be subject to police action.⁹²

This was true of women in other times and places, as sex workers had little recourse to the law for protection against violence. This was partly because in many cases their activities were illegal and they were therefore keen not to draw the attention of the authorities to themselves. In other cases, the law was simply unsympathetic to their plight. It was common, for instance, for the rape

87 Hammad and Biancani, this volume, Cairo.

88 Frances, *Selling Sex*, Ch. 16; Absi, this volume, Bolivia.

89 Conner, this volume, Paris.

90 Zheng, *Red Lights*, pp. 70–72, 83–85, 90–92, 104, 159; Henriot, *Prostitution and Sexuality in Shanghai*, esp. Ch. 6; Hershtatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, pp. 145–165.

91 Wyers, this volume, Istanbul.

92 *Ibid.*

of prostitutes to be either tolerated or treated as far less serious than the rape of a “respectable” woman.⁹³

Immigration Restrictions

As well as laws and practices that affected the working lives of women in the sex industry in particular locations, changes in official attitudes to immigration could have major impacts on the ability of prostitutes to move between countries. This in turn could have a major effect on their ability to earn an income. Thus in Australia, the laws of the newly federated Commonwealth of Australia instituted after 1901 restricted the entry of all persons of colour, effectively ending the entry of Japanese women who had been working in the mining towns and ports of central and northern Australia since the 1880s.⁹⁴ Similar restrictions, either racially based or specifically aimed at prostitutes, affected Japanese prostitutes in other parts of South East Asia and the US in the early decades of the twentieth century.⁹⁵ In the British colony of Gibraltar, colonial authorities used a longstanding law relating to “aliens” to regulate prostitutes, expelling any women (alien or not) who did not conform to the de facto system of registration, examinations, and hospitalization.⁹⁶

Similarly, many countries changed their approach to prostitution in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the wake of international campaigns against the so-called “white slave traffic”. Many sex industry entrepreneurs left New York after the crackdown on foreigners connected with prostitution there in the 1890s. They turned their attention to the gold-fields of South Africa, only to be excluded from the cities of Johannesburg and Cape Town by official action in the 1890s.⁹⁷ Starting in the 1930s, foreign women found working in Istanbul’s registered brothels were deported.⁹⁸ French prostitutes who found the Egyptian authorities less tolerant after the First World War moved on to Perth in Australia, only to be harassed by local

93 For example in Brazil, Criminal Code 1830 specified one year prison for the rape of a prostitute compared to up to twelve years for “honest” victims; Blanchette and Schettini, this volume, Buenos Aires.

94 Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth.

95 See note 7 above for sources on Japanese prostitution in the Asia-Pacific region.

96 Philip Howell, “Sexuality, Sovereignty and Space”, p. 445.

97 Charles van Onselen, “Prostitutes and Proletarians 1886–1914” in *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand 1886–1914*, 2 vols (New York, 1982), 1, pp. 103–162, 108; Elizabeth B. van Heyningen, “The Social Evil in the Cape Colony 1868–1902: Prostitution and the Contagious Diseases Acts”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 10 (1984), pp. 170–197.

98 Wyers, this volume, Istanbul.

immigration and police as part of Australia's response to the League of Nations Convention on the Traffic in Women and Children, which was issued in the 1920s. Constantly moving around in this way meant that individual women found it more difficult to earn a living and accumulate assets. Ironically, such official responses aimed at reducing "trafficking" may have in fact extended the working life of prostitutes who had to work longer to make up for lost earnings and property investments.⁹⁹

Technological and Medical Developments

Since the 1990s, the trend of cybersex and the use of the internet to get in touch with clients have had a significant impact on the ways sex workers can minimize the violence to which they are exposed, both from the police and clients. Instead of soliciting in public places, the internet has enabled workers to operate from private homes or other indoor arrangements. Just as telephones enabled "call girls" to build up a clientele of discreet and trusted clients, the internet also makes it possible for workers to build up a small but steady group of clients and minimize the risk of violence and police harassment. And in both cases, remote sex, whether on the phone or the net, offers much more safety and anonymity to providers of the service than actual physical contact.

However, just as earlier sexual markets were segmented, websites for sold sex also display elements of ethnic and other kinds of segmentation. In Istanbul, for instance, websites are divided between those for foreign women and those for Turkish women, with foreign women charging twice as much as Turkish women.¹⁰⁰

Clearly, though, the extent to which sex workers can make use of the internet to increase their independence and invisibility is very much dependent on the education levels of both workers and clients. Thus, it is very important in Cuba because of the high literacy rates occasioned by free universal education under Fidel Castro's regime. In Johannesburg, in contrast, the internet has made remote sex work possible and cell phones have become a vital tool in the business, but low levels of literacy limit the ability of street-based workers to use these technologies to improve their working lives. And it is not always the

99 Raelene Frances, "White Australia and the White Slave Traffic: Gender, Race and Citizenship", *International Review of Social History*, 44 (1999), supplement, pp. 101–122.

100 Wyers, this volume, Istanbul.

case that the internet reduces the risk of violence as workers may be lured to unsafe meeting places via this means.¹⁰¹

Developments in transport as well as communications have also affected the ways in which sex is sold. Motor vehicles allowed for new forms of contact between clients and workers, while cheaper and faster ships and airplanes facilitated greater mobility of both. Many of Perth's sex workers, for example, live in the capital but regularly fly to the remote mining towns in the north to work for varying periods of time.¹⁰²

It is apparent that there is a strong link between working conditions, hours of work, earnings, and health. Venereal diseases present a major health risk for all sex workers. Syphilis was seen as a major problem in Europe from the end of the fifteenth century onwards. It was spread by armies around the world, so all sex workers in this study were and are vulnerable to infection. The spread of European empires in the nineteenth century was partly responsible for the increasing incidences of and concerns about syphilis in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth. It was this concern that prompted the first systems of regulated prostitution in France and also their adoption in other jurisdictions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These systems attempted to control prostitutes as they were posited as the alleged vectors of disease.¹⁰³ Nigeria was the only example in this study in which anti-venereal disease measures targeted men rather than women; soldiers were subjected to "cock-pulling or public display of genitals" for contracting venereal diseases and they had to pay a fine of six pence per day for concealment of the disease.¹⁰⁴

However, the health benefits of these systems for sex workers are far from clear. Apart from inaccurate methods of diagnosis used in most of this period, there weren't any effective cures for syphilis until the introduction of penicillin in the 1940s. All of the various systems of regulation, whether official or de facto, were also applied unevenly and those who escaped surveillance—the so-called clandestine prostitutes—always outnumbered those who were registered. In Hanoi in 1915, for instance, of more than 2,000 prostitutes, less than half were registered and of those only 82 had been examined at all; of those women, only 40 were examined regularly. In the 1930s, less than 5 per cent

101 Cabezas, this volume, Havana; Choonara, "Selling Sex in Johannesburg".

102 Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth.

103 Frances, "Prostitution: The Age of Empires".

104 Chacha, "An Over-view History of Prostitution in Nairobi".

of the estimated 3,000 to 5,000 prostitutes were examined and many women avoided treatment as it prevented them from working or looking after their children.¹⁰⁵

Indeed, opponents of the system argued that the regulations were actually counterproductive, encouraging complacency amongst clients who believed that regulated women were medically “clean”. The health outcomes for women involved in sold sex were mixed. While it is probably true that few were cured by the draconian but largely ineffective treatment regimes in place before the 1940s, it also seems that for some poor prostitutes the compulsory health care that accompanied regulation was the only medical service to which they had access. James Warren argues that the end of regulation in Singapore, for instance, meant that the health of many brothel inmates deteriorated because they no longer had access to any medical care.¹⁰⁶ It is also possible that the heightened awareness of venereal diseases that accompanied compulsory inspection and treatment prompted many sex workers to take prophylactic measures. It was certainly the case in Australia that French women, accustomed to the regulatory regimes of France, were much more inclined to inspect their clients for disease, to require the use of condoms, and to douche with antiseptics between customers.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, a 1906 study of registered women in Stockholm found that 73 per cent performed some kind of inspection of clients and many also insisted on contraceptives (presumably condoms).¹⁰⁸

But even after the discovery of penicillin in 1938 and when it became available in 1943, for many poorer women the chances of getting cured did not improve. Almost half of the prostitutes arrested by the police in 1951 in Shanghai had a combination of both syphilis and gonorrhoea. Traditional medicines like mercury and calomel were used in China and modern medicines were introduced later, but western medicines were too expensive for many Chinese prostitutes. Condom use was also not openly discussed in China until the 1940s and it is still relatively rare decades later; as a result, the large majority of prostitutes suffered from disease but were not treated.¹⁰⁹

There is also a correlation between education levels and the ability to negotiate safe sexual relations. A prostitute’s socio-economic status also plays a part, as those engaged in survival sex are less able to assert agency in terms of

105 Tracol-Huynh, this volume, Hanoi.

106 Warren, *Ah Ku and Karayuki-san*.

107 Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth.

108 Svanström, this volume, Stockholm.

109 Henriot, *Prostitution and Sexuality in Shanghai*, p. 149.

the health risks they take.¹¹⁰ Similarly, drug addicts tend to take more risks than other workers as regards their health.

But while venereal diseases such as syphilis and gonorrhoea were the main health issue for sex workers for the past 500 years, the late twentieth century was to bring an even more debilitating disease. As we have seen in the case of early venereal diseases, prostitutes were targeted as major vectors of the HIV/AIDS pandemic that struck most parts of the world in the 1980s. In most cases, the authorities and workers were caught completely unprepared.¹¹¹

While venereal diseases are the most obvious health risk for prostitutes alongside violence, female prostitutes also face serious health risks as a result of pregnancies and abortions. These risks have been ameliorated to some extent with new technologies such as the contraceptive pill and the more widespread use of condoms to avoid infection. Similarly, abortions are now more readily available and are safer in many countries as there are better medical procedures and drugs to control infections. However, there are still large populations of sex workers who do not have access to such contraception and medical treatment, and traditional methods of avoiding pregnancy are not as effective.¹¹² On the other hand, for women in Nigeria high rates of infertility probably caused by venereal diseases are seen as a more significant problem than pregnancies. In the past, urban sex workers adopted children to compensate for this, and more recently have taken advantage of programmes using fertility technologies. However, the expense of these programmes means that they provide no solution for childless sex workers occupying the slums of Lagos.¹¹³

Anecdotal evidence and popular literary and film stereotypes suggest that the physical and psychological health of sex workers is generally poor and results in high rates of suicide. However, few systematic surveys have been carried out to support this. One study of regulated sex workers in Stockholm found the mortality rate among the women from 1871 to 1890 was twice as high compared to unmarried women on the whole in Stockholm and was

110 Hetherington, this volume, Moscow/St. Petersburg, notes that in contemporary Russia those most vulnerable to venereal diseases are the poorest prostitutes.

111 Paul Sendziuk, *Learning to Trust: Australian Responses to AIDS* (Sydney, 2003), Ch. 8, provides an excellent summary of the AIDS issue as it related to prostitution.

112 See reference in the overview of Shanghai regarding traditional forms of contraception; Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai.

113 Chacha, "An Over-view History of Prostitution in Nairobi".

possibly higher since a number of the women left the regulation system before dying.¹¹⁴

One can speculate on the reasons for the poor health of sex workers, and in some cases the causes are fairly obvious, as in the case of Shanghai workers suffering from severe psychological trauma after being tortured in prison.¹¹⁵ It is also probable that where sex work is still illegal, the associated stress for workers takes its toll on both their physical and mental health. Researchers in Istanbul found that the reported low general health of workers in Istanbul was attributed to the legal and social conditions under which they live. Poor working conditions contributed to sleeplessness, malnutrition, respiratory infections, skin diseases, venereal diseases, and mental illness.¹¹⁶

Lack of affordable medical care is also a factor in poor health for sex workers. A survey of sex workers in Paris in 1975 found that less than 40 per cent had health insurance. In the registered brothels in Istanbul, even though keepers are supposed to pay for the health insurance and social security of their workers, many fail to do so.¹¹⁷

Developments in medicine could also have indirect consequences for the experience of working in the sex industry. The availability of drugs such as Viagra since 1999 has allowed some clients to perform sexual intercourse for much longer periods of time, increasing the stress on the body of the sex worker.

Conclusion

This comparative analysis has revealed a number of key factors that have shaped the working and living conditions of sex workers across the globe. Of these, the degree to which women were bonded or “free” was probably the most significant as it affected individual women’s autonomy and bargaining power and thus most aspects of their working lives.

State responses to prostitution were also significant, often determining where and how women could sell sex and affecting their levels of exposure to violence both from the state and from clients. Colonialism also played a major role in shaping the evolution of commercial sex and in constructing racially segmented sex industries. Major economic shifts also impacted sex workers,

114 Svanström, this volume, Stockholm.

115 Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai.

116 Wyers, this volume, Istanbul.

117 Conner, this volume, Paris.

affecting both the market for sexual services and the supply of women willing to sell sex. Civil upheavals and wars have had a similar impact on the market for sex, and have contributed indirectly to official responses to prostitution. Collective organisation by prostitutes has, since the 1970s in some cases, been important in influencing how governments treat workers in the sex industry. Finally, developments in technology and medicine, especially starting in the early twentieth century, have contributed to significant shifts in the ways in which sexual services are delivered and also on the health of sex workers.

Migration and Prostitution

Nicole Keusch

Introduction

Prostitution is considered to be a profession of high mobility; it is almost tempting to say that probably every prostitute migrates at least once in her lifetime. Despite this fact, the share of prostitutes in the flows over and across the continents has been widely neglected in migration studies. Migration is thought to be a “basic condition of human societies”¹ and “central to the human experience [and] the major forces for historical change.”² Nevertheless, many studies focus solely on the movements of European male settlers. In particular, labour migration was long held to be a male domain, keeping up the idea of males as breadwinners and the main actors in history.³ Hoerder offers up the critique that migration studies emphasize “the westward flow of agrarian settlers and neglect [the] moves of workers and of women” and has made a call for more research on non-western interperiphery mobility,⁴ just as Lucassen *et al.* identify state-centrism, modernization-centrism, and Atlanto- or Euro-centrism as the main frameworks that shape and thus bias migration studies.⁵

The neglect of women and the biased Eurocentric perspective in migration studies shall be taken up in this paper by highlighting migration history from

* I am deeply indebted to the editors of this volume, Magaly, Elise and Lex, for inviting me to join this project, their helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper, and especially their almost Buddha-like patience.

1 Dirk Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact: World Migrations in the Second Millennium* (Durham, 2002), p. ix.

2 Patrick Manning, *Migration in World History* (New York, 2005), pp. 6f.

3 Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact.*, p. 13; Jan Lucassen, Leo Lucassen and Patrick Manning (eds), *Migration History in World History: Multidisciplinary Approaches* (Leiden, 2010), pp. 10, 14.

4 Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact*, pp. 8, 12.

5 Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen, “Migration, Migration History, History: Old Paradigms and New Perspectives”, in Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen (eds), *Migration, Migration History, History: Old Paradigms and New Perspectives* (Bern, 1997), pp. 9–38, 26–28. See also the critique of Pooley *et al.* on migration research in Colin G. Pooley and Jan D. Whyte (eds), *Migrants, Emigrants and Immigrants: A Social History of Migration* (London [etc.], 1991), pp. 4–6.

the perspective of women in the sex business on the basis of the urban overviews in this volume which discuss various cities around the world. The first section will give an overview of how the movements of prostitutes fit into the general history of global migration. Afterwards, several characteristics common to the decisions and lives of many prostitutes will be discussed in order to give an idea about when migration and prostitution overlapped in their lives, where they came from and where they decided to go, how and under what circumstances they undertook their journeys, and finally why they chose to change places and what factors influenced their choices. In the last section, the narratives surrounding migrating prostitutes are brought together and analysed. While migration is indeed frequent and often a necessity for the women in the sex business, the image of prostitutes is also deeply shaped by a sense of foreignness and volatility. Thus, mobility becomes not only a part of real experiences, but also a central aspect of how they are perceived by others.

Throughout this paper, only the movements of prostitutes are considered. Other actors such as pimps, madams, clients, brokers, and individuals assisting in travel are not taken into account, although the shifting structures of this network would surely provide interesting insights that would help us better understand the circumstances under which prostitutes live.

Periodization of the Migration of Prostitutes

European Expansion and Mercantilism, 1600 to 1850

By 1600, the exploration of the world was almost complete. Migration to newly discovered regions was now connected to the hope for a better life. Short-term encounters turned into long-term relationships between locals and migrants, and permanent routes of exchange were established. European imperialist intentions were accompanied by economic expansion, and European administration and settlements shaped the structural development and monetary flows in many places.⁶ Industrialization changed societies, leading to new working structures and accelerating urbanization and labour migration. Commercial centres formed where wage labour, resources, and infrastructure met. Travelling was expensive and time consuming, and networks facilitating journeys were still rudimentary. However, the pace of migration accelerated over the years and both labour migration and forced migration of varying levels of free will increased.⁷

⁶ Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact*, p. 4.

⁷ For an overview of the general history of migration in that period, see Chapters 7 and 8 of Manning, *Migration in World History*.

During this period, records about mobility were few; border crossings were seldom documented and health records and censuses barely existed. However, attempts to confine and control prostitutes' mobility such as by the use of medical examinations and travel passes were initiated⁸ and legislation on prostitution slowly developed, mostly in order to prevent the spread of venereal diseases and "immorality". Still, regulations on both migration and prostitution were not laid down precisely, and especially outside of Europe they were almost non-existent. Even in more strictly controlled European cities, there was still plenty of freedom for the business and movements of prostitutes. If the interactions of prostitutes went against ideas of racial purity, they were rather tolerated as an urban service, and sex workers were relatively integrated into society. Fighting prostitution was not a priority and therefore the women were left widely unattended as long as no problems occurred. In some cases, the migration of prostitutes was even promoted by the authorities.⁹

Cities developed into regional centres; infrastructure like ports and industries attracted people in search of work, and the unfavourable economic situation in the countryside drove people to urban centres. Those were characterized by a disproportionate number of men who had to pay for sex and women without good prospects for finding a job. In the large metropolises, women mostly arrived from neighbouring regions and countries. In smaller cities, urbanization and labour migration did play a role, but the numbers of incoming women were lower and the distance migrated shorter.¹⁰ At the intersections of European and Asian domains, prostitution was more diverse and not restricted to local women. Here, single male migrants from the countryside and settlers from Europe created a high demand for prostitutes and more cases of long-distance migration occurred.

European women arrived in the colonies, hoping for a better future. On the other hand, forced migration mostly in the form of the slave trade took women from one colony to another. The major influx of people and the accompanying service economy in these parts of the world led to a high demand for prostitutes, which was allayed by both migrant and local women.¹¹

8 Svanström, this volume, Stockholm.

9 Biancani and Hammad, this volume, Cairo; Wyers, this volume, Istanbul. Compare also Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact*, p. 431 and Eithne Luibhéid, "Sexuality and International Migration", in Robert M. Buffington, Eithne Luibhéid and Donna J. Guy (eds), *A Global History of Sexuality: The Modern Era* (Chichester, 2014), pp. 119–150, 124.

10 Mechant, this volume, Bruges; Pluskota, this volume, Amsterdam; Turno, this volume, Florence.

11 Biancani, Hammad, this volume, Cairo; Blanchette and Schettini, this volume, Rio de Janeiro; Cabezas, this volume, Havana; Wyers, this volume, Istanbul.

Imperialism and the Era of Steamships, 1850 to 1920

Starting in the beginning of the nineteenth century, new transportation and communication technologies changed the movement of people considerably. All over the world, ongoing industrialization led to a further increase in the demand for cheap labour and contributed to urbanization.¹² This period of globalization was marked by an immense increase in long-distance migration. The emergence of steamships for passenger services made travelling possible for larger numbers of people. The opening of new transport routes like the Suez Canal shortened sea journeys, and the financial cost of migrants' journeys decreased as well. Postal services and telegraph lines enhanced levels of coordination. Networks facilitating travel grew in scope and living standards improved, making it easier for individuals to move to new places.¹³ The resulting diasporas were far more closely linked to their homelands than in earlier periods, and they shared a strong sense of nationhood and national culture.¹⁴

This new mobility and professionalism changed the sex business. In the first decades when legislation was not so restrictive yet, migration increased immensely. European women migrated to the colonies mostly voluntarily and they were individually motivated to escape either the harsh conditions at home or government policies.¹⁵ In general, internationalization was at its height around the mid-nineteenth century, and many European prostitutes could be found abroad. Because of the prevailing romantic nationalism and ethnocentrism, the new communities in the colonies tried to be similar to their home countries so demand for European prostitutes grew considerably. The migration of women from Europe to the colonies was sometimes actively promoted by governments and thus it was not just an option for poor lower-class women.¹⁶

In urban colonial contexts, the lack of women was also compensated with local concubines or prostitutes who sometimes became cultural agents between

12 See Chapter 8 and 9 of Patrick Manning, *Migration in World History*.

13 Timothy J. Hatton and Jeffrey G. Williamson, *The Age of Mass Migration: Causes and Economic Impact* (New York [etc.], 1998), p. 251.

14 Manning, *Migration in World History*, pp. 158–161.

15 *Ibid.*, pp. 151–153.

16 Biancani and Hammad, this volume, Cairo; Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai; Herzog, this volume, Singapore; Jan MacKell, "Frontier Prostitution in the United States", unpublished paper collected for the project "Selling Sex in the City", 2013; Schettini, this volume, Buenos Aires. On the situation of migrant prostitutes in the US see Eileen Scully, "Pre-Cold War Traffic in Sexual Labor and its Foes: Some Contemporary Lessons", in David Kyle and Rey Koslowski (eds), *Global Human Smuggling Comparative Perspectives* (Baltimore [etc.], 2001), pp. 74–106.

their clients and their home community. Colonial administrations used several methods like gender ratios in migration in order to control such interracial sexuality with varying levels of success.¹⁷ Despite these attempts, most prostitutes in many places around the world were locals or from surrounding areas.¹⁸

Starting in 1900, national legislation on migration changed worldwide, bringing about immigration laws and other restrictions. The setting of boundaries, wars, and conflicts led to a rapid increase in refugee movement.¹⁹ The global community was ruled by a few economically strong states, so the established system of migration controls multiplied inequalities among countries.²⁰ Mobile women were increasingly eyed with suspicion, and a moral panic about the “white slave trade” arose at the beginning of the twentieth century. In many places, administrative monitoring and health checks were established.²¹ Not only the governments of sending and receiving countries, but also families and communities were deeply worried about the rising number of prostitutes because deviation from sexual norms was interpreted as a general failing of women’s families, communities, and countries of origin.²²

International Monitoring in the Interwar Years, 1920 to 1950

World War I led to refugee migration and the warfare mobility of people providing services for army troops. After the war, state-run bureaucracies institutionalized control of borders²³ so migration decreased during the interwar period. Legislation on both migration and prostitution became stricter, and strong initiatives to suppress the traffic in persons emerged. In 1921, the International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children

17 Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact*, pp. 434f.

18 Blanchette and Schettini, this volume, Rio de Janeiro; Cabezas, this volume, Havana; Conner, this volume, Paris; Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai; Herzog, this volume, Singapore; Hetherington, this volume, St. Petersburg/Moscow; Mechant, this volume, Bruges; Jürgen Nautz, “Urban Overview: Vienna”, unpublished paper collected for the project “Selling Sex in the City”, 2013; Nuñez and Fuentes, this volume, Mexico City; Schettini, this volume, Buenos Aires; Turno, this volume, Florence.

19 Manning, *Migration in World History*, pp. 163–167.

20 Luibhéid, “Sexuality and International Migration”, pp. 119f.

21 Blanchette and Schettini, this volume, Rio de Janeiro; Conner, this volume, Paris; Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth; MacKell, “Frontier Prostitution in the United States”; Pluskota, this volume, Amsterdam; Svanström, this volume, Stockholm; Wyers, this volume, Istanbul.

22 Luibhéid, “Sexuality and International Migration”, pp. 126f.

23 Lucassen *et al.*, “Migration, Migration History, History”, p. 32.

was drawn up by the League of Nations which subsequently opted for stronger international regulation and monitoring.²⁴

Around the world, legislation and administration were strongly influenced by European standards. Laws restricting sex work drove prostitutes to flee to places with more favourable legislation and sometimes resulted in them being deported to their home countries. Anti-trafficking movements became more and more influential, but in effect, many of those initiatives focused on European prostitutes.²⁵

The debates on forced migration and prostitution carried out in the League of Nations led to the abolition of regulated brothels in the 1940s, for they were seen as the main market for migrant prostitutes. This was followed by a UN convention against forced migration for prostitution in 1949. This development may be the main cause for a decline in both the voluntary and involuntary migration of prostitutes from 1930 to 1960. However, these new conditions drove much of the business underground so the actual effect remains vague.²⁶

Decolonization and Liberalization, 1945 to 1990

After World War II, the colonial structures which had dominated migration in previous centuries slowly disintegrated. European prostitutes in former colonies returned when their main clientele, the European settlers and bureaucrats, left. Staying behind to serve the remaining potential local clients was obviously not an option.²⁷ The relative size of a city was not so important anymore because even smaller towns now offered the anonymity and the diverse customers needed in the sex business. The general division between rich and poor countries continued, but the movement and destinations of women became more diverse. From the 1960s onward, a general “feminization of migration” occurred, especially in the case of forced migration and prostitution.²⁸

Mobility again increased around 1970, when growing literacy and the increase of cheap transport, electronic communications, and broadcasting

24 Robert M. Buffington and Donna J. Guy, “Sex Trafficking”, in Buffington *et al.*, *A Global History of Sexuality: The Modern Era*, pp. 151–194, 161f.

25 Amir *et al.*, this volume, Tel Aviv/Jaffa; Biancani and Hammad, this volume, Cairo; Dasgupta, this volume, Calcutta; Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria; Herzog, this volume, Singapore; Nuñez and Fuentes, this volume, Mexico City; Tracol-Huynh, this volume, Hanoi; Wyers, this volume, Istanbul.

26 Marlou Schrover, Joanne van der Leun, Leo Lucassen and Chris Quispel (eds), *Illegal Migration and Global and Historical Perspective* (Amsterdam, 2008), p. 30.

27 Kozma, this volume, Casablanca.

28 Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact*, p. 517.

devices opened up new opportunities for prostitutes.²⁹ Decolonization and the lifting of migration restrictions brought migrants to western countries, and the poorest countries started to participate more actively in migration networks.³⁰ Relatively inexpensive flights made it easier to cross great distances and means of staying connected fuelled the movement of people from poorer countries to better-off regions. As Hoerder states, “[t]he internationalized non-White underclass began to migrate into social spaces that internationalized white-colored middle classes had reserved for themselves.”³¹ The trend in which mobility in colonial countries was mainly restricted to neighbouring regions while women from Europe looked for the best opportunities all over the world was partly reversed, and the first world turned into a new destination for women from the former colonies.³²

On the other hand, the sex market in many developing countries became more local again after the fairly international years of colonial rule. Incoming prostitutes arrived from neighbouring countries and regions, while outgoing women headed for better markets in wealthier countries.³³ With the advent of mass tourism, the clientele of prostitutes started to travel in order to find inexpensive sex services with an exotic flair so less prostitutes had to leave the country in search of business.

Globalization and the Digital Revolution, 1990 to 2010

In the last decade of the twentieth century, the end of the Cold War changed the global situation. Women from eastern Europe and especially Russia had already spread around the world, and this reached a peak after the collapse of the eastern bloc. The opening of the EU to poorer countries in southern and eastern Europe like Romania and Bulgaria boosted the influx of women from those countries. These women had now even better working conditions than those from the former colonies, as they did not need a special working permit.³⁴ The new freedom of travelling and easily attained resident permits made moving to more promising destinations extremely attractive and easy,

29 Manning, *Migration in World History*, p. 157.

30 Lucassen *et al.*, *Migration History in World History*, p. 16.

31 Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact*, p. 7.

32 Conner, this volume, Paris; Pluskota, this volume, Amsterdam; Svanström, this volume, Stockholm; Turno, this volume, Florence.

33 Blanchette and Schettini, this volume, Rio de Janeiro; Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria.

34 Amir *et al.*, this volume, Tel Aviv/Jaffa; Conner, this volume, Paris; Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth; Hetherington, this volume, St. Petersburg/Moscow; Pluskota, this volume, Amsterdam; Svanström, this volume, Stockholm; Turno, this volume, Florence; Wyers, this volume, Istanbul.

and women intentionally migrated in order to work as prostitutes. The liberalization and toleration of sexual services in many western countries facilitated this trend. The revolution of communication networks with new broadcasting and data transmission services made it easier for a wider range of customers to make contacts, and new forms of cybersex developed.³⁵

The Characteristics of the Migration of Prostitutes

Prostitution and migration are closely connected, and it is extremely difficult to tell whether a migrant woman prostitutes herself or whether a woman in prostitution migrates. Sometimes being engaged in prostitution makes moving beneficial or necessary, and sometimes being a migrant leads to engaging in occasional prostitution, getting arrested, and finally to long-term sex work.³⁶

When we observe the temporal relationship between migration and the entrance to sex business, we can differentiate between migration before, during, and after taking up prostitution. In the first case, rural locations are usually the starting point. Women seek new job opportunities and move to a new town where they then decide to take up prostitution because of economic necessity, the allure of better pay, or force. In the unfamiliar urban environment, the generally low wages available to uneducated women from the countryside make them extremely vulnerable to sexually exploitative male–female relationships.³⁷ In the second case, the move to prostitution coincides with a change of location, for instance because a woman anticipates a good start in business somewhere else or because she wants to avoid the shame that her new occupation could bring to herself or her family. The third case is when a woman moves while already engaged in prostitution. This commonly happens when she decides to move to another urban centre, for instance because she expects the market to be better or because she is pursued by the authorities.³⁸ Presumably a change of place also occurs when women quit the business, but there is not much information on this aspect of prostitutes' lives.

The fact that almost all of the cities and towns in this compilation are global migrant centres demonstrates the intimate link between urbanity and

35 Blanchette and Schettini, this volume, Rio de Janeiro; Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria; Pluskota, this volume, Amsterdam; Svanström, this volume, Stockholm; Wyers, this volume, Istanbul.

36 Kozma, this volume, Casablanca.

37 Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact*, p. 434.

38 Amir *et al.*, this volume, Tel Aviv/Jaffa; Mechant, this volume, Bruges.

prostitution. Urban environments are a prime destination because they usually offer work opportunities, money, and anonymity, which are important for a rather precarious profession in the sex sector. Labour migration mostly starts as short-distance migration from rural areas to urban cities, followed by long-distance cross-community migration. The move from the periphery to regional centres provides better opportunities for economic success³⁹ and is sometimes the first stage of migrating overseas.⁴⁰ Examples of women travelling from urban places to rural settlements are rare and mostly connected to administrative restraints or demographical changes. Places with a large share of single men and therefore potential clients, like army bases and booming businesses, can be attractive destinations even in remote areas.⁴¹ Hoerder introduced the category of circular migration which occurs when migrants return regularly to their hometown or have at least the intention to do so, as is typical for many labour migrants. This option is almost non-existent for women in the sex business because of the stigma attached to their profession.⁴²

In the sex sector, the relationship between organized travel and coercion is rather complicated. Generally speaking, there are three levels of freedom or a lack therein: Women may migrate and decide to engage in sex work themselves; they may migrate voluntarily but be forced into prostitution; or, they may be forced to move to another country for the purpose of engaging in prostitution.

When women leave a place voluntarily for any reason, such as because of the unfavourable conditions there or because of run-ins with the law, they still have a choice about when and how to leave. They may decide to do so on their own, or with the help of friends or family members.⁴³ Although some of the overviews do tell of friendships at brothels and solidarity between prostitutes,⁴⁴

39 Amir *et al.*, this volume, Tel Aviv/Jaffa; Dasgupta, this volume, Calcutta; Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth; Kozma, this volume, Casablanca; Mechant, this volume, Bruges.

40 Hatton *et al.*, *The Age of Mass Migration*, p. 17; Manning, *Migration in World History*, pp. 5f, 144f.

41 Absi, this volume, Bolivia; Biancani and Hammad, this volume, Cairo; Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth; Hetherington, this volume, St. Petersburg/Moscow; MacKell, "Frontier Prostitution in the United States".

42 Dirk Hoerder, "Segmented Macrosystems and Networking Individuals: The Balancing Functions of Migration Processes", in Lucassen *et al.*, *Migration, Migration History, History: Old Paradigms and New Perspectives*, pp. 73–84, 74.

43 Leslie Page Moch, "Dividing Time: An Analytical Framework for Migrant History Periodization", in Lucassen *et al.*, *Migration, Migration History, History: Old Paradigms and New Perspectives*, pp. 41–56, 44.

44 Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth.

evidence of women having company during their travels is rare. They follow specific paths of migration and rely on social networks established by fellow villagers or family members,⁴⁵ and those networks have shifted throughout the centuries according to the needs at hand.⁴⁶ In many cases, the cost of passage is financed by family members and friends who have already migrated. The decision who will migrate is often negotiated within the context of the family economy, kin relations, sibling order, and friendship ties, and is much influenced by the power hierarchies of gender and generations.⁴⁷ Migration generally demands a lot of adaptation and the will to build up a new life.⁴⁸ Gathering together in ethnic communities after arrival in the host society makes it easier to adapt to the new surroundings, and in this way social and kinship networks develop.⁴⁹ Societies with strong kinship bonds actually seem to rely more on this kind of support. Nevertheless, after departure many women have to be self-reliant until they are able to build up new networks.⁵⁰

Leaving one's social environment can result in isolation and loneliness. Compared to earlier times, it is today much easier to stay in contact using modern means of communication. Therefore, women's breaks with their home communities may now be less significant than before. If a migrant prostitute breaks off contact with her family today it is either her own decision—maybe out of fear, shame, or as a form of emancipation—or she is actively being prevented from contacting other people.⁵¹ According to Peach, much of the human trafficking for sex that exists today is facilitated by the restrictive immigration policies of destination countries, the growth of international organized crime, the large profits that can be made through human smuggling, the rise of sex tourism, government corruption and complicity, and inadequate and ineffective legal mechanisms.⁵²

45 Hoerder, "Segmented Macrosystems and Networking Individuals", p. 80; Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact*, p. 5.

46 Manning, *Migration in World History*, p. 8f.

47 Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact*, pp. 16, 19, 379.

48 *Ibid.*, pp. ix, 13.

49 Hatton *et al.*, *The Age of Mass Migration*, pp. 14, 23.

50 Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria; Pluskota, this volume, Amsterdam.

51 Pluskota, this volume, Amsterdam.

52 Lucinda Joy Peach, "Female Sex Slavery or Just Women's Work? Prostitution and Female Subjectivity within Anti-trafficking Discourses", in Kathy E. Ferguson, Monique Mironesco (eds), *Gender and Globalization in Asia and the Pacific: Method, Practice, Theory* (Honolulu, 2008), pp. 233–252, 233. On the role of international human rights in the trafficking of women and the problems connected to that, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, see also Nancie Caraway, "Do No Harm": The Asian Female Migrant and Feminist Debates in

In earlier centuries, migrating was difficult and sometimes dangerous because there was less information available about job opportunities and the social and legal situation of the destination. Decisions had to be made on the basis of outside knowledge and women had to trust their informants. The fact that many women were illiterate suggests that they were dependent on informal information. Moreover, the flow of information was rather slow, so migrants never knew what the conditions would be like when they arrived. If women did not have personal acquaintances to gather such information, they had to consult professional organizations which assisted them in their choices about where to go and how to get there. Thus, professional networks in the sex business became common,⁵³ and the difficulties and expense of long distance travel therefore created attractive business opportunities for networks in both free and unfree migration.⁵⁴ Such networks worked internationally and had access to the main systems of transport. Many of them maintained employment agencies which offered jobs and collaborated with people in the transport and supply sector.⁵⁵

It is not clear to what extent women were involved in their travel preparations and to what extent they were informed about where they were going and what the situation would be like at their destination. When women voluntarily consulted an employment agency but had to be smuggled illegally across a border, they became vulnerable to be forced into sex work. Illegal travel required a higher degree of organization and young uneducated women from rural areas who had no experience with travelling were dependent on others. Because they were cut off from their personal acquaintances, such women might find themselves

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- the Global Anti-trafficking Movement”, in Ferguson *et al.*, *Gender and Globalization in Asia and the Pacific: Method, Practice, Theory*, pp. 253–271. On the situation of migrant prostitutes in the US, see Scully, “Pre-Cold War Traffic in Sexual Labor and its Foes”, pp. 74–106.
- 53 Ziyad Choonara, “Selling Sex in Johannesburg from 1886 to the Present”, unpublished paper collected for the project “Selling Sex in the City”, 2013; Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria; Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth; Mechant, this volume, Bruges; Pluskota, this volume, Amsterdam; Schettini, this volume, Buenos Aires. On the Chinese trade of women and girls between the ports of colonial Vietnam and other Asian cities, see Julia Martinez, “La Traite des Jaunes: Trafficking in Women and Children across the China Sea”, in Emma Christopher, Cassandra Pybus, Marcus Rediker (eds), *Many Middle Passages: Forced Migration and the Making of the Modern World* (Berkeley [etc.], 2007), pp. 204–221.
- 54 Buffington *et al.*, “Sex Trafficking”, p. 158.
- 55 Biancani and Hammad, this volume, Cairo; Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth; Schettini, this volume, Buenos Aires.

in a position where they were forced into prostitution.⁵⁶ There is evidence that women engaged in prostitution during their travels for protection and to improve their travelling conditions.⁵⁷ When legislation became stricter around the turn of the twentieth century, more and more people had to travel illegally which may have resulted in more cases of coerced prostitution.

The most extreme form of coercion occurs when women are pushed or lured to migrate and then forced into prostitution. In such cases, they may have been persuaded to migrate by friends or family, talked into migrating by strangers, sold to procurers by family members, or simply kidnapped by traffickers. In almost all cases, a professional organization is involved in one way or another. Procurers try to keep the women isolated and therefore dependent on them. Such professional traffickers usually operate on established routes and the women are taken to places based on their suitability for the clientele in terms of their attractiveness and youth.⁵⁸ Despite the common view that such involuntary migration and forced prostitution is the rule, many of the overviews stress that women took part in the business both knowingly and voluntarily.⁵⁹

For those women who had the chance to decide themselves, there are several reasons to leave for a new destination. Moch defines migration as a change in residence beyond a communal border triggered by demand for labour, deployment of capital, shifts in population patterns, landholding regimes, family, and inheritance systems, as well as state politics and policies.⁶⁰ Naturally, most such factors typical for labour migration also drive prostitutes' movements, for example more or less practical aspects like overpopulation at the place of departure, the level of industrialization and hence opportunities to earn money at the destination, the existence of suitable transport and infrastructure for

56 Amir *et al.*, this volume, Tel Aviv/Jaffa; Biancani and Hammad, this volume, Cairo; Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria; Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth; Kozma, this volume, Casablanca; Nuñez and Fuentes, this volume, Mexico City; Svanström, this volume, Stockholm; Wyers, this volume, Istanbul.

57 Emma Christopher, "The Slave Trade Is Merciful Compared to [This]: Slave Traders, Convict Transportation, and the Abolitionists", in Christopher *et al.*, *Many Middle Passages: Forced Migration and the Making of the Modern World*, pp. 109–128, 119f.

58 Biancani and Hammad, this volume, Cairo; Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth; Linehan, this volume, Chicago.

59 Amir *et al.*, this volume, Tel Aviv/Jaffa; Biancani and Hammad, this volume, Cairo; Dasgupta, this volume, Calcutta; Herzog, this volume, Singapore; Hetherington, this volume, St. Petersburg/Moscow; Kozma, this volume, Casablanca; Mechant, this volume, Bruges; Pluskota, this volume, Amsterdam; Schettini, this volume, Buenos Aires.

60 Moch, "Dividing Time", p. 43.

both the basic needs of everyday life and the job in particular, sufficient prospective clients and suppliers to support the business, or networks and acquaintances. Especially important for women engaging in a business which is restrained in most societies are favourable legal conditions promising a certain degree of personal freedom and freedom to do business, as well as a society that is not excessively prejudiced and discriminatory towards the migrant's origin or lifestyle. Not all of these conditions have to be fulfilled at the same time, and the prospect of relative improvement is sufficient to make people move as long as both the actual and social costs such as the loss of relationships or the danger of change are worthwhile.

The prime reasons for prostitutes to migrate are indeed economic considerations. Hatton and Williamson describe the typical male migrant as single men from rural regions, unskilled labourers who leave their homes in order to improve their economic status.⁶¹ Moch likewise identifies the search for better job opportunities combined with demographical factors as the main reasons for changing places.⁶² The same can be stated for the women who engage in sex work, especially in the case of poorer prostitutes. Prospects for improvement like benefits for the family and the contribution of resources to the community play an important role for many women.⁶³ Sometimes we can also observe cases of refugee migration among prostitutes, for example because of persecution, war, violence, or disasters. In any case, the goal of migration is generally to improve one's situation and guarantee subsistence.⁶⁴ Practically all of the urban overviews, whether they describe colonial locations or industrialized areas, tell of women leaving the countryside and going to the city in order to find employment. As already mentioned, preparations are sometimes laid out quite strategically and sometimes rather randomly; some women originally plan to find jobs in other sectors but end up in prostitution, while others seek to work as prostitutes from the beginning.

Very closely tied to the desire to find employment is the hope of escaping personal and structural poverty. Varying degrees of overpopulation and poverty are the main push factors everywhere. Rural areas do not have much to offer, so migrants, including women, seek out a better standard of living elsewhere. In some cases, women may hope to get rich, or at least earn easy or extra money so they can participate in the global consumer culture or take part in modern urban life. Such cases show that women willingly take up prostitution,

61 Hatton *et al.*, *The Age of Mass Migration*, p. 11f.

62 Moch, "Dividing Time", pp. 45, 50, 54.

63 Manning, *Migration in World History*, p. 7.

64 Lucassen *et al.*, "Migration, Migration History, History", pp. 14, 18f.

choosing it over the other options available. At other times, prostitution can be a survival option for people who have been marginalized and for newcomers with few social resources, and it can also be a means of escaping a negative economic environment.⁶⁵

While already conducting business, people migrate mainly in order to improve their own position, for example by seeking out or following clientele when commercial centres change or new places become more attractive. Similarly, people may migrate because of shifts in the gender balance, or they may want to flee from “disturbing” factors such as jealous or problematic spouses. A change in infrastructure can facilitate travel and places can become more or less attractive because of the existing facilities, taxes, or costs of doing business. For example, mass tourism increases the number of people visiting a given area, bringing a steady pool of rotating clientele. Many of the overviews also cite worsening social situations as push factors for migration, caused for example by civil unrest, rebellions, war, catastrophes, and famine, along with dispossession, changing production systems, and the discovery of natural resources.⁶⁶

Besides economic considerations, legal conditions are another cause for migration, but the major waves of migration seem to be generally prompted by the labour market rather than state politics.⁶⁷ While economic considerations appear to be equally important in all periods of time, the scope of official surveillance and legislation concerning sold sex has become globally broader and more comprehensive over the centuries. This trend was driven by a generally negative attitude towards prostitution in western Christian countries, the policies of which have shaped other systems of legislation. Eventually this trend gave way to more liberal attitudes especially in western countries by the end of the twentieth century, causing a reversal of the migration trend.

65 Amir *et al.*, this volume, Tel Aviv/Jaffa; Biancani and Hammad, this volume, Cairo; Blanchette and Schettini, this volume, Rio de Janeiro; Conner, this volume, Paris.; Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria; Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai; Pluskota, this volume, Amsterdam; Schettini, this volume, Buenos Aires; Tracol-Huynh, this volume, Hanoi; Turno, this volume, Florence.

66 Absi, this volume, Bolivia; Amir *et al.*, this volume, Tel Aviv/Jaffa; Biancani and Hammad, this volume, Cairo; Choonara, “Selling Sex in Johannesburg”; Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria; Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth; Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai; Hetherington, this volume, St. Petersburg/Moscow; MacKell, “Frontier Prostitution in the United States”; Wyers, this volume, Istanbul.

67 Lucassen and Lucassen, “Migration, Migration History, History”, p. 27.

The choice to take up prostitution as a means of subsistence almost naturally leads to a preference for places where legislation is less strict and neighbourhoods where the police are lenient. In particular, women leave places where legislative racial or religious constraints make it difficult or impossible to work. In other cases, prostitutes migrate when a system of licensed prostitution is enacted or compulsory medical examinations are enforced. Turno offers an interesting interpretation of mobility as a form of resistance. On the other hand, forced migration for legal reasons can take the form of bans on certain people living in certain areas, deportation, or the closing of settlements.⁶⁸

Social realities also cause people to migrate so they can be either closer to or further from family and friends. Many women migrate in order to help their families, and those who do so are mostly from poor or overpopulated areas. In some cases, women leave their homes because of family problems, to escape the control of the family or husband, or get out of a situation in which they do not receive sufficient support. The pressure of traditional rules, marginalization in the household, religious constraints, social deprivation, and inequality in the community are other reasons to migrate. In an urban setting, women selling sex can enjoy a certain amount of anonymity and avoid being stigmatized. Sometimes curiosity about a new place can also prompt women to migrate.⁶⁹

Social factors are much more individual than economic or legal motivations and thus differ greatly. The degree of freedom and liberalization that exists in a given society can indicate how decisive such aspects are. Factors like role allocation in the household, gender equality, moral duties, the rigidity of ethical concepts, and attitudes towards sexuality in general set the background for decisions about migrating and taking up sex work. It seems that as an incentive, social factors generally are minor, especially when compared to economic

68 Amir *et al.*, this volume, Tel Aviv/Jaffa; Biancani and Hammad, this volume, Cairo; Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth; Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai; Herzog, this volume, Singapore; Hetherington, this volume, St. Petersburg/Moscow; Kozma, this volume, Casablanca; Linehan, this volume, Chicago; Tracol-Huynh, this volume, Hanoi; Turno, this volume, Florence; Wyers, this volume, Istanbul; Choonara, "Selling Sex in Johannesburg".

69 Absi, this volume, Bolivia; Amir *et al.*, this volume, Tel Aviv/Jaffa; Biancani and Hammad, this volume, Cairo; Conner, this volume, Paris; Dasgupta, this volume, Calcutta; Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria; Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai; Kozma, this volume, Casablanca; Turno, this volume, Florence; Wyers, this volume, Istanbul; Choonara, "Selling Sex in Johannesburg".

reasons. In individual cases, however, social considerations may be the decisive ones. Overall it can be observed that female migrants do not necessarily have dysfunctional family backgrounds but in most cases they do suffer from poverty.⁷⁰

Narratives about Migrant Prostitutes

Most narratives are initially based on facts but are quickly conflated with other issues and perceptions in society, resulting in a blend of fantasy and reality. They sometimes tell more about the standards and concepts of the society in which they arose, but a combination of all narratives creates a mosaic of a prototype of “the migrant prostitute”. Nevertheless, the border between concepts like “foreign” and “migrant”, or “local” and “native” becomes opaque so it is difficult to tell whether a woman is an actual newcomer who has just arrived or if it is her appearance or a lack of integration that makes her an outsider. Many of the narratives tell of a general othering of foreign elements in society, while others are directly built around the mobility of women.

One common dichotomy is that of the “local wife” and the “mobile prostitute”. Especially before World War II, women who travelled alone were often associated with prostitution, regardless of their actual occupation. In many societies, women were expected to stay at home with the family. Those seeking independence and autonomy did not fit with the expected moral and ethical standards. Such “misconduct” was therefore interpreted to be a general lack of decency and a sign of loose morals, thus leading to accusations of prostitution. This idea that migrant women are more likely to end up in the sex business has led to many restrictions on their movement via various travel and health controls. While mobile men were a cause for pride, as they were seen as pioneering explorers and visionary innovators, the mobility of women posed a threat to patriarchal traditions and the moral integrity of society. According to Hoerder, Asian societies place particularly strict restrictions on female migration by drawing upon systems of family values and gendered power hierarchies,⁷¹ but examples of hostility towards mobile women are numerous in all parts of the world.⁷²

⁷⁰ Pluskota, this volume, Amsterdam.

⁷¹ Dirk Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact*, p. 379.

⁷² Amir *et al.*, this volume, Tel Aviv/Jaffa; Babere Kerata Chacha, “An Overview History of Prostitution in Nairobi: From the Precolonial Period to the Present”, unpublished paper

The fear of female mobility has intensified the notion that foreign women in general are closer to crime and prostitution than “local” women, i.e. those women who are integrated into society and whose outward appearance fit resident patterns. Therefore, the greater visibility of women believed to be foreign and thus migrant has been a cause for a generally precarious position in society. Furthermore, foreign women who are proven to be involved in the sex business are prime suspects for other illegal activities such as smuggling or drug use. With both migration and prostitution being a crime or at least close to criminality, the idea has become widespread that a person guilty of one is involved in other more serious infractions of the law. Sometimes the condemnation of foreign prostitutes has been utilized to cover up the presence of local prostitutes and create the image of a healthy society that is being “invaded” by dangerous elements. Thus, some sources state that there are more foreign prostitutes than local ones, although the figures available often do not support this view.⁷³

Nevertheless, women who are not integrated into the host society and physically look different are indeed more vulnerable, and therefore they may actually end up being involved in criminal activities or prostitution more easily than their local counterparts.⁷⁴ According to Hoerder, the extent of migrants’ interaction with the host society depends less on choice than on access to daily necessities and facilities.⁷⁵ Especially in cases when their legal status is not clear, foreign women may have difficulties in maintaining a stable and secure life. Things that local women can easily access like housing and social integration are problematic and can be made up for by taking up work in a bordello.⁷⁶ Thus, heightened visibility and actual vulnerability lead to a situation in which mobile women are more likely to be involved in activities that may be criminal.

A more favourable imagining of the migrant prostitute is that of a poor native girl in a dangerous world. This idea is partly based on a similar notion as

collected for the project “Selling Sex in the City”, 2013; Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai; Svanström, this volume, Stockholm.

73 Amir *et al.*, this volume, Tel Aviv/Jaffa; Blanchette and Schettini, this volume, Rio de Janeiro; Cabezas, this volume, Havana; Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria; Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth; Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai; Hetherington, this volume, St. Petersburg/Moscow; Linehan, this volume, Chicago; Nautz, “Urban Overview: Vienna”; Schettini, this volume, Buenos Aires; Svanström, this volume, Stockholm; Wyers, this volume, Istanbul.

74 MacKell, “Frontier Prostitution in the United States”; Wyers, this volume, Istanbul.

75 Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact*, p. 435.

76 Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria.

that of the “loose” criminal whore: A “decent” girl would not leave her family and start working in the sex sector. So single women far away from their families can only be either complete villains, or force must have been involved in luring her from home. Especially in Christian societies and in those controlled by a Christian colonial administration, the ideal of purity made it beneficial to play the role of an innocent girl from the countryside that had been tricked into prostitution. Clients seem to prefer this idea of the fallen girl to that of a wise business woman, and both procurers and prostitutes are keen to satisfy customers. For some women, this positive image of a morally pure but fallen woman might help her find a client who pities her enough to free her from prostitution. In colonial times, this victim narrative was also used by European administrations to explain the existence of European prostitutes who were thought to tarnish notions of European moral supremacy and the integrity of the ruling European class.⁷⁷

The sexual availability of women of one’s own nationality was not only a source of shame for Europeans in Europe, but also in countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Even today, debates condemning prostitution on the grounds of national dignity can be observed. Turno argues that the fact that the trafficking of women and children are often discussed together strengthens this idea concerning the victimization of women.⁷⁸ This perception of disgrace may have also led to a change in the victim narrative in the twentieth century. In Brazil, for example, the victim is now construed as a local mixed-race or black woman who is tricked into prostitution by foreign agents. As in former times, the women are depicted as being sexually inexperienced, rather passive, and cut off from outside contact.⁷⁹

The status of prostitutes in the sex business is defined by their age, appearance, habits, class, and their clientele, but also by their actual or presumed origin. When a woman’s origin is apparent via physical traits, this establishes and strengthens hierarchies in business.⁸⁰ Those are in many cases not a direct result of actual migration but a general characteristic of a business sector that is powerfully shaped by mixed origins and appearance. Categorizing sex workers according to their origin reflects thus not only the reality of the social hierarchies

77 Blanchette and Schettini, this volume, Rio de Janeiro; Herzog, this volume, Singapore; Mechant, this volume, Bruges; Schettini, this volume, Buenos Aires; Schrover *et al.*, *Illegal Migration and Global and Historical Perspectives*, p. *inf.*; Tracol-Huynh, this volume, Hanoi.

78 Blanchette and Schettini, this volume, Rio de Janeiro; Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria; Herzog, this volume, Singapore; Schettini, this volume, Buenos Aires; Tracol-Huynh, this volume, Hanoi; Turno, this volume, Florence.

79 Blanchette and Schettini, this volume, Rio de Janeiro.

80 Absi, this volume, Bolivia; Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth; Herzog, this volume, Singapore; Schettini, this volume, Buenos Aires.

and the categories in the sex sector, but also echoes common notions about the expectations of such women. These hierarchies are sometimes also reflected in official regulations and administrations' attitudes towards certain prostitutes, and many cities had quarters set aside for prostitutes of different origins who charged different prices.⁸¹ Knowledge about these hierarchies may lead women to prefer or avoid certain locations, making ethnic background both a real and a constructed marker. Women frequently adopt ethnic identities and present themselves in whatever role best suits their business. They also tend to serve a particular clientele, and the origin and status of the client corresponds in most cases to the social ranking of the prostitute.⁸²

In colonial contexts, racial categories were common, and inevitably a dichotomy between a mostly privileged white category and a coloured category came into being. Therefore in most places prostitutes of European origin used to be the most sought after. Among them, "French" prostitutes were generally the most popular, and they charged the highest prices and worked in the best environments. They were thought to be elegant and refined and associated with "civilized", i.e. expensive, quality services. On the other hand, many women from eastern Europe were associated with forced prostitution and cheap sex. Despite the lightness of their skin, they often lived in run-down quarters together with local "coloured" prostitutes.⁸³

However, racial categories were not always an advantage for white prostitutes and sometimes led to the denial of their existence or a ban on their business. Their existence was a cause of shame for European administrations, especially when the women were available for the local population, as the "prestige of the white man" was seen as a means of ensuring colonial supremacy. White women were ascribed family roles and the task of maintaining normative standards and respectability.⁸⁴ Prostitution was considered to be a backwards trade in the orient, where local women were thought to be loose and debased. The imagining of white women as the pure and chaste keepers of the family did not allow for erotic fantasies and hence European prostitution was strictly condemned, while the prostitution of coloured women was seen as a "necessary

81 Absi, this volume, Bolivia; Biancani and Hammad, this volume, Cairo; Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth; Herzog, this volume, Singapore; Kozma, this volume, Casablanca; MacKell, "Frontier Prostitution in the United States"; Blanchette and Schettini, this volume, Buenos Aires; Tracol-Huynh, this volume, Hanoi.

82 Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth; Herzog, this volume, Singapore; Tracol-Huynh, this volume, Hanoi.

83 Blanchette and Schettini, this volume, Rio de Janeiro; Herzog, this volume, Singapore.

84 Chacha, "An Over-view History of Prostitution in Nairobi"; Herzog, this volume, Singapore; Tracol-Huynh, this volume, Hanoi.

evil".⁸⁵ Hoerder explains the toleration of sexual relations between white men and non-white women in colonial societies in light of the fact that the sexual activities of male colonial officers and settlers were thought to be unavoidable. Although such interactions went against concepts of racial purity, it helped maintain the purity of home societies since the men were prohibited from bringing back coloured wives and children.⁸⁶

Black and "coloured" women had to deal with a rather sexualized image. They were strongly associated with otherness and exoticism mixed with an erotic flair, but still viewed with suspicion and distrust. The idea that certain races are more prone to prostitution led to situations in which the working conditions of coloured women were better in terms of being less controlled, as long as they confined their sex work to the recognised sector. Nevertheless, indigenous women have in many cases been at the bottom of social and business hierarchies. The roots of such racialized eroticism can be traced back to colonial thought; in the colonial imagining, black women were seen as sexually rapacious and morally corrupt. In countries with a highly mixed population like Brazil, racial categories were especially complex, with light coloured women believed to be pretty, sentimental, and loving, and dark coloured women thought to be ugly and sexually depraved.⁸⁷ For Hoerder, the construction of native women's sexuality was carried out in terms of the sexual deprivation of colonial officers and settlers. White women were seen as inviolable, while colonized female bodies were easily accessible.⁸⁸

In Asia, Europeans did not seem to have the same privileged position as elsewhere. European prostitutes from central and eastern Europe did not necessarily have a good reputation in contrast to the "quiet charm" ascribed to the native women. European prostitutes were said to practise their trade coldly in contrast to the passionate and loving local women. In contrast, the hierarchy was often influenced by women's level of education. In many cases migrants represented the poorest and least educated group, so they were of the lowest class. National categories also influenced how prostitutes dressed, which was important in differentiating the various groups of people.

85 Biancani and Hammad, this volume, Cairo; Chacha, "An Over-view History of Prostitution in Nairobi" Choonara, "Selling Sex in Johannesburg"; Herzog, this volume, Singapore; Tracol-Huynh, this volume, Hanoi.

86 Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact*, p. 431.

87 Biancani and Hammad, this volume, Cairo; Blanchette and Schettini, this volume, Rio de Janeiro; Choonara, "Selling Sex in Johannesburg"; Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria; Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth; Linehan, this volume, Chicago; Nuñez and Fuentes, this volume, Mexico City; Schettini, this volume, Buenos Aires.

88 Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact*, p. 431.

In colonial Hanoi, Japanese prostitutes wore traditional outfits, makeup, and hairstyles that clearly distinguished them from the cheaper Chinese and Vietnamese prostitutes who were thought to be unclean and carriers of diseases.⁸⁹ Stereotypes and hierarchies in prostitution persist today, if not in law then at least in practice. Governments habitually differentiate between migrants who enter a country for temporary labour and permanent settlers on the grounds of racial, gendered, geopolitical, and economic hierarchies.⁹⁰ The tendency to value women from richer first-world countries more than those from poorer countries continues until today. In modern cyber prostitution there are different websites with different rates for foreign and local prostitutes. As in former times, it is still easier for local women who are comparatively well integrated to maintain their business unobserved by the authorities. Foreign prostitutes are exposed to more violence and police harassment, and have less control over their clients, working conditions, and money. There is also evidence of a division of labour based on origins which is still shaped around the social hierarchies of race and country of origin.⁹¹ On the other hand, an exotic flair is still a way to enliven sex fantasies: After World War II, Havana's exotic image was exploited in order to attract sex tourists from the US to a place that was "so near, yet so foreign".⁹²

Conclusion

Changing places is a lifetime experience of women involved in the sex sector, and in many cases, they travel far more than people in other sectors. In addition, mobility and its attendant foreignness are both real and presumed characteristics which determine how those women are perceived by others and how they arrange their lives. Many aspects of their movement around the world fit some general notions in migration history, but several factors have led to a neglect of their involvement in research.

Pooley *et al.* identify five general problems in migration research which prove to be true for the migration of prostitutes: First, the life stories of people are overshadowed by the analysis of increasingly large data sets. This lack of individual sources is compensated for by the large-scale evaluation of quantitative

89 Blanchette and Schettini, this volume, Rio de Janeiro; Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai; Herzog, this volume, Singapore; Tracol-Huynh, this volume, Hanoi.

90 Luibhéid, "Sexuality and International Migration", pp. 125f.

91 Linehan, this volume, Chicago; Turno, this volume, Florence; Wyers, this volume, Istanbul.

92 Cabezas, this volume, Havana.

material. Second, this focus on numbers and statistics provides a rather static and non-dynamic view of the events which led people to decide to change their lives and move. Third, many studies tend to focus on one small community so it is difficult to come to general findings that are also useful for other places and time periods. Fourth, explicit information from direct sources—if available—about the motives and effects of migration are often anecdotal and therefore not representative. Fifth, most research concentrates on periods and places for which data are relatively abundant and detailed regardless of their historical significance.⁹³

Gender studies have already made a major contribution to the inclusion of women's experiences in global history. The initial focus of migration studies on settlers' movements has also slowly started to fall away. Still, the precarious situation of prostitutes brought about by the fact that sex work makes them social outsiders in most societies has led them to be disregarded. Their work and lifestyle are consequently stigmatized and criminalized, and they mostly belong to the social underclass. This leads to the perception that their experiences are of minor importance in terms of ground-breaking developments in global history. Indeed, if one is interested in pioneering explorations of new worlds, prostitutes do not provide new insights, as they tend to follow their male clients. Still, they provide a service, and a stable clientele is the basis for their living, so the fact that they follow their clientele is not a sign of passivity or subordination but simply a sensible business strategy.

Besides the neglect of women's experiences in general and the disregard of women in the sex sector in particular, it is difficult to provide a globally balanced view of the movement of people for another reason. The term "migration" connotes long-distance mobility, border-crossing, and leaving or entering nation-states, thus maintaining a basic European concept which has shaped historiography until today. Local and regional mobility between areas that are not so rigidly administered (or in pre-nation-state periods and places) has been naturally far more widespread but is extremely difficult to trace, so many studies rely on the state as the basic analytical element and modernization as the main stimulus for migration. This approach almost automatically leads to an overemphasis on international mass migration as well as the role of the state administration, and internal and short distance migration as well as personal or communal considerations remain widely unobserved. European actors tend to be overrepresented and changes in global history brought about by Europe are overly emphasized.⁹⁴

93 Pooley *et al.*, *Migrants, Emigrants and Immigrants*, pp. 4–6.

94 Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact*, p. xxi.

The main sources available for migration studies are administrative records of border crossings, local censuses registering the numbers and origins of residents, and police and court records that indicate conflicts. They reinforce the impression that laws and regulations dominate people's lives and decisions, highlighting the role of Europeans as rulers in the colonial period. In the case of sex workers, such sources almost inevitably lead to an outlook tinged by criminalization, underscoring the need for women to do business in the underground which makes their decisions and actions much more opaque and thus unavailable for research.

But without consulting passports and immigration records, it is indeed difficult to find adequate criteria to identify "migrants". Personal information concerning language, race, religion, ethnic markers, family background and self-ascription is difficult to obtain and ambiguous as well, for it implies that "foreigners" and social outsiders are the same as "migrants" and vice versa. Direct sources concerning migrants might reveal their actual and felt status, but in the case of prostitutes, they are extremely rare because many such women were illiterate (and there is also the problem of language barriers), as well as the fact of their illegality and marginalization within society. Existing non-administrational sources, especially in colonial locations, were written by male observers or the clients who share neither the language nor the cultural background of the women, and thus reflect not only a male perspective but also European values.⁹⁵ Therefore, a wider variety of direct sources as well as more transnational research going beyond European concepts is needed in order to present the history of the migration of prostitutes in a more balanced light.

95 See Kozma, this volume, Casablanca; Biancani and Hammad, this volume, Cairo.

Prostitution and Colonial Relations

Liat Kozma

Colonial encounters played a significant role in shaping policies and desires in both Europe's colonies and in Europe itself, and thus they deserve their own thematic overview. I define colonial relations as ethnic or racial-based hierarchies and segregations which developed as a consequence of western imperial expansion. These were unequal power relations in which the colonizer had control over, or at least attempted to control, residential choices, mobility in public space and across borders, and who wedded and bedded with whom. I thus follow Ann Stoler's contention that the very intimate domain of desire was shaped by these colonial interactions.¹

Historical research on prostitution and colonialism is relatively recent. The argument historians present is that colonial domination and colonial power relations affected prostitution on multiple levels. First, the migration of women for prostitution to, between, from, and within Europe's colonies was facilitated, encouraged, or restricted by colonial authorities. Second, colonial urban planning segregated colonizers from colonized, industrial from residential, and respectability from vice. Such segregations did not mean, of course, that different social groups did not interact or even live together. It means, however, that questions of racial and class interactions were central to the colonial vision of the city. These policies, in turn, affected the urban geography of prostitution, its interaction with the city's inhabitants, and divisions within brothels or prostitutes' quarters. Furthermore, the permanent and temporary migration of men—as soldiers, sailors, or industrial workers—created highly gender-imbalanced environments, and prostitutes were the only women officially allowed in some of them.²

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- 1 Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, 1995); Ann Laura Stoler, "Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 31 (1989), pp. 134–161; Ann Laura Stoler, "Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies", *The Journal of American History*, 88 (2001), pp. 829–865.
 - 2 Raelene Frances, "Prostitution: The Age of Empire", in Chiara Beccalossi and Ivan Crozier (eds), *A Cultural History of Sexuality in the Age of Empire* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 145–170; Philip Howell, *Geographies of Regulation: Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Britain and the*

The processes and categories of regulation—of prostitutes, brothels, and red-light districts—were not unique to the colonial context, and they are outlined in detail in the other urban and thematic overviews. What I try to do here is examine the specificities of colonial contexts and the various levels of power relations between the state and its subjects as well as between individuals on different sides of ethnic or racial hierarchic divides.

Sources

Sources for precolonial periods are often very rare or non-existent because many colonized societies were predominantly illiterate or because records were not preserved. Hammad and Biancani's work on Cairo is able to reconstruct the precolonial history of prostitution because in Islamic Cairo decrees, chronicles and court records were kept.³ This was not the case for colonial Nairobi or Lagos, for which very little information is available. Some colonial cities discussed here, such as Singapore, Casablanca, and Nairobi, were not urban centres or did not exist at all before the colonial encounter, and thus only provide a roughly century-long historical survey.⁴

Sources for the colonial period were produced mostly by the colonizers. Historians of prostitution in these societies therefore use sources written by colonial administrators or imperial voluntary organizations who sought to civilize indigenous populations, combat global prostitution, salvage colonial reputation, and/or mitigate the flaws of colonial rule. Ekpootu's research on colonial Nigeria, for instance, relies mainly on colonial police records and administrative correspondence. Similarly, Tracol-Huynh's article on Hanoi notes that most available sources on prostitution are French and that French writings about Vietnamese women were imbued with stereotypes of their race and sex.⁵

Empire (Cambridge, 2009); Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in The British Empire* (New York, 2003); Ashwini Tambe, *Codes of Misconduct: Regulating Prostitution in Late Colonial Bombay* (Minneapolis, 2009); Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago, 1990).

3 Biancani and Hammad, this volume, Cairo.

4 Babere Kerata Chacha, "An Over-view History of Prostitution in Nairobi: From the Precolonial Period to the Present", unpublished paper collected for the project "Selling Sex in the City", 2013; Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria; Herzog, this volume, Singapore; Kozma, this volume, Casablanca.

5 Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria; Tracol-Huyn, this volume, Hanoi.

Indeed, in most historical societies the life stories of the women in prostitution are often mediated through those who tried to reform, regulate, or discipline them. In colonial contexts, notably, such mediation is further extenuated by racial divisions and colonial power relations. So, those who wrote about prostitutes and recorded their life stories did not share these women's language, and, as I demonstrate below, often held specific assumptions about the sexuality of non-European women.

Sexuality and Colonial Relations

Colonial relations were often metaphorically depicted as sexual encounters, be it the "virgin African continent",⁶ or the likes of Kuchuk Hanem, the dancer who fascinated Flaubert in his mid-nineteenth century visit to Egypt and became a metaphor of the colonial coveting gaze in Edward Said's *Orientalism*.⁷ Consequently, colonized women themselves became an object of colonial sexual fantasy, curiosity, and gaze. In certain cases, such as Kenya or India, the colonized woman was perceived as exotic and hypersexual.⁸ In other cases, such as Islamic societies, women's sexuality was perceived, by definition, to be oppressed, and Muslim women were to be saved by colonial authorities or benevolent voluntary organizations. Such metaphors were translated into colonial erotic imagery, both at home and in the colonies themselves: erotic representations of the colonized, and sexual fantasies of the colonizer.⁹

Colonial policies in regulating and policing prostitution are best understood within a conceptual framework mindful of the role of desire and sexuality in shaping colonial relations. On the one hand, Ann Stoler has shown how the intimate domain of human interactions was central to colonial policies. British colonial officers, for example, were not allowed to age in the colonies so that imperial prestige would not be questioned by the sight of an elderly Englishman. English and Dutch youth in the colonies were sent to boarding schools in Europe, so that affection toward their childhood nannies or desire toward indigenous girls would not undermine well-kept distinctions between colonizers and colonized. The policies that ensued from these anxieties differed

6 Chacha, "An Over-view History of Prostitution in Nairobi".

7 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978), pp. 186–190.

8 Chacha, "An Over-view History of Prostitution in Nairobi".

9 See, for example, Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York, 1995); Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem* (Minneapolis, 1986).

in different imperial contexts. All, however, saw interracial sexual relations or the potential for such relations as a matter fit for state intervention.¹⁰ In several colonial contexts, such as the Dutch Indies or Singapore, concubinage and the existence of “mixed-blood” children were perceived as a threat to colonial power and prestige and were strongly discouraged. Much earlier than the Dutch and the French, Herzog argues, the British created policies preventing interracial relations and marriage, and they were outlawed throughout the Empire already at the end of the eighteenth century.¹¹

On the other hand, as Franz Fanon has famously argued, colonial relations also produced and channelled desire itself. White men’s access to colonized women had distinctly different cultural meanings and different histories from colonized men’s desire for white women. The former was sometimes banned, but sometimes encouraged by colonial authorities, for example by operating indigenous brothels to cater to the “needs” of occupying armies or colonial administrations. The desire of indigenous or non-white men for white women, Fanon argued, was created and nurtured by colonial relations and anti-colonial sentiment. The colonized, he stated, desired that which belonged to the colonizer: to sit at the settler’s table and to sleep in the settler’s bed, “preferably with his wife.” The political desire to take the place of the colonizer and reverse power relations is translated here into sexual desire.¹² A black man’s desire, in turn, was translated into colonial or white anxieties about the uncontrollable sexuality of the colonized. This can be seen, for example, in French colonial policies toward its colonial soldiers, both overseas and in France itself. Similar concerns influenced highly racially-segregated societies, for example the American South of the Jim Crow era.¹³

Women’s sexual desires are rarely part of this paradigm. They were deemed irrelevant in colonial discourses, and were rarely discussed when describing relations between prostitutes and their patrons. European reformers and officials described white women merely as victims of “white slavery” (to be described below) or as victims of deception which led them into interracial

10 Stoler, *Sex and the Education of Desire*, pp. 137–164; Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Thinking through Colonial Ontologies* (Princeton, 2009), pp. 57–104.

11 Herzog, this volume, Singapore.

12 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York, 2004), p. 5; see also his book *Black Skin, White Masks* (London, 2008).

13 On sexual anxieties and racial violence in the American south, see for example Jane Dailley, *Before Jim Crow: The Politics of Race in Post-Emancipation Virginia* (Chapel Hill, 2000), and on African-American masculinity in the Jim Crow era, see Marlon Bryan Ross, *Manning the Race: Reforming Black Men in the Jim Crow Era* (New York, 2004).

intimacy or even marriage. Female desire within colonial relations is therefore not a part of my explanatory framework, and although it surely deserves its own theoretical discussion, unfortunately it is beyond the scope of this paper.¹⁴

To summarize, colonial regimes of regulation differed from those in the metropolis by incorporating racial assumptions about sexuality into everyday policies of rule. Imperial and/or racial prestige affected policy and this was implemented in the most intimate domains of human interactions.

Indigenous Sexuality and Early Colonial Encounters

For many precolonial societies, we know little about how colonial encounters affected patterns of non-marital or commercial sex. Very schematically, historical research points to at least three categories of precolonial sexual/commercial practices: first, prostitution, or a phenomenon that closely resembled it (as in Vietnam and the Islamic world); second, an exchange of sex for money, the cultural connotations of which were different enough from prostitution to be considered as something else (such as Indian temple prostitution or North African courtesans); and third, societies in which there was no prostitution as the society had little or no money/wage labour, and therefore there was no exchange of sex for money (as, for example, in Nairobi). A fourth category might be distinguished as cases in which we have no information at all, due to a lack of sources. All were transformed in the period of colonial control.

In Latin America, for example, we know that there were sexual encounters between Spanish and Portuguese men and local women that were either encouraged or tolerated by the colonial authorities. Little historical research, however, is available on commercial sex here.¹⁵ As early as 1538 the Spanish Crown granted the municipal authority of Mexico City a permit to operate a properly supervised “concubinary house” to service Spanish men, but it is unknown whether such a house was indeed opened at that point. Spanish

14 On North African soldiers in the French army, see for example Ethan M. Orwin, “Of Couscous and Control: The Bureau of Muslim Soldier Affairs and the Crisis of French Colonialism”, *The Historian* 70 (2008), pp. 263–284, 272; Glenford D. Howe, “Military-Civilian Intercourse, Prostitution and Venereal Disease Among Black West Indian Soldiers During World War 1”, *The Journal of Caribbean History*, 31 (1997), pp. 88–102.

15 See, for example, Asuncion Lavrin (ed.), *Sexuality and Marriage in Colonial Latin America* (Lincoln, 1989); the more recent book by Karen Vieira Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest: The Gendered Genesis of Spanish American Society, 1500–1600* (Albuquerque, 2005); Asunción Lavrin, “Sexuality in Colonial Spanish America”, in Jose C. Moya (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Latin American History* (New York, 2011), pp. 132–152.

men, sent to rule over a non-Christian population, left their women and children behind. Sexual relations with indigenous women became acceptable, and these women sometimes resorted to selling their bodies as a means of survival. It is difficult to determine which such relations were indeed commercial, since all non-marital sex was similarly referred to as "life in sin". Women known to be leading such a life were banned from leaving their houses when dressed up glamorously, riding in carriages, or bringing cushions or rugs to church. It was only in the eighteenth century that prostitutes and pimps were legally identified, punished, and imprisoned.¹⁶

Until the 1830s, the East Indian Company was wary of allowing European women into India, fearful it might destabilize the company's relationship with India's rulers. As a consequence, British men entered into concubinal or marital relations with Indian women. The British authorities, however, became increasingly intolerant toward such relations. By the late eighteenth century, persons of mixed race were excluded from holding political or military office with the company. At about the same time, venereal diseases came to be defined as a medical problem which threatened the wellbeing of British soldiers and officers. Low-class prostitutes who were found to be diseased were confined to a lock hospital and segregated from society until cured. The regulation system was designed to ensure that soldiers had access to sex while being protected from venereal diseases. In different times and places, such access was regulated along ethnic or racial lines, while in others it was not. In any case, white men's access to non-white women was more acceptable than non-white men's access to white women.¹⁷

In some cases, traditions of public entertainers, some of whom were engaged in occasional prostitution, disappeared with the colonial encounter. The women engaged in such professions were eroticized, sexualized, and then integrated into a system of regulated prostitution. In precolonial Vietnam, for example, legislators condemned prostitution but did not try to punish prostitutes. Colonial legislation replaced precolonial forms of non-marital sex and institutionalized commercial prostitution.¹⁸ In Egypt, alongside prostitutes there were singing and dancing women who would perform for upper-class

16 Nuñez and Fuentes, this volume, Mexico City.

17 Erica Wald, "From Begums and Bibis to Abandoned Females and Idle Women: Sexual Relationships, Venereal Disease and the Redefinition of Prostitution in Early Nineteenth-Century India", *Indian Economic Social History Review*, 46 (2009), pp. 5–25; Judy Whitehead, "Bodies Clean and Unclean: Prostitution, Sanitary Legislation, and Respectable Femininity in Colonial North India", *Gender & History*, 7 (1995), pp. 41–63.

18 Tracol-Huynh, this volume, Hanoi.

families and they were known for their refinement and style. In the nineteenth century, with the influx of European tourists to Egypt, they came to be confused with prostitutes and their title, *'awalim*, became synonymous with prostitution.¹⁹ Similarly, women of the Ouled Nail tribe, who served as professional dancers, concubines, and courtesans in precolonial Algeria, came to be classified as prostitutes; the name of the tribe itself came to be synonymous with prostitution. Their traditional dance was turned into an erotic tourist attraction which also featured in orientalist fantasy and imagery of colonial Algeria. In precolonial Algeria, these women were socially acceptable and could go on to marry. In colonial Algeria, they were branded as prostitutes, both legally and socially.²⁰

Similarly, in colonial India the category of prostitution was extended to women whose activities had not been previously classified as criminal or immoral, particularly courtesans. These were women who lived and entertained in salons which came to be known as centres of music and culture. They also provided sexual services to a limited upper-class clientele. As the Indian court centres lost their standing with the strengthening of the East India Company, the women lost their former support, and their role came to be restricted solely to the sexual sphere. These women were transformed from trusted companions into medical threats. The Indian woman alone, rather than her sexual partners, was singled out as a transmitter of venereal diseases. Temple prostitution and traditional dance, both containing a sexual component, were also classified by the British as prostitution. In earlier periods, British officials distinguished between these categories of women and bazar prostitutes, but these distinctions later disappeared and these women's social and religious functions were erased.²¹

In Yoruba communities in Nigeria, a wife could take a lover who secured her husband's approval by paying a fine and performing culturally-approved rites. European writers, and later European administrators, Ekpootu argues, eroticized non-erotic practices and represented as socially deviant what had been culturally legitimate. The colonial economic system introduced new economic

19 John Rodenbeck, "Awalim; or, The Persistence of Error", in Jill Edwards (ed.), *Historians in Cairo: Essays in Honor of George Scanlon* (Cairo, 2002); Karin van Nieuwkerk, "A Trade like Any Other": *Female Singers and Dancers in Egypt* (Austin, 1995), pp. 33–36.

20 Barkahoum Ferhati, "La danseuse prostituée dite 'Ouled Nail', entre mythe et réalité (1830–1962): Des rapports sociaux et des pratiques concrètes", *CLIO: Femmes, Genre, Histoire*, 17 (2003), pp. 101–113; Barkahoum Ferhati, "Enquête sur la prostitution en Algérie: Souvenirs de Bou-Saâda", *L'Année du Maghreb*, 6 (2010), pp. 253–268.

21 Wald, "From Begums and Bibis".

relations within families and communities. Colonial policies were also affected by the Victorian gender ethos which favoured men and devalued women's labour and relegated women to the domestic sphere, marginalizing them economically. Migration of males within the colony also resulted in an increase in female-headed households, thus feminizing poverty and driving some women to prostitution as a means of supporting their families. Some were driven to the city where they hoped to find opportunities, as village life offered little.²²

The legacy of slavery and abolition is also present in some of our case studies. European powers had a complicated and ambiguous relationship with slavery. Until the early to mid-nineteenth century most colonial powers enjoyed the cheap labour provided by existing systems of slavery, sometimes incorporating them into capitalist expansion. Britain was the first to ban slavery in its colonies in the 1830s, and others followed, sometimes substituting it with other forms of bonded labour.²³ The abolition of slavery in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries created new realities. Men and women could no longer legally be purchased, for example in Lagos, Casablanca, or in Cairo, and abolition gave rise to other forms of exchange and employment. In some of these localities, manumitted slaves, who had nowhere to go and little support within the community, had little choice but to resort to prostitution. In late nineteenth century Egypt, for example, references to manumitted slaves in brothels suggest such a predicament. The British authorities established homes for manumitted slaves with the declared aim of directing those women to domestic labour rather than prostitution.²⁴

Urban Spaces

The history of prostitution is predominantly an urban one, and the colonial context is no exception. Here, histories of colonial prostitution are intimately linked to histories of colonial urbanism in terms of how colonial authorities chose to construct and transform urban spaces. Historians of prostitution in

22 Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria.

23 See, for example, Kenneth Morgan, *Slavery and the British Empire: From Africa to America* (Oxford, 2007); Lawrence C. Jennings, *French Anti-slavery: The Movement for the Abolition of Slavery in France, 1802–1848* (Cambridge, 2000); Marcel van der Linden (ed.), *Humanitarian Intervention and Changing Labor Relations: The Long-Term Consequences of the Abolition of the Slave Trade* (Leiden, 2011).

24 Judith Tucker, *Women in Nineteenth Century Egypt* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 174; Diane Robinson-Dunn, *The Harem, Slavery and British Imperial Culture: Anglo-Muslim Relations in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester, 2006), pp. 84–85.

colonial societies connect the transformation of prostitution to the transformations of urban space brought about by the colonial presence. In the passage cited below, Fanon famously demonstrated the effects of colonial relations on how urban spaces were experienced by both colonizer and colonized:

The settler's town is a strongly built town, all made of stone and steel. It is a brightly lit town; the streets are paved with asphalt, and the garbage cans swallow all the leavings, unseen, unknown, and hardly thought about... The settler's town is a well-fed town, an easygoing town; its belly is always full of good things. The settler's town is a town of white people, of foreigners.

The town belonging to the colonized people, or at least the native town, the Negro village, the medina, the reservation, is a place of ill fame, peopled by men of evil repute. They are born there, it matters little where or how; they die there, it matters not where, nor how. It is a world without spaciousness; men live there on top of each other, and their huts are built one on top of the other. The native town is a hungry town, starved of bread, of meat, of shoes, of coal, of light. The native town is a crouching village, a town on its knees, a town wallowing in the mire. It is a town of niggers and dirty Arabs.²⁵

Colonial urbanism was a modernizing project in the sense that it relegated urban planning to experts who relied on supposedly impartial social science to generate objective criteria and techniques often termed "colonial laboratories". Europe's colonies were territories in which methods could be implemented, tried out, modified, and improved if necessary.²⁶ Colonial urbanism was colonial in relying on unofficial zoning and de facto class- and race-based segregation and inequalities. Colonial cities segregated the respectable from vice, indigenous from the foreign, and lower-class from upper-class clientele. These districts were monitored by a system of gates and walls, as well as curtains and glazed windows.²⁷ In Johannesburg, for example, the 1923 Act removed black people from the city's centres and settled them on the outskirts of the city.

25 Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, pp. 38–39.

26 See for example, Omnia El Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt* (Stanford, 2007).

27 Gwendolyn Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Chicago, 1991), pp. 3–11; Christabelle Teraud, *La prostitution coloniale: Algérie, Tunisie, Maroc: 1830–1962* (Paris, 2003), p. 85.

In Shanghai, the various international concessions and the Chinese town had different prostitution regulations (and practices) and in Nairobi, blacks were confined to certain neighbourhoods.²⁸

In North Africa, colonial urbanism entailed opening up the old city and making it more accessible to colonial policing; the gates which divided urban quarters after nightfall, for example, were removed. The winding alleyways and the rooftops which one could easily use for escape were most problematic in maintaining law and order. In addition, colonial authorities constructed new quarters adjacent to the old one, implementing rational principles of visibility and accessibility: standardized buildings, wide boulevards, and segregation between residential and industrial regions. The tramway, and later the bus, also facilitated mobility within the city and necessitated urban planning which made it possible for these vehicles to move around the city.²⁹

The geography of prostitution in colonized urban spaces was marked by the complex relationship between settlers' and indigenous neighbourhoods, or between the indigenous city and the colonial city which developed around it. Postcolonial cities often bear the mark of this bifurcated past to this day. Colonial cities marked an unequal encounter between different social and economic systems, one imposed upon the other, causing social and economic ruptures and dislocations. These, in turn, created economic instability which drove women to prostitution. These processes supplemented, rather than replaced, traditional modes of control and supervision of women with modern, bureaucratized ones.³⁰

In the various case studies discussed in this volume, the colonial presence affected the geography of prostitution in several important ways. First, the colonial administration transformed urban geographies either by creating new urban centres or transforming existing ones. Nairobi and Casablanca are two examples of small towns/villages which became administrative colonial centres, thus attracting both European and local immigrants in search of skilled or unskilled jobs.³¹ In some urban localities, this created a gender imbalance: male labour was much more in demand in these new or growing urban centres

28 Ziyad Choonara, "Selling Sex in Johannesburg: From 1886 to the Present", unpublished paper collected for the project "Selling Sex in the City", 2013; Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai.

29 Taraud, *La prostitution coloniale*, pp. 81–83.

30 *Ibid.*, pp. 11–13; Wright, *The Politics of Design*; Anthony D. King, *Spaces of Global Cultures: Architecture, Urbanism, Identity* (London, 2004).

31 Chacha, "An Over-view History of Prostitution in Nairobi".

than female labour, and female migration was either discouraged or actively banned. As Ekpootu demonstrates, colonial Lagos became a colonial administrative centre and colonial capitalist development attracted indigenous migratory flows in response to perceived opportunities. These migratory flows, in turn, changed Lagos into a commercial centre.³²

Nairobi provides an example of the effects of the monetization of a traditional economy and the dislocation of social and familial relations following colonial intervention which drove families to poverty and women to prostitution. Nairobi became an administrative and commercial centre during the colonial period. Mining camps, military settlements, and port cities attracted commercial prostitution to their predominantly male environments. The colonial administration prohibited wives from joining their husbands at the workplace. Culturally, moreover, it was not acceptable for respectable women to abandon their lands and move to the city as dependents with their husbands.

In non-colonial situations it was the presence of western settlements or armies, such as in nineteenth-century Shanghai and early twentieth-century Istanbul, that attracted the migration of prostitutes and pimps.³³ Singapore changed from a small fishing village into the centre of British colonial rule and British influence in the region, thus creating both supply and demand for prostitution. Herzog shows that although trafficking in women and the slave trade were illegal in British territories, in Singapore the British authorities ignored the import of non-European women, mainly from neighbouring islands, because it reduced the gender imbalance and provided both domestic and sexual labour that was sought after by sailors, merchants and soldiers. As Singapore grew, these were joined by voluntary migration as well.³⁴ Johannesburg's existence and growth were related to the imperialist expansion of capital and the discovery of gold. In the early twentieth century, it was inhabited mainly by men, as black women's entry to the city was restricted. Consequently, it attracted both African and eastern European prostitutes and trafficking.³⁵

Commercial sex arrived in Australia with the first European colonizers who set up a convict colony in Sydney in 1788. Some of them had been selling sex in Great Britain before being deported to Australia. Aboriginal women who were dispossessed from their land and from their traditional economies also provided sex to the colonizers in exchange for money, food, or alcohol. European settlement in Australia also attracted southern and eastern European immigrants,

32 Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria.

33 Chacha, "An Over-view History of Prostitution in Nairobi".

34 Herzog, this volume, Singapore.

35 Choonara, "Selling Sex in Johannesburg".

including prostitutes. These served men in the new townships and mining districts, which like in Nigeria and Johannesburg, were composed mainly of men.³⁶

In other places, urban development contributed to the growth of particular cities and with them the development of a middle class with a dispensable income, which increased the demand for leisure and pleasure opportunities for the male bourgeoisie. In Hanoi, the growing city offered an easier life, a standard of living that was better than in the countryside, and anonymity, and thus it attracted many young women from rural areas.³⁷

Regulation

The regulation of prostitution in colonized societies was often related to the presence of colonial military forces. So while regimes of regulation were increasingly criticized or abolished in Europe, regulation was imposed on colonized societies, first and foremost in order to protect colonial soldiers from venereal diseases, which could be, until the beginning of the twentieth century, fatal. The debilitating effects of syphilis on the military made regulation appear to be a viable tool even after medical advancements improved the quality of care and thus the chances of recovery.³⁸ In the case of Singapore, Herzog claims that even when it was clear that the medical regulation of prostitution was not effective, regulatory measures were maintained because they served a secondary goal of maintaining order and supervising the conduct of both prostitutes and soldiers.³⁹

More generally, controversial medical practices were maintained in the colonies because they made it possible for colonial authorities to protect their soldiers and settlers from disease while at the same time monitoring and regulating interracial sexual encounters. Actual policies and practices varied between and

36 Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth.

37 Tracol-Huynh, this volume, Hanoi.

38 See, for example, Michelle K. Rhoades, "Renegotiating French Masculinity: Medicine and Venereal Disease during the Great War", *French Historical Studies*, 29 (2006), pp. 293–327; Laura Doan, "Sex Education and the Great War Soldier: A Queer Analysis of the Practice of 'Hetero' Sex", *Journal of British Studies*, 51 (2012), pp. 641–663; Mary Louise Roberts, "The Price of Discretion: Prostitution, Venereal Disease, and the American Military in France, 1944–1946", 115 (2010), pp. 1002–1030; Glenford D. Howe, "Military-Civilian Intercourse, Prostitution and Venereal Disease Among Black West Indian Soldiers During World War I", *Journal of Caribbean History*, 31 (1997), pp. 88–118.

39 Herzog, this volume, Singapore.

within different empires. Britain, for example, had abolished formal regulation in Britain already in 1886 and in Singapore two years later. It did, however, impose regulation on Egypt in 1883 and on Iraq in 1921, while regulating prostitution in Palestine for only a couple of years after World War I. The French, on the other hand, abolished regulation at home only in 1946 and their regulation regimes in the colonies faced very little domestic criticism. Such differences can be ascribed to both imperial considerations and to circumstances on the ground, which comparative studies are now beginning to unravel.⁴⁰

The abolition of licensed brothels, at home and throughout the empire, was one of the causes that British and French women organized around before they obtained the right to vote. In Britain, Josephine Butler led a successful campaign against the contagious disease act.⁴¹ In France, abolitionist campaigns began in the 1870s and enjoyed only partial success until the official closing of licensed brothels in 1946. French regulationists justified the persistence of licensed houses in both France and the colonies in terms of a “need” to find a legitimate sexual outlet for colonized men who would otherwise prey on “respectable” women. Abolitionists, for their part, maintained that regulated brothels undermined men’s respect for respectable French women. They likewise described the operation of licensed brothels in the colonies as a betrayal of the sacred trust of civilization. Reserved quarters, such as in Casablanca or Saigon, particularly embarrassed French reformers.⁴²

Colonial regulation policies included regular medical examinations, restrictions on prostitutes’ residential choices, the establishment of state-controlled brothels and at times red-light districts or designated quarters, and controlling such women’s mobility not only within urban spaces but also nationally and globally. Colonial rule introduced a new language of hygiene and public order as well as new bureaucratic apparatuses to enforce it. Colonial rule also introduced and codified new anxieties about miscegenation and the different sexuality of the colonized. These also relied on specific assumptions about masculinity, especially that of young soldiers. Sexual intercourse was seen as

40 Three notable examples are Howell, *Geographies of Regulation*; Levine, *Prostitution, Race, and Politics*; Stephanie A. Limoncelli, *The Politics of Trafficking: The First International Movement to Combat the Sexual Exploitation of Women* (Stanford, 2010).

41 Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (Cambridge, 1980); Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865–1915* (Chapel Hill, 1994), pp. 127–170.

42 Julia Christine Scriven Miller, “The ‘Romance of Regulation’: The Movement against State-Regulated Prostitution in France, 1871–1946” (Unpublished Ph.D., New York University, 2000), pp. 361–446.

a biological necessity, and abstinence was unthinkable for young men when they were away from their wives or were still single; masturbation or homosexuality were frowned upon and this left prostitution as the only option.⁴³

As a result, while regulated prostitution had been losing ground in Britain since the 1880s and increasingly throughout continental Europe in the following decades, it was perceived as being indispensable in the colonies. On the one hand, colonial troops had to be protected. On the other hand, indigenous prostitutes could not be trusted to care for their own health without compulsory supervision. Again, the question of interracial sex, and then of the fraternization of colonial soldiers and administrators with indigenous men at the same brothels, required strict regulation and segregationist policies.

The centrality of colonial armies in policies regarding prostitutes is demonstrated through those policies that targeted the spread of venereal diseases; in Hanoi, if it was determined that a man had a venereal disease he was required to report the prostitute who infected him to the vice squad, and she could then be punished. The authorities sought mainly to regulate those women who were in contact with Europeans. Although regulation was applied only to prostitutes, artists and concubines were in some cases also under various kinds of supervision, with varying levels of success.⁴⁴

In Singapore, the Contagious Disease Act was repealed in 1888 after a long struggle between state authorities and social reformers who saw these acts as state-sponsored prostitution and an affront to British morality. Pressure from London further prevented the reinstatement of the Act. Singapore's officials, however, devised new ways of monitoring and regulating commercial sex.⁴⁵ As stated above, in Egypt and in Iraq the controversy over the CDA in Britain itself did not prevent the authorities from regulating prostitution in both localities.

Racial Hierarchies

Colonial prostitution, like colonial urban policies in general, relied on spatial segregation and legalized hierarchies between different populations. These could be simple dichotomous relations between colonizers and colonized, such as Europeans and non-Europeans, as was for instance the case in Cairo

43 Rhoades, "Renegotiating French Masculinity", pp. 293–327; Doan, "Sex Education and the Great War Soldier", pp. 641–663.

44 Tracol-Huynh, this volume, Hanoi.

45 Hertzog, this volume, Singapore.

and Casablanca.⁴⁶ These hierarchies were more complex or nuanced in Nairobi and Johannesburg, as Asians, Indians, and “coloured” constituted a third category.⁴⁷ Such hierarchies could determine who would be subjected to regulatory measures and who would not; where one was allowed to reside; whether a woman was subjected to medical examinations at a public clinic or could consult a private physician; how much she was allowed to charge; who she was allowed to have sex with; and, to what extent she could turn to the police for assistance.

In Singapore, sex workers were divided by class and ethnicity; different ethnic groups inhabited different parts of the city and those were divided by class as well.⁴⁸ In South Africa, European and black prostitutes were treated differently. Black prostitution was less of a concern in colonial and independent South Africa, as long as black prostitutes stayed in “native locations” and did not cross the colour line. It was not prostitution or black prostitution as such that were state concerns, but rather interracial sex: at first only non-marital sex, and later also interracial marriage.⁴⁹

These considerations did not have equal importance for British and French authorities. Whereas the French did not discourage the migration of French prostitutes to their colonies, the British strictly banned the migration of British prostitutes, while permitting the prostitution of other white women. As Tambe argues, the presence of eastern European Jewish women in Indian brothels served Britain’s dual purpose of supplying its soldiers with women who were “white enough” but not endangering its imperial reputation as these women were considered “non-*quite*-white”; colonial officials emphasized the Jewish background of these women, and thus from their perspective, respect for the empire was left intact as Indian men were not exposed to British prostitutes and had no opportunity to frequent them.⁵⁰ In Singapore as well, the immigration of eastern and central European women was encouraged, while the immigration of British prostitutes was banned.⁵¹

The legal status of white women often differed from non-white women, just as the status of immigrant women differed from that of indigenous women. In different colonial settings, the division was not clear-cut; mixed-blood or

46 Biancani and Hammad, this volume, Cairo.

47 Chacha, “An Over-view History of Prostitution in Nairobi”; Choonara, “Selling Sex in Johannesburg”.

48 Herzog, this volume, Singapore.

49 Choonara, “Selling Sex in Johannesburg”.

50 Tambe, *Codes of Misconduct*, pp. 57–67.

51 Herzog, this volume, Singapore.

mulatta women could be classified as white, non-white, or in-between, according to the context. These divisions, moreover, played on colonial male fantasies and on scientific assumptions about racial difference. In Vietnam, the colonial authorities saw Vietnamese prostitutes as dirty and dangerous, whereas Japanese women were considered to be medically safer and Chinese women were somewhere in the middle. European prostitutes, moreover, were considered to be a bad example of European behaviour, especially since they could be “bought” by Vietnamese men. In Vietnam, eastern European prostitutes had the privilege of being able to get private medical examinations.⁵²

Colonial regulation also meant that colonized women were treated differently than European women. Levine notes, for example, that in Britain itself women were registered after being arrested while the colonial assumption was that Indian women would register voluntarily because prostitution was not shameful in Indian culture. The colonial authorities also considered physical contact with colonized women to be a form of contamination that threatened to orientalise and degenerate British soldiers.⁵³

White slavery was also a concept that European empires employed in attempts to understand and later regulate the prostitution of white women in the colonies. It was Victor Hugo who coined the term “white slavery” in the 1870s to designate the denigration of French women in state-licensed brothels in France itself. In later decades, however, it was used to describe the kidnapping and trafficking of young women overseas such as English girls in the brothels of Brussels or Jewish women in Buenos Aires. The very existence and scope of such a trade has been controversial from the early days of the twentieth century up through present-day historical debates; it is clear that women migrated to work in prostitution and it is also clear that violence and deception were involved in some of these cases and that women were often much more vulnerable in foreign lands than at home. The controversy lies in the extent of coercion vs. consent involved, both in the past and present.

In the colonial context, these concerns were intimately related to imperial honour and prestige, as outlined above. The ability of the Empire to protect European girls and to a lesser extent indigenous girls from being trafficked and coerced into prostitution was a matter of state policy with regards to limiting the migration of unaccompanied women to colonial possessions and restricting admission to licensed brothels. These concerns were taken up in the 1920s by the League of Nations’ Committee on Traffic in Women and Children. Both

52 Tracol-Huynh, this volume, Hanoi.

53 Philippa Levine, “Venereal Disease, Prostitution and the Politics of Empire: The Case of British India”, *Journal of the History Sexuality*, 4 (1994), pp. 579–602.

Britain and France were represented in the committee and adhered to the relevant international conventions, but they were very hesitant to adhere on behalf of their colonial and mandatory possessions, and this was critiqued by international women's organizations as well as some of the members of the committee, especially the Danish feminist Valentine Dannevig.⁵⁴

The question of white slavery or trafficking in women and children as it was later called was related to the presence of white prostitutes abroad, both in Europe and overseas. In the colonies, as Chacha demonstrates, the presence of white women was supposed to civilize the colony by encouraging white men to adopt normative standards of respectability.⁵⁵ White prostitutes, on the other hand, had the potential to reduce the reputation of the empire in the eyes of the colonized.

Conclusion

The current overview first examined how colonial expansion affected the global geography of prostitution. The formation of colonial outposts and capitalist enterprises attracted migratory populations and with them the urban development of prostitution. Thus, communities of migrants from the countryside, in addition to European women and migrants from neighbouring regions or settlements, came into being throughout the colonized world. The regulation of prostitution and commercial forms of exchange replaced a variety of former prostitudinal practices which disappeared in places like India and North Africa. Colonial policies also affected urban spaces, leading to the creation of walled brothel districts where there had been none, and some of those urban layouts outlasted colonial rule.

Prostitution in colonial settings differed from prostitution in the metropolis in several important respects. One was racial segregation which is common, in one degree or another, to all colonial contexts. Another was colonial armies, the presence of which dictated policies, regulations, and practices. Yet another

54 On the League of Nations' Committee on the Traffic in Women and Children, see Jessica R. Pliley, "Claims to Protection: The Rise and Fall of Feminist Abolitionism in the League of Nations' Committee on the Traffic in Women and Children, 1919–1936?" *Journal of Women's History*, 22 (2010), pp. 90–113; Magaly Rodríguez García, "The League of Nations and the Moral Recruitment of Women", *International Review of Social History*, 57 (2012), pp. 97–128; Katarina Leppänen, "International Reorganisation and Traffic In Women: Venues of Vulnerability and Resistance", *Lychnos* (2006), pp. 110–128.

55 Chacha, "An Over-view History of Prostitution in Nairobi".

characteristic was the marginal effect that the indigenous population had on regulation policies, which were decided by colonial authorities with little regard for the population's needs or concerns.

Alongside these commonalities, this paper highlighted several important differences. French authorities were more likely to regulate prostitution than British ones, and Spanish colonialism tended to tolerate interracial sex more than the British model. Also, official red-light districts were more characteristic of French colonial cities than their British counterparts. An explanation for these differences cannot be offered in this overview, as that would require more thorough research in colonial archives. Such research would also be able to address questions that urban overviews situated in specific urban settings cannot address about inter- and intra-colonial influences. We know that policies in the colonies and medical knowledge acquired in colonial hospitals affected policies in the *metropole* but the multiple ways they did so are subjects beyond the scope of this volume that demand further research.

Seeing Beyond Prostitution: Agency and the Organization of Sex Work

Thaddeus Gregory Blanchette

In order to understand the role agency plays in sex work, we must first divest ourselves of the liberal belief that the term is a synonym for free will, sovereignty, or untrammelled choice. Furthermore, we must also challenge two common positions regarding prostitution: its naturalization as a moral category and the belief that it is simply work, like any other work under capitalism. Finally, we must also question as analytical categories certain emic¹ or accusatory categories such as trafficking, pimp, and prostitute. Only by cultivating a cultural studies approach that looks at commercial sex as a rich field of human activities intimately intertwined with wider forms of engendered labour performed by women can we understand the role individual agency plays in the (re)production of forms of sexual/affective exchange understood to be prostitution.

I am not a libertarian, I rarely talk about rights and freedoms. I also am not a neoliberal proponent of the happiness of making money in a free marketplace. What I am is a believer in human agency. I believe that disadvantaged persons with limited options of how to proceed in life have, until they are actually put in chains, some space to move, negotiate, prefer one option to another. This position hardly seems philosophical to me, and I am not going to get credit for inventing a new theory with it. Yet time and again it turns conversations upside down.

LAURA AGUSTIN

Stop punishing me just because you may not be able to imagine being me.

Artist and sex worker SADIE LUNE

1 Emic categories are those used by a group of insiders—members of a certain population—to describe reality. In the case of sex work, the emic categories that are usually employed, sans analysis, come from law enforcement, social work, and so-called “rescue” groups.

Introduction

My partner, Dr Ana Paula da Silva, does a lot of her research into prostitution in restrooms. One evening, she went into one and found a young woman crying alone over an industrial sink. Ana is an excellent ethnographer and a sympathetic person, so it didn't take her long to find out what was wrong.

The young woman was working to support her family, in which she was the only labouring adult. She had been on the job for three months—some days for up to twelve hours—but had yet to be paid. She had met her household's expenses by borrowing at exorbitant interest rates. Now, word had come down that her pay would be delayed for a fourth month running. She had no effective legal response and was at wit's end. As she talked to Ana, she confessed that she was thinking of killing herself. Only the thought of her family being stripped of any income kept her going.

"After all", she said, half declaring, half entreating, "as long as I keep working, they have to pay me some day. Right?"

Many of you reading this story in its present context—a volume on the global history of prostitution—are probably recognizing this young woman's plight. After all, the received wisdom regarding those who sell sex highlights the variety of deceptions that are used to exploit them. We have read thousands of pages on sex worker enslavement, recruitment under false pretences, indebtedness... The terms "pimp", "trafficker", and "exploiter" fall glibly from our tongues. If there's one thing the histories in this collaborative volume emphasize, it's that prostitutes² are often exploited and sometimes enslaved.

2 What to call those who sell or exchange sex for livelihood is quite complicated. Most of the people I interact with prefer "sex worker" while many wish to reclaim "prostitute". Both terms have problems. As prostitute rights activist Gabriela Leite points out, "sex worker" is a conceptually more general word which can be applied to anyone involved in the commercialization of sex, including strippers, phone sex workers, and even people otherwise glossed as "pimps". "Prostitute", according to Leite, has the advantage of referring specifically to the person having sex for money. It is in this sense that many of the authors in this volume seem to use the term. However, this is also problematic because people who may not actually sell sex (but rather trade it) are often understood to be prostitutes. Furthermore, people who actually do sell sex but do so in relatively privileged social circumstances that permit destigmatization (i.e. bar hostesses in upper class clubs, middle class "party girls", some sexual therapists, and certain wives and mistresses) manage to largely avoid being qualified as prostitutes. Finally, the view that *prostitution* refers to the simple commercial sale of sex is empirically complicated by the fact that many sex workers sell a wide range of things that go beyond sex, such as companionship and affective services of all sorts (Elizabeth Bernstein, *Temporarily Yours: Intimacy, Authenticity and the Commerce of Sex* (Chicago, 2007)). Nevertheless, we

But I haven't been entirely honest with you. Although Ana does much of her ethnographic work in restrooms, this particular incident didn't happen in a brothel, but at her university. UNISUOR³ is a private school in Rio de Janeiro. The woman in question was a newly employed professor with a master's degree. Her monthly salary was around 4,000 reais, which at the time made it the equivalent of eight minimum wages or four times what fully 72 per cent of Brazilian workers earn (around 1,000 reais monthly in 2010).⁴ In 2008, only 17 per cent of all Brazilian households were earning what she was earning.⁵ All of this presumes, of course, that she was receiving her salary—which she wasn't.

The dilemma faced by this young professor is nothing new to Brazilian workers, especially those who (like the majority of female workers) struggle in the economy's lower reaches.⁶ Brazilian workers are vulnerable to gross exploitation. Having a job does not necessarily mean that one receives a salary and for those caught in this cycle of late- or unpaid work, the means to confront one's bosses are few and the opportunities to go into debt while awaiting payment are many.

It is certainly true that prostitutes and professors are not the same. Prostitution involves stigma and risks that professors do not face and these have real consequences for sex workers' lives. What the above story illustrates, however, is the degree of exploitation and lack of options faced even by privileged female workers. Often when we talk about prostitution, the common labour practices of the neo-liberal globalized economy disappear and exploitation is conceived of outside its larger economic framework. Prostitution is analysed as if it were a separate field from life and labour in general, not just in moral or theoretical terms, but in terms of life as it is lived. Because of this, the question of why many women enter into prostitution is stripped of any real context.

Nowhere is this perhaps more apparent than in discussions about *agency* and prostitutes' ability to choose sexual labour. Few people ask if maids,

must have labels. In this chapter, I will use "*sex worker*" and "*prostitute*" interchangeably to refer to women who exchange sex for livelihood. Obviously, there are also male prostitutes, but given that the histories collected here rarely mention them, my focus here will likewise be restricted to women.

3 UNISUOR is a fake name and an in-joke between me and Ana Paula. It means "UniSweat" and it reflects the belief of many of the institution's professors that it is a sweatshop for educators.

4 IBGE, *Mulher no mercado de trabalho: perguntas e respostas* (Brasília, 2012); UOL "IBGE: 72% dos brasileiros ganhavam até 2 salários mínimos em 2010", *UOL Economia*, 19 March 2012, available at: <http://economia.uol.com.br/noticias/redacao/2012/12/19/ibge-72-dos-brasileiros-ganhavam-ate-2-salarios-minimos-em-2010.htm>; last accessed 2 August 2017.

5 IBGE, *Pesquisa nacional por amostra de domicílio 2002/2008* (Brasília, 2009).

6 IBGE, *Mulher no mercado de trabalho*.

check-out counter girls, baby-sitters, street cleaners, or factory workers (and certainly not professors) “really want” to do their jobs. In fact, for almost every kind of labour except sex work, workers’ ability to choose and act tends to be simply presumed; they do that job because they chose to and they can leave any time they want. Agency, however, must be questioned when the work is sexual and the worker is female.

In this chapter, I will argue that sex work occurs in a specific engendered context and that in order to understand agency in sex work, we must first divest ourselves of the belief that the term is a synonym for free will, sovereignty, or untrammelled choice. Agency is much less, but also much more than that. We must also denaturalize prostitution itself, as well as the terms which surround sex work; these are not *etic*⁷ or analytical categories, but rather accusations.

When I say that prostitution occurs in a specific engendered context, I am saying that when we look at agency, we need to perceive that sex work has generally taken place as part of what Gayle Rubin calls “the world historical defeat of women”⁸ in which women’s sexual/reproductive capacities have been alienated and their labour situated as private services or obligations to men and not socially productive work or, indeed, as the woman’s own labour.⁹

As both Rubin and anthropologist Sherry Ortner point out, it is precisely female sexual-reproductive capacities that seem to have created “woman” as a social category whose sexuality needs to be constrained and possessed, especially in the context of patriarchal hypergamic societies.¹⁰ Women’s desires and interests have rarely been foregrounded in *any* form of socially legitimated sexual interaction and it is important to remember in this context that marriage has first and foremost been an economic and (re)productive arrangement between non-equal parties throughout most of human history. Only relatively recently has it taken on its idealized role in bourgeois western thought as a source of sexual and emotional fulfilment based upon equal partnership.

If we define prostitution as the exchange of sexual/reproductive/affective acts for livelihood, it encompasses a series of interactions that include so-called “transactional sex”, many stable affective/sexual relationships, and

7 Etic categories stand in contrast to emic categories (see footnote 1). They are science-oriented and speak to a wider audience than one small cultural group. They seek to describe cultures impartially.

8 Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex”, in Reiter (ed.), *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (New York, 1975), pp. 157–210.

9 Friedrich Engels, “The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State”, in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: Selected Works* (New York, 1986), pp. 468–595.

10 Sherry Ortner, “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?” and “The Virgin and the State”, in Ortner, *Making Gender: The Politics and Erotics of Culture* (Boston, 1996), pp. 21–58.

several types of pre-capitalist exchange (outlined by Mauss and more recently discussed by Graeber).¹¹ Without wishing to reinforce the old saw that prostitution is the world's oldest profession, it seems that we must accept the fact that the use of sex in instrumentalist exchange certainly pre-dates capitalism, patriarchy, and even perhaps the human condition.¹² Capitalism, in other words, has not commodified women's sexual-reproductive capacities; these were alienated as items of exchange long before the modern era, as Rubin, following Lévi-Strauss, points out.¹³ As Engels himself noted, the development of industry has actually provided the conditions through which women have begun to free themselves, if imperfectly, from this commodification.¹⁴

It is within this historical context in which women's work has been bracketed by unpaid obligations on the one hand, and restricted or devalued employment on the other, that we must understand agency in sex as work. We thus need to look at the conditions, freedoms, and restrictions involved in different forms of prostitution and how these combine with women's needs, plans, and desires in the face of the other engendered opportunities available on their horizon of possibilities. In this view, prostitution should not be treated as a homogenous category, but rather as a series of diverse activities that can encompass a variety of lived exchanges, oppressions, and liberties. Women who engage in the sale of sex generally have these factors in mind and not a utopian promise of a world freed from the shackles of class and gender.

It is when we understand prostitution within this larger context that agency becomes important but not as a synonym for free will or opportunity. The reason one discusses agency is not to reify the individual human will but to understand the how's and why's of an individual's actions in the face of a socially constrained horizon of possibilities. Unlike social determinists, moreover, those who take a relational perspective of agency see a dialectic existing between individuals and social structure. To properly apprehend this dialectic, one cannot explain micro-scale effects exclusively by looking at large order structures; one needs to specify and see how the macro is also constituted from

11 Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (London, 1990) and David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5000 Years*, (Brooklyn, 2011).

12 Gomes and Boesch, for example, show that wild chimpanzees apparently exchange meat for sex. Christina M. Gomes & Christophe Boesch, "Wild Chimpanzees Exchange Meat for Sex on a Long-Term Basis", *PLoS ONE*, 4 (2009), available at: <http://www.plosone.org/article/citationList.action?sessionId=2F5438EB4D946ACD217EF1EAB223B541?articleURI=info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0005116>; last accessed 2 August 2017.

13 Rubin, "The Traffic in Women"; Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (New York, 1969).

14 Engels, "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State", pp. 509–510.

the apparent chaos of the micro. In the case of prostitution, this means appreciating the plurality of sexual exchanges themselves and their interactions with other sorts of exchanges in a given socio-economic context.

Agency and Prostitution

Debates about agency and its relation to structure have a long history in the social sciences, reaching back to sociologist Émile Durkheim's comments regarding the interplay between individual will and social facts.¹⁵ The problem of agency revolves around to what degree, if any, human beings can make choices in the face of coercive social pressures.

As Durkheim pointed out, society cannot be understood as the sum of individual human actions as it exists outside the individual and exerts a coercive power upon her:

[T]here are ways of acting, thinking and feeling which possess the remarkable property of existing outside the consciousness of the individual. Not only are these types of behavior and thinking external to the individual, but they are endued with a compelling and coercive power by virtue of which, whether he wishes it or not, they impose themselves upon him.¹⁶

For Durkheim, however, this coercive power of the social is not absolute; it is refracted through the individual conscience, creating a situation in which the effects of social facts are inevitably different from the facts themselves. Individuals, in other words, retain the ability to modulate social coercion through their performance in the face of social strictures and structures and they inevitably exercise this ability even when they attempt to faithfully follow rules and laws.¹⁷ Individuals, however, notoriously do not always attempt to follow their society's precepts. Even such strict anti-liberal social determinists as Berger and Luckmann point out that institutions break down and lose their relevance

15 Émile Durkheim, *The Rules of the Sociological Method* (New York, 1982), pp. 50–59. In fact, the debate reaches further back still to Marx and Engels and even to the acrimonious arguments surrounding predestination during the Reformation. The question concerning to what extent humans are actually free to choose has been perennial within western and, indeed, human thought.

16 Durkheim, *The Rules of the Sociological Method*, p. 51.

17 *Ibid.*, pp. 54–59.

to the degree that they become divorced from the concrete *praxis* of socialized individuals:

Deviance from the institutionally “programmed” courses of action becomes likely once the institutions have become realities divorced from their original relevance in the concrete social processes from which they arose. To put this more simply, it is more likely that one will deviate from programmes set up for one by others than from programmes that one has helped establish oneself.¹⁸

The trend within recent sociology and social anthropology has been towards seeing agency in light of this dialectical relationship between the individual conscience and social structure. This tendency has perhaps reached its apex in certain lines of post-structuralist anthropology. An example is Pierre Bourdieu’s understanding of habitus as the internalized expression of external social constraints, with individual actions that have been modulated by interests transmitting change to the social fields that are productive of habitus.¹⁹ A similar understanding can be found in Marshall Sahlins’ *Islands of History*²⁰ with culture providing the rules for individual behaviour and praxis inevitably leading to cultural change. A good workable definition of agency within this intellectual trend has been provided by Emirbayer and Mische, who see it as

...a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its “iterational” or habitual aspect) but also oriented towards the future (as a “projective” capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a “practical-calculative” capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment).²¹

Within the debates surrounding prostitution, however, agency has taken on a different connotation. Contrary to its current use within sociology and anthropology, the word seems to be generally used as a synonym for free will, especially by feminist theorists whose opinions inform a large portion of the

18 Peter L. Berger & Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (London, 1984), p. 80.

19 Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge, 1972).

20 Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago, 1985).

21 Mustafa Emirbayer & Ann Mische, “What is Agency?” *The American Journal of Sociology*, 103 (1998), pp. 962–1023.

debates surrounding sex as work. Take, for example, this statement by prostitution scholar Julia O'Connell-Davidson:

Though some [...] women and children have been forced into prostitution by a third party, it is dull economic compulsion that drives many of them into sex work, just as in America (a country with a per capita GDP of US \$21,558), many women and girls “elect” to prostitute themselves rather than join the 35 per cent of the female workforce earning poverty-level wages [...]. To describe such individuals as exercising rights of self-sovereignty seems as spurious as stating that their prostitution represents a violation of their right to dignity. There is no dignity in poverty, which denies the person full powers of agency. Yet the right to sell one's labor (sexual or otherwise) does not guarantee the restitution of dignity or moral agency.²²

Here, O'Connell-Davidson implies that agency is synonymous with self-sovereignty and is something that increases as one's economic status improves. She seems to be saying that within a capitalist society, rich people have more agency than poor people. Furthermore, it is their relative lack of agency that “forces” women²³ into prostitution through “dull compulsion”. The choice between sex work and “poverty-level wages” is understood to not be a real choice at all and is thus not “full [...] agency”.

O'Connell-Davidson understands prostitution to be a form of labour and prostitutes as women who exercise some degree of agency, however constrained. Her principal abolitionist interlocutors—people such as Sheila Jeffreys, Catherine McKinnon, Meghan Murphy, and Melissa Farley—oppose the very notion of sex as work, claiming that prostitution is *ipso facto* engendered violence comparable to slavery. According to these intellectuals, to talk about agency in such a situation borders upon the obscene.

The most commonly encountered abolitionist feminist view is that prostitution cannot be work because in it, the woman transforms her body into a

22 Julia O'Connell Davidson, “The Rights and Wrongs of Prostitution”, *Hypatia*, 17 (2002), pp. 84–98, 90.

23 Obviously, many categories of people other than women and girls—men, boys and the transgendered—enter into sex work. Debates regarding prostitution have historically revolved around the question of female prostitution, however. That is also the focus of my own research and of every article in the current volume. Given this, the present article concentrates on the heterosexual prostitution of women and girls. The question of whether or not the analysis presented here is of use in discussing other forms of sex work is something I leave for future debate.

good that is then alienated on the market. This argument is expanded through the addition of the “pimp” (a very poorly defined accusatory figure, as we shall see below), who is understood to actually own the prostituted woman’s body, transforming her into a slave.²⁴

There are several problems with this viewpoint, beginning with the observable fact that bodies are not alienated and sold in prostitution any more than they are in the production of any other non-concrete good. As Brazilian sex worker rights activist Indianara Siqueira pithily remarked at a seminar at the National Law College in Rio de Janeiro: “Honey, if I sold my body, there’d be nothing left of it for you to see today.”

Of course, if a sex worker is in fact enslaved then her body may indeed become a commodity. This is not something that is limited to prostitution, however: any worker, once enslaved, becomes a commodity. But even if most prostitution were slavery, this would not disqualify it as work. No-one denies that slaves work: it is, in fact, their *raison d’être*. What qualifies work as slavery is not the labour that is performed, but the condition of the labourer as an unfree subject and commodity.

Abolitionist feminists make a more subtle point, however, when they claim that even freely consenting to prostitution is not work like other work. They anchor this argument in their understanding of human social relations as patriarchal, claiming that the position of women within a labour system that is conceptually organized around male dominance leads to the marginalization of women as labourers and, in fact, socially erases much of what women actually do, qualifying this as non-work. Given the greater context of the economic marginalization of women under capitalism and the institutionalized misogyny of patriarchy, abolitionists argue that no-one can truly say that women freely choose prostitution; rather, they are compelled to it by greater social constraints. In such a situation, according to these theorists, it is futile to talk about agency as social structure trumps individual will.

What is curious about this position, however, is that these feminists do not seem to take their own arguments regarding the marginalization of women’s labour to its logical conclusions. After all, according to Friedrich Engels, one of

24 Finn McKay, “Arguing Against the Industry of Prostitution: Beyond the Abolitionist Versus Sex-Worker Binary”, *Feminist Current*, 24 June 2013, available at: <http://feministcurrent.com/7758/arguing-against-the-industry-of-prostitution-beyond-the-abolitionist-versus-sex-worker-binary/>; last accessed 2 August 2017; Janice G. Raymond, “Prostitution as Violence Against Women: NGO Stonewalling in Beijing and Elsewhere”, *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 21 (1998), pp. 1–9; Sheila Jeffreys, *The Idea of Prostitution* (North Melbourne, 2009).

the founders of the critique of patriarchal capitalism, in bourgeois marriage the wife “differs from the ordinary courtesan only in that she does not hire out her body, like a wage-worker, on piecework, but sells it into slavery once and for all.”²⁵ In other words, the wife stands in relation to the prostitute as the slave does to the worker. In fact, the voluntarism of the marriage contract itself is understood by Engels as being determined by the same social coercive forces which abolitionist feminists claim make a mockery of the idea of choice in the context of prostitution.

Readings of abolitionist feminist critiques of sex work reveal that there is rarely a discussion of this point; it is as if prostitution were either the nadir or origin of women’s oppression. And yet, as so many of the contributions in this book point out, prostitution was and often is a means of escape from even more onerous and un- or underpaid forms of work carried out within traditional women’s roles. For it is a fact that while prostitution (absent actual slavery) does not necessarily entail possession of women’s bodies, engendered family roles have often historically meant exactly that.

Ultimately, both O’Connell-Davidson and her abolitionist interlocutors fall into the same problem *vis-à-vis* agency; while attacking the liberal view of agency as the right to consent and contract, they unfortunately end up reifying agency itself. Both construct a utopian condition (what O’Connell-Davidson calls the “full powers of agency”) around a non-existent alternative to engendered market-based capitalism in order to critique sex work. While such a critique is interesting, if used as the basis for an understanding of truly occurring prostitution, it violates one of the key principles of social-scientific investigation: it classifies social facts as moral constructs that should be evaluated *a priori* according to pre-established philosophies.²⁶ When set against the opportunities presumably available in a postcapitalist, postpatriarchal utopia, the choices made by women facing servile marriage, low-wage labour, or prostitution can seem very pitiful indeed. “Full powers of agency”, understood as freedom from engendered socio-economic constraint, don’t exist, however, and actually occurring agency cannot be measured in relation to them.

When one anchors the concept of agency in the idea of free choice, one obfuscates actually occurring social *praxis* in which people make constrained choices that are nevertheless perceived by themselves and others as very real. As relational theorists point out, people make decisions within a socio-culturally defined field of possibilities and these decisions significantly alter

25 Frederick Engels, “The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State”, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works* (New York, 1986), pp. 468–595, 503.

26 Durkheim, *The Rules of the Sociological Method*.

their life trajectories.²⁷ It is difficult, from this point of view, to claim that individuals have “more” or “less” agency, as agency is not a reified object which can be quantitatively measured but rather the innate ability of individuals to refract social forces in accordance with their interests, calculations, and choices, thus (re)producing social structures. Within this point of view, asking how much agency an individual has is rather like asking which ocean is wetter.

The feminist critique of engendered capitalism is well-taken; life as it’s lived is certainly not a level playing field where everyone competes as free agents. Some people have more opportunities than others. Opportunity, however, is not agency and to mistake it as such is to confuse object with subject. Furthermore, in the world of labour as it’s lived, it must be remembered that few if any workers have a wide variety of options—even university professors. This, of course, was the reality faced by the young woman in UNISUOR’s restroom: given the social constraints and commitments in which she was embedded, she couldn’t simply “up and leave”. Her employers, conscious of this fact, had neatly trapped her in a cycle of precarious labour and indebtedness. Her options were very constrained, even though she was engaged in a more comfortable (and certainly less stigmatized) form of labour than most sex workers.

Agency has thus become something of a red herring in discussions of sex work; it is most often used to construct a false dichotomy between voluntary and involuntary prostitution or to claim that, in the face of a coercive and engendered capitalist economy, no-one can ever “freely” choose sex work (as if one could “freely” choose most other forms of labour). In the name of weighing a reified “agency” (and thus supposedly determining whether or not a given form of prostitution is slavery or quasi-slavery), questions are asked of sex workers that are rarely asked of other labourers. “Do you really want to work as a prostitute?” is one of these. “Do you regret choosing this path?” is another.

Sex Work and Economies of Makeshift

An important effect of the reified view of agency is that it doesn’t allow us to see sex work as a logical continuation of (or a revolt against) normative gender relations under patriarchal capitalism. One thing that I commonly encounter in my fieldwork—and which many of the texts in this volume also demonstrate—are women who sell sex as an extension of other, socially respectable, engendered roles. An excellent example of this can be found in

27 Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*; Gilberto Velho, *Projeto e metamorfose: Antropologia das sociedades complexas* (Rio de Janeiro, 1972).

Dasgupta's²⁸ article on Calcutta. Because of traditional Indian taboos against remarriage, women who choose to be housewives and mothers can find themselves bereft of both economic support and sexual fulfilment upon the death of a partner. It is not surprising, then, to find that 78 per cent of the women who voluntarily chose sex work in Dasgupta's study are widows. The sex working, family-supporting mother or daughter is also a classic example of this phenomenon. Rio de Janeiro prostitutes often emphasize that they've chosen sex work in order to provide better educational opportunities for their children or healthcare for their parents. In these situations, prostitution is situated as an adjunct for the reproduction of the family and a necessary extension of women's roles within it.

In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Bruges, twentieth-century Nairobi, early twentieth-century Rio de Janeiro, early twentieth-century Buenos Aires, mid-twentieth-century Nigeria, twentieth-century Bolivia and, in fact, in almost every context presented in this volume, increased female immigration to cities, combined with poor or uncertain wages in engendered labour markets, led women to combine sex work with other forms of (generally unstable and poorly paying) labour. Seasonal work, piece work, and dependent labour all characterize much of what is traditionally considered "women's work", making the salaries obtained through these forms of labour insufficient or uncertain. These conditions of engendered labour make sex work a viable and/or necessary option for many women in an economy of makeshifts.²⁹

One should not be too quick to label sex work in this context a "survival strategy", however, especially if one means to set it apart from other work through this. All work is ultimately a survival strategy. To claim that certain women are "vulnerable" to sex work while not seeing them as "vulnerable" to other forms of women's labour is to naturalize prostitution as inferior labour. It is also important to remember that "women's work" has often combined labour and sex in ways which may not be neatly categorizable. In the chapters on nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, Havana, Bruges, and Singapore we find reports of domestic labour being intermixed with the provision of sexual services.³⁰ Furthermore, as Mechant points out, domestic labour in particular makes women highly dependent on the family as an employer and thus

28 Dasgupta, this volume, Calcutta.

29 For an understanding of the concept of the "economy of makeshifts" and its application to women's lives in one given historical context, see Chapter 2 of Sarah Mendelson & Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England 1550–1720* (Oxford, 2003).

30 In fact, the persistent occurrence of this mix of sexual and domestic labour in almost all the chapters leads me to wonder if some sort of deeper, structural factor might be in play.

particularly liable to lose everything upon unemployment. This, in turn, often results in a domestic worker's rapid entry into prostitution upon dismissal.³¹

Other forms of socially acceptable women's work may involve systematic sexual exploitation, as is the case with women's labour in the construction trade in Calcutta.³² It should be pointed out that this sort of coercion is hardly restricted to "lower class" occupations. Shortly after Ana left UNISUOR, for example, the university's male chancellor was discovered in the school's parking lot engaging in sexual relations with a young female professor; she was immediately fired and he continued on with his post. Rumours abounded that the professor in question had been the target of sexual coercion.

Traditional marriage for women is also, in many contexts, a combination of unpaid domestic and sexual labour and this supposedly "free" sex is certainly not free of coercion. In the words of one of our informants, a 35-year-old woman who works in Copacabana:

When you marry a man, that's when he thinks he owns you. What I do here in the streets isn't any different from what I did at home when I was married [...]. It was a job, just like this here. Actually, that's a lie: it was a *duty*. And you don't make money off of a duty. Here at least I get paid for what I do. My husband never paid me.³³

Sex work, for all its many problems, can be liberating, especially when it is set against other forms of traditional women's work. And while sex work does result in situations similar to slavery, so do other kinds of work, particularly in the lowest reaches of the economy. It's interesting to note in this context that Dasgupta's Calcuttan informant Sapna distinguished sex work as a superior oppositional category to both the supposed "freely given" sex of marriage and the coerced sex demanded of women by foremen in the construction trade, declaring "No more free and forced sex!"³⁴

For a woman to sell sex at least presumes that she has sex to sell, in other words, that it is hers.³⁵ This position stands in direct contrast to a wide range

31 Mechant, this volume, Bruges.

32 Dasgupta, this volume, Calcutta.

33 Thaddeus Gregory Blanchette & Ana Paula da Silva, "Prostitution in Contemporary Rio de Janeiro" in Susan Dewy & Patty Kelly (eds), *Policing Pleasure: Sex Work, Policy and the State in Global Perspective* (New York, 2011), pp. 130–145.

34 Dasgupta, this volume, Calcutta.

35 This presumes, of course, that the woman in question is not a slave. That qualifier, however, should be made for all forms of labour and not just the sexual.

of historically occurring forms of sex and gender control which situate female sexuality as the possession of another, almost always an older man. If one of the horrors of “pimping” is that a man possesses a woman’s sexuality, it must be recognized that this has historically been a base condition for “respectable” women throughout history. As Simone de Beauvoir pointed out forty years ago, sex work can indeed be empowering for some women in that it at least asserts—as the title of Cristiana Schettini’s review of sex work in early twentieth century Rio de Janeiro points out—that women have their own bodies.³⁶ If we accept that economic power increases women’s options in the world, then getting paid for sex can indeed be liberatory as many sex working women point out, especially if it stands in opposition to not getting paid for sex and having to do it anyway.

But finally, as so many authors in this collaborative effort show, sex work pays well when compared to other forms of women’s work—often ridiculously well. This is, of course, why many women choose to work selling sex. Moreover, prostitution can also involve more flexible and even more attractive work conditions than other kinds of commonly available labour.

It’s true, as anthropologist Susan Dewey points out, that sex workers may exaggerate their income, stating as “typical” what in fact might be extraordinary and receiving liquid earnings that are ultimately comparable to those achieved in other forms of low-wage labour.³⁷ However, many of the articles in this volume report sex work earnings that are much higher than any other comparative form of feminized labour. Mechant remarks, in fact, that the price for sexual services has remained remarkably consistent in Bruges over the centuries at the equivalent of one (male) day’s wage.³⁸ This, interestingly enough, seems to be another pattern which repeats itself in many different contexts. Hammad and Biancani, for example, report that lower-class prostitutes in Cairo in the early twentieth century charged 10 piastres a head while native masons during the same period made 6–12 piastres per day.³⁹ In Rio de Janeiro in 2009, the cheapest prostitutes charged 15–20 reals per act at a time when the minimum wage was around 500 reals a month, or 16.6 reals a day. Meanwhile,

36 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York, 1953); Cristiana Schettini, “*Que tenhas teu corpo*”: Uma história social da prostituição no Rio de Janeiro das primeiras décadas republicanas (Rio de Janeiro, 2004).

37 Susan Dewey, *Neon Wasteland: On Love, Motherhood, and Sex Work in a Rust Belt Town* (Berkeley, 2011).

38 Mechant, this volume, Bruges.

39 Biancani and Hammad, this volume, Cairo.

the prostitutes working in the city's most luxurious saunas—women whose clients typically made 10,000 reais a month or more—were charging 350 reais.

The ability to earn in one sex act what a male earns in a day is a non-trivial means of achieving one's socio-economic goals which can counterbalance the stigma of prostitution and the need to perform sex without desire. Thus, while prostitution may not take women's sexual desires into consideration, it often provides a more satisfactory means of achieving a woman's other desires than any form of labour available on her horizon of possibilities. The ability to choose to be a prostitute rather than, say, a wife or a maid is not necessarily a small thing, even if it doesn't provide "sovereignty" (and is there a profession that does?).

What is particular about agency within this general context is that in spite of claims that women entering into sex work have "no real choice", many sex working women are very clear that this is indeed a real choice for them. It is often the best available way to meet the multiple engendered demands to which they are subject, escape other demands, and create opportunities that would otherwise not be open to them. In fact, it may be precisely because they are mothers, daughters, wives, widows, divorcees, and/or desirous of the glamorous, on-the-go, consuming, independent, professional lifestyle held out to them as the feminine ideal by much of today's globalized media that so many women enter into sex work. In short, they are often chasing opportunities and not just being driven by need.

When we claim that women are "vulnerable" to trafficking and prostitution, while forgetting that they are also vulnerable to un-, underpaid or coerced labour and forced immobility, we forget that migration and sex work are often seen by women as a means of escaping onerous, but more socially acceptable, engendered duties. This is particularly obvious in Chacha's discussion of prostitution in Nairobi, where migration to the city and a life as a "disrespectable" woman was a means of escape from the traditional demands placed on women for unpaid agricultural labour by the rural patriarchal gerontocracy.⁴⁰ Ekpootu details similar situations in Nigeria, highlighting how not only female migrants from the rural interior, but also middle-class, urban university students involved in "runs" see prostitution as a means of providing an entry into modern, urbanizing, individualizing consumer culture.⁴¹

40 Babere Kerata Chacha, "An Over-view History of Prostitution in Nairobi: From the Pre-colonial Period to the Present", unpublished paper collected for the project "Selling Sex in the City", 2013.

41 Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria.

At the same time, sex workers are also usually very clear about the dangers and stigmas they are subject to; they are aware that they are often seen by other members of society as “the lowest of the low” and that this makes them vulnerable to harassment, exploitation, and violence. Prostitution is generally not understood by them to be positive (though, of course, there is a significant minority that disagrees) and it is not what they would “freely choose” if given the proverbial three wishes. Nevertheless, they often see it as the best choice available along their horizon of possibilities.

It is thus in the field of truly existing opportunities and desires that women exercise the decision to engage in sex work and not against the backdrop of some utopian full autonomy where all possibilities are equally available. Nevertheless, these decisions are real and have real consequences. It is women’s negotiation of the possibilities and perils of sex work—in short, their agency—which often determines whether or not sex work allows them to achieve their goals, traps them in a regressive life cycle,⁴² or, indeed, enslaves them.

Agency and the Social Organization of Prostitution

When we apply a relational understanding of agency to prostitution, we begin to see that the questions we should be asking have to do with what options are opened or closed for a person who engages in sex work. How does sex work link to, reinforce, negate, or modify other social roles, especially engendered roles? How do people negotiate the possibilities created by sex work while trying to avoid its pitfalls? How does this work intersect with other social forms and institutions?

In order to give a reasonable account of prostitution as work, we must study it as a set of lived cultures and not as a singular, abstract, ideologized category. It is only by situating sex work within life as it’s lived by socially-constrained actors that its meanings become clear. The ultimate poverty of the eternal arguments between “sex positive” and “abolitionist” feminists and their respective political allies is that these debates reify extremely abstract definitions of prostitution to the point where they have little, if any, link to actually occurring social practices.

42 The concept of the “regressive life cycle” comes from Paul Cressey’s ground-breaking sex work study *The Taxi Dance Hall* (Chicago, 2008 [1932]), p. 97. It refers to the fact that work which places a high premium on youth, beauty, and/or novelty tends to trap labourers in a downward spiral in which it becomes ever more difficult to reproduce economic success.

Anthropologist Laura Agustin believes that the only way out of the impasse in which a large part of prostitution studies has been stuck over the past century is to look at commercial sex as a rich field of human activities intimately intertwined with the surrounding socio-cultural milieus:

The cultural study of commercial sex would use a cultural-studies, interdisciplinary approach to fill gaps in knowledge about commercial sex and relate the findings to other social and cultural concepts. Recent work has demonstrated how people who sell sex are excluded from studies of migration, of service work and of informal economies, and are instead examined only in terms of “prostitution”, a concept that focuses on transactions between individuals, especially their personal motivations. With the academic, media and “helping” gaze fixed almost exclusively on women who sell sex, the great majority of phenomena that make up the sex industry are ignored, and this in itself contributes to the intransigent stigmatization of these women [...]. A cultural-studies approach [...] would look at commercial sex in its widest sense, examining its intersections with art, ethics, consumption, family life, entertainment, sport, economics, urban space, sexuality, tourism and criminality, not omitting issues of race, class, gender, identity and citizenship.⁴³

The persistent classification of prostitution as a morally separate and inferior activity engaged in by women who have a distinct and sexualized social persona flattens and homogenizes the phenomenon. When “agency” becomes a code-word for “free will” and is transformed into the prime category through which people attempt to distinguish between “enslaved prostitution” and morally-noxious-yet-tolerable sex work, the real interactions between choice and structure, individual will, and socio-economic limitations involved in the decision to start, continue, or stop selling sex disappear from view. In this way “prostitute” comes to stand as a singular, homogenous sign for an enormous variety of forms of sexual(ized) labour engaged in by women in different contexts and conditions. Its incautious usage causes us to lose touch with the lived cultures of sex and work. And it is precisely within these lived cultures that agency, opportunity, enslavement, and independence become manifest, not to mention the actual social organization of sex work itself.

In order to better grasp the diverse set of social realities with which we need to engage in order to study commercial sex as a cultural phenomenon, let's

43 Laura Agustin, “New Research Directions: The Cultural Study of Commercial Sex”, *Sexualities*, 8 (2005), pp. 618–631.

briefly look over a few of the cultural categories associated with prostitution within the historical context of three of the cities presented in this volume:

Bruges

Brothel prostitution (official and clandestine). Phone sex. Pole dancing. Foreign and native prostitutes. Literate and illiterate prostitutes. Registered and unregistered prostitutes. Textile and domestic work as linked to prostitution. Full time and part time prostitution. Pimps. Madams. Escort agents. Brothel owners. Married and unmarried prostitutes. Prostitutes with and without children. Older and younger prostitutes. Soldiers as customers of prostitutes. Immigrant prostitutes. Brothel networks that exchange prostitutes. Debt as a means of controlling prostitutes. "Dishonest inns". Payment in money and payment in goods. Paying a fixed amount for lodging in a brothel. Paying half of one's earnings for lodging in a brothel. Prostitutes who work from their homes. Street prostitution. Visible and invisible prostitution. Independent prostitutes. Forced and free prostitutes. Cities which tolerate prostitution and cities which openly fight it.

Buenos Aires

White slaves. Trafficked women. Jewish traffickers. Pimps. *Cafishos*. Madams. Brothel prostitution. Regulated brothels. Immigrant prostitutes. Foreign prostitutes as emblematic of aggressive modernity, urbanization, and otherness. "Creole" or native prostitutes. Clandestine prostitutes. Waitresses who sell sex. Actresses who sell sex. Domestic workers who engage in sex as part of their work. Dance hall workers. Boarding house residents. Brothels. Registered prostitutes. Underaged prostitutes. Independent prostitutes. Prostitutes who work from their homes. Street prostitutes. Licensed brothels. French prostitutes as teachers of "civilized" sex. Prostitutes who don't speak Spanish. *Casas de citas*. *Casas de comissionatas*. Working class clients. Debt as a means of controlling prostitutes. Tango musicians and other men accompanying "artist prostitutes" as protectors. Entrepreneurs, directors and managers of night clubs, cafés, and theatres as managers of prostitutes. Prostitutes' union.

Lagos

Wives whose male lovers pay their husbands "for encroaching on his property". Slave wives. Hausa prostitutes. West African prostitutes. Chinese prostitutes. European prostitutes. Immigrant prostitutes.

Runaway wives from the provinces. Hotel-based prostitutes. Foreign clients. Clients with high social status. Clients with low social status. High-class prostitutes with good educations. Escort services. Call girls. Strip clubs. Brothels. Divorcees and widows who sell sex and engage in other commercial ventures, particularly beer-brewing. Seamstresses who engage in prostitution in bars and cafés. Patron/husbands. Street-hawkers who sell sex. Smuggler prostitutes. Poor women engaged in “survival” prostitution. University students engaged in “runs”. Boys employed by prostitutes to engage clients. Under-aged sex workers. “Women’s houses”. Domestic workers who engage in sex as part of their work. Married and unmarried prostitutes. Prostitutes with and without children. Payment in cash and payment in goods or property. Prostitutes’ organizations. Prostitution as a transient stage before marriage. “Ammunition wives”. Prostitution as a route for participation in global consumer culture. Prostitution as a means of assuring accommodation during housing shortages. Child marriage disguising child prostitution. Debt as a means of controlling prostitutes. On-line soliciting. Outdoor prostitution. Street prostitution. Companion and hostess prostitution. Massage parlour prostitution. Lap dancing. Prostitution and “boma” and “jaguda” criminal boys’ gangs. Prostitution as an act of defiance and resistance to the social/sexual constraints placed on women. “Awon” girls. Management societies formed by prostitutes along ethnic lines. Sex Workers’ Alliance Nigeria.

The histories collected in the present volume do a sterling job of identifying these cultural categories and allow us to descry some questions which seem to be common to prostitution almost everywhere. However, they only begin to scratch the surface of the social organization of prostitution and how the many categories deployed to describe it interrelate with one another and with larger social contexts.

We know, for example, that certain sex working women in mid-nineteenth century Florence could live as isolated registered prostitutes in *casa particolari* and that this allowed them “to gain an appearance of normality, make more complex relationships” and achieve a notable degree of autonomy. How and why did these women become *casa particolari* prostitutes as opposed to brothel prostitutes, however? What did they have to do to negotiate this status? How did they protect it? In twentieth-century Rio de Janeiro, we can see that a distinct bifurcation developed between prostitutes confined to the lower-class *Mangue* red-light district and those who worked in the “artistic” cafés and clubs of the bohemian Lapa and Copacabana districts. We do not know,

however, how sex working women became inserted into these moral regions or what the relative benefits—if any—were of working in one district or the other. In early twentieth-century Singapore brothel prostitution, Chinese *Ab Ku* were divided into “sold”, “pawned”, and “voluntary” categories depending upon their financial relationship with the house. How well do these essentially European categories translate their original Chinese content, however? What were the rights of a “sold” woman? Was she pure chattel or were other, more subtle, distinctions of servitude in play? How did women pass from one category to the other? How likely was it that their debts could be paid off?

All of this volume’s contributors could easily address these questions and many more, given enough time and space. A certain degree of abstraction must be accepted in a project that brings together close to two dozen authors with a synchronic and diachronic focus that spans six continents and half a millennium. Without a deeper cultural-studies, micro-historical, or ethnographic-based engagement with the multitudinous varieties of sex work presented here, however, little of any substance can be said regarding the agency of women involved in sex work, because it is only at the micro level where individuals negotiate with social structures that agency is revealed.

More problematic, however, are certain conceptual and analytical questions that become apparent in a large-scale, comparative project such as this. One of the most salient of these is a relative lack of discussions regarding clients. They are rarely described and generally only appear (when they appear) vaguely categorized by status/class (“high” or “low”), race/ethnicity, and occasionally occupation (“soldier” being the most common). Men, in general, are not problematized in this volume. Male and trans-prostitutes can be seen peeking around the corners of some of the articles, but most authors (including myself) ignore them, even though red-light districts the world over contain male and trans-prostitutes. Likewise, males involved in the organization of prostitution are generally presented in an unambiguous, flat, and essentialized manner, typically bounded by the qualifiers “pimp” and “client”, as if these terms were self-explanatory and transcultural.

This brings up what is perhaps the worst vice of prostitution studies, from a relational, agency-oriented point of view: the unconscious and almost unquestioned use of emic and even accusatory categories as if they were analytical devices. Unquestioning use of these terms makes it difficult to recover any agency at all, given that they presume as stable those meanings that are bitterly and constantly (re)negotiated in life as it’s lived. I’d like to briefly deal with three of these problematic terms in particular: pimp, trafficking, and prostitute.

Pimp is an ugly and imprecise term that is inevitably weighted with all sorts of moral prejudices and has been polluted by an English-language bias that

symbolically links the word to Hollywood-inspired, racialized thug stereotypes. More problematically, it is essentially a legal accusation. Many third parties are involved in the social organization of prostitution, including landlords, the owners and managers of hotels/bars/clubs, security personnel, chamber maids, bartenders, taxi drivers, and so on. All of these people are more properly neutrally termed “market facilitators” and all of them extract surplus—directly or indirectly—from prostitutes’ sexual labour. Unfortunately, many countries simply define a pimp as someone who makes money from the sexual labour of others. In places like Brazil, India, and France, the concept is widened to include anyone who receives direct or indirect benefits from prostitutes, monetary or otherwise. This means that the children, husbands, lovers, roommates, parents, and dependents of prostitutes can be labelled as pimps.

Prostitution studies are full of examples of men and women involved in sexual/affective relationships with prostitutes and who work as these women’s aids, managers, and security personnel. Prostitutes also exercise their agency by *hiring* third parties to work for them. An example of this can be seen in Ekpootu’s article on Lagos⁴⁴ in which she reports that women employ “boma” and “jaguda” boys as client-finders. In Rio de Janeiro, sex working women in Copacabana likewise often employ street children to pass out pamphlets to tourists. These third parties are routinely accused of being pimps and exploiters even when they serve as welcome support for prostitute women. Schettini’s article⁴⁵ shows that “artistic” traveling prostitutes in early twentieth-century South America often engaged male companions who could intercede for them in the face of excessive demands for sex work on the part of club or theatre owners. These male “circuit breakers” could be accused by local authorities (allied with local venue owners) of “pimping” precisely as a means of stripping prostitutes of this protection and opening them up to greater exploitation.

At the same time, these hirelings and lovers/boyfriends/husbands-cum-managers can also be exploiters and even pimps in the classic, thuggish sense. Ekpootu reports that the same sorts of boys hired by Lagos prostitutes might also coercively manage younger girls. And in both Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires accusations of pimping and trafficking were often levelled by prostitute women against men who had, at other moments, been their companions. In other words, relationships between prostitutes and people accused of being pimps involve dense and often contradictory demands and roles involving

44 Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria.

45 Schettini, this volume, Buenos Aires. See also Thaddeus Gregory Blanchette & Ana Paula da Silva, “As American Girls: Migração, sexo e status imperial em 1918”, *Horizontes Antropológicos*, 15 (2009), pp. 75–99.

support, love, respect, fear, abuse, legal privileges, limitations, and engendered violence—much like marriage, in fact. These relationships are not reducible to a simple equation of villains and victims and to do so, again, buries any possibility of recovering—let alone understanding—the agency of women involved in prostitution and the empirical structures of the organization of sex work.

Trafficker and trafficking are likewise legal accusatory categories. It is worth reflecting upon the fact that both of these terms were originally formulated in the context of the nationalist tensions that led up to and followed the First World War. As historian John Torpey points out in *The Invention of the Passport*, the universalization of this document took place at a time in history when vigilance of national frontiers was being taken to new heights. With the advent of capitalist modernity and the decline of servitude and slavery, the power of authorizing or prohibiting the movement of individuals was centralized in the hands of the state. The creation of the modern passport system thus “signaled the dawn of a new era in human affairs, in which individual states and the international state system as a whole monopolized the legitimate authority to permit movement within and across their jurisdictions.” This monopolization was not neutral. It manifested certain interests, principally an overweening preoccupation with what Torpey calls “masterless men”: free and rootless individuals moving about and answering to no-one.⁴⁶

The recrudescent nationalism and fears of revolution of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries found expression in a growing body of international jurisprudence that sought to create social defences against two specific types of engendered “footloose” individuals: the male anarchist/Bolshevik and the female prostitute/white slave.⁴⁷ As many authors have pointed out, the white slavery panic very rarely focused upon repressing actual, provable instances of slavery, but more generally upon restricting the growing mobility and perceived immorality of women and their male companions, particularly those of certain classes and ethnic groups.⁴⁸

Women, it must be remembered, were generally not understood to be full and sovereign citizens during this period but rather dependent individuals

46 John Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship and the State* (Cambridge [etc.], 2000), pp. 8–9, 111–121.

47 Mathieu Deflem, *Policing World Society: Historical Foundations of International Police Cooperation* (Oxford [etc.], 2002), pp. 65–70.

48 Mary Ann Irwin, “‘White Slavery’ as Metaphor Anatomy of a Moral Panic”, *Ex Post Facto: The History Journal*, 5 (1996), pp. 2–22; Frederick K. Grittner, *White Slavery: Myth, Ideology, and American Law* (New York, 1990); Jo Doezema, *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters: The Construction of Trafficking* (London [etc.], 2010); Schettini, “*Que tenhas teu corpo*”; Blanchette & Silva, “As American Girls”.

under the tutelage of male “protectors”. To obtain a passport and travel internationally, women often had to have a chaperone. Original documents from the American Embassy in Rio de Janeiro regarding Brazilian demands on migrating women during the first decades of the twentieth century indicate that this meant that a woman needed to be married, provably widowed, a minor and traveling with family, traveling as a registered employee, or in possession of a good conduct certificate signed by members of her local clergy and ratified by her country’s passport bureau.⁴⁹ In other words, it wasn’t enough to just have a passport in order to migrate if one was a woman; one had to prove one’s respectability by situating oneself as a mother, wife, employee, or devout Judeo-Christian. In short, that meant proving that one’s sexual morality was beyond suspicion, typically by linking oneself as the dependent of a male authority figure.

It is in this context that the accusation of trafficking was created. While portrayed as unscrupulous slavers (which some certainly were), traffickers were first and foremost those people who aided “suspect” women in avoiding immigration restrictions. Beginning in 1904, trafficking became legally defined through successive international treaties as the crime of transporting women for the purpose of prostitution.⁵⁰ The concept had little to do with slavery and the treaties discussing trafficking rarely mentioned slavery until 2002, when trafficking was reworked by the UN’s Palermo Protocol. In Brazil and many other nations, trafficking is still simply legally defined as aiding and abetting the movement of prostitutes; whether or not one profits from this movement or even if it involves coercion or practices similar to slavery is beside the point in the eyes of the law.

By using the term trafficking to unreflexively label any assisted migration of prostitutes, we forget that for a great part of history, women could only legally migrate if they could show that they weren’t prostitutes. Migrants involved in sex work were *ipso facto* trafficked according to the law because the very definition of “trafficking victim” was “migrant prostitute”. This does not mean, however, that they were necessarily *enslaved*, which is what the post-2002 international legal definition of trafficking implies and what most twenty-first century readers understand it to mean.

A reflexive understanding of trafficking that seeks to recover prostitute women’s agency must take this history into consideration. It should investigate

49 National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). RG 84, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Brazil: Rio de Janeiro Embassy.

50 Isabel T.C.M. Ferreira, “A construção social do tráfico de pessoas” (Unpublished M.A., PPGAS/MN/UFRJ Rio de Janeiro, 2009).

the motivations and conditions of female migration, what alliances and performances were needed in order to accomplish it, and how sexual exchanges of all sorts can be related to this nexus of agents and structures. Furthermore, it must be remembered that trafficked objects are passive, while human agents are not. The political rhetoric of anti-trafficking ironically objectifies women in ways that are strikingly similar to pornography, as the current predilection for portraying naked, boxed, caged, and shrink-wrapped female bodies on anti-trafficking billboards and posters graphically demonstrates. While many sex working women obviously encounter violations of their rights and bodies during trajectories of migration, these do not magically transform them into pork-chops: such women continue to be endowed with and exercise agency. Attempts to understand trafficking and its relationship to the social organization of prostitution that do not take this fact into consideration are doomed to be fruitless.

Finally, prostitution itself must be unpacked as an analytical category. A vast variety of instrumental exchanges of sex for livelihood appear in the articles in this volume. In the face of these, several authors have attempted to categorize prostitution as the commercialized sale of alienated sex. However, when we look at, say, Cairo in the twentieth century (to draw just one example from the rich body of work contained in this volume), we quickly perceive that the category “prostitute” was not necessarily used in this sense by the authorities or, indeed, by the women selling sex. It was an accusation applied to certain women by the colonial—and later the independent Egyptian—state. Indeed, as we move farther back in time in western Europe (the region which would ultimately export the concept of prostitution around the world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries), we see the term calving off from the more general term “whore”, which was used to describe “disreputable” women of all sorts. In spite of the theoretically more precise typification of “prostitute”, however, colonial authorities the world over (and, indeed, authorities in metropolitan states) applied the term to ordain⁵¹ a bewildering variety of instrumental exchanges of sex which did not neatly slot into rationalized, essentialized legal concepts regarding prostitution.

We thus find in Cairo, Bruges, Buenos Aires, Florence, Nigeria, Rio de Janeiro, Mexico City, Paris, Sydney, and many other places the odd category of “clandestine prostitute” which refers to women who are seen by the authorities as “really” being prostitutes but have somehow escaped official classification as such. These women seem to have engaged in a variety of sexual exchange practices in the course of other work or relationships. Given my experiences in

51 As in “to engage in ordination” either by ordaining or by defining social and legal ordinates.

interviewing *carioca* women who exchange sex for presents, money, and nights on the town with foreigners in the Lapa and Copacabana tourism districts, I very much doubt that many—if not most—of these women saw themselves as “prostitutes”. If we unreflexively adopt accusatory terms of this nature as analytical categories, we run the risk of foregrounding state biopower and its capacity to classify and ordinate behaviour and, once again, we lose track of agency. It’s worth remarking in this context that very few men and women desire to be labelled as a prostitute precisely because the term was developed in the context of criminalization, state repression, and social stigmatization. People are not “prostitutes”; they are engaged in activities classified by other political and moral actors as “prostitution”. An agency-based understanding of prostitution and its social organization should respect this distinction and eschew the naturalization of state-originated legal and accusatory categories.

Conclusion: Seeing Beyond Prostitution to Agency

Prostitution studies have suffered from two major vices: an ethnocentric tendency to view prostitution from “the top down” via a framework of naturalized moral and political standards, and the reification and unreflective use of accusatory categories created by state ordination. Both of these problems have militated against a relational understanding of sex work as cultural phenomena and eschewed the recuperation of agency by foregrounding macro-scale social structures and (more problematically) legal accusations in descriptions of sex work.

The histories collected in this volume lay out a rich variety of phenomena that have been labelled “prostitution” and allow us to envision how much work still needs to be done in order to fully understand these phenomena and their relationships to surrounding cultural categories. If nothing else, the articles presented here serve as a warning to those who would attempt to homogenize and flatten the intersection between sex and work into a one-size-fits-all category.

We can, however, see certain global trends in the material presented here that relate specifically to the question of agency and the organization of sex work. One of the most important of these are the laws that have been made with regards to prostitution over the past 500 years. Simplifying (but not greatly), we can say that the hegemonic legal structures through which prostitution is conceived in the world today seem to have been born in modern Europe during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and exported via colonial imperialism throughout the rest of the world. It is notable in this respect that

some of the first globalized international treaties ever signed dealt with the migration and ordination of “fallen” or “disreputable” women, antedating the League of Nations by several years.

The rubrics of prostitution have thus been internationalized almost exclusively according to western models and this situation continues today with surprisingly little effective contestation. Basically, there seem to be three main models of prostitution legislation that have come out of the West over the past few centuries: regulation, abolition, and prohibition. Much ink has been spilled dealing with the supposed benefits and pitfalls of these systems, but few people have noted their inherent similarity: all three legislative models presume that prostitution is a problem and seek to address that rather than address the demands, desires, and issues of people engaged in sex work. Furthermore, all three criminalize certain aspects or forms of prostitution, situating the sale of sex as essentially a problem to be managed by the police rather than by other social authorities. Finally, all three turn a blind eye to certain socially acceptable exchanges of sexual-reproductive capacities for sustenance, most particularly in the context of monogamic, patriarchal, and heterosexual marriage.

Most of the articles presented here chart a shift from the “French model” of regulation to the “British model” of abolition and on to (in certain cases) what could arguably be called the “American model” of prohibition. It is notable that these shifts occurred more or less around the same time, which is a clear indication that they were not being generated solely by local conditions but rather also by international pressures. It is also striking that these shifts from policy to policy created changes in the forms of sexual commerce occurring “on the ground” but never eliminated or even provably reduced the incidence of prostitution. None of the three policies have ever come close to meeting their stated moral and political goals in any of the countries studied here. They have, however, repeatedly reformulated the social and legal constraints around which prostitution must organize. One can argue, then, that the only proper way to study the effects of laws on prostitution is through a relational understanding that works from the ground up; analysing what limitations or opportunities laws present for sex workers is a much more fertile field for socio-historical research which seeks to understand so-called prostitution than the laws themselves and the stated goals of their architects.

From the point of view of the women engaging in prostitution, shifts from one legal paradigm to another rarely appear as beneficial because they do not contemplate sex work as anything other than a morally noxious category which must be either done away with or segregated from respectable society. In other words, again, these legal approaches seek to solve prostitution as a problem and do not focus on the problems of prostitutes. Strikingly, it is almost

impossible to find instances of government intervention which attempt to situate sex workers as the primary stake-holders in the legislation being contemplated in their name. The newest trend in prostitution law, the so-called Swedish model, has been notorious in this respect, going so far as to deny sex workers any possibility of having an active voice in their country's prostitution debates and instead medicalizing these women as mentally ill, addicted, or brainwashed.⁵² Whether states see sex workers as "criminals" or "victims", a singular fact remains: they are rarely contemplated as full citizens in possession of their rights. Rather, they are understood, at best, as what anthropologist Paul Amar calls "para-humans": human subjects of governmentality "always already-disabled or insecure, [victims] needing parallel, emergency, paralegal, or extralegal protective action or rescue intervention in order to assume the provisional status of citizen."⁵³

Given this, many politically-organized prostitutes have come to deeply distrust the state as an ally or partner. In the words of Alice Raizel, a New Zealand-based prostitutes' rights activist and sex worker:

Trusting in the benevolence of those who reserve the right to destroy you at the slightest shift in the political winds is both imprudent and unprincipled. Power does not become your friend simply because it has refrained from beating you for a decade. Certainly, if political dynamics come out in momentary favor of a liberatory cause, one should take advantage of them, and some gratitude justly belongs to those who ably do so. But believing that this represents some fundamental shift in the nature of state or class power-structures is a dangerous illusion.⁵⁴

Prostitution researchers should take these words to heart and seek to create investigative projects that foreground the experiences, trajectories, and forms of negotiation of the people involved in the sale of sex, prioritizing local contingency rather than grand moral or political questions. In such a way of looking at the world, even the category of "prostitute" itself must be contextualized and interpreted with an eye to the dialectical relationship between individual agency and social structures.

52 S. Dodillet & P. Östergren, "The Swedish Sex Purchase Act: Claimed Success and Documented Effects" (Unpublished paper presented at the workshop Decriminalizing Prostitution and Beyond: Practical Experiences and Challenges, 2011).

53 Paul Amar, *The Security Archipelago: Human-Security States, Sexuality Politics, and the End of Neoliberalism* (Durham [etc.], 2013), p. 41.

54 Personal communication, 4 April 2013.

Coercion and Voluntarism in Sex Work

Mark David Wyers

Introduction

Investigated in terms of a broad perspective that takes into account concrete historical and geographical particularities, the concepts of coercion/voluntarism as they apply to sex work appear to raise more questions than they answer. In this study, I intend to scrutinize the concepts as they have evolved and been invoked historically, and through an exploration of how they have been brought up in debates and lived out on the ground in disparate time periods and urban settings around the world, I hope to problematize the notions and examine the inner contradictions they reproduce. Coercion/voluntarism are intimately bound up with the issues of violence and slavery, which are problematic concepts in themselves, but still we must take those into account as well in the construction of a theoretical approach capable of teasing out complexity rather than essentializing moments of rupture and continuity. For me, the first question that comes to mind when thinking about these concepts is: How useful are they as a means of thinking about sex work? If all forms of sold sex represent acts of male violence, as some abolitionists argue via a singular model of coercion, are there no spaces at all for agency in the various ways that sex work suffuses the urban spaces of cities around the world? Conversely, if we posit a dichotomous coercion/voluntarism model in thinking about the sexual economy, an approach that recognizes agency but also the reality of force, what nuances might be elided? To begin an enquiry into these issues, I intend to examine how these concepts evolved and have been employed and discuss how they have impacted legislation and the people those laws target. By taking a broad, global approach, I think it is important for us to ask: Is this model perhaps a western notion that still today propagates latent imperialist modes of thinking? Through an examination of its inner workings in colonial and post-colonial settings, in addition to the “western world”, I think it is important to also ask: What are the moral underpinnings of the supposed coercion/voluntarism divide, and have these led to a conceptual bias that leads to blind spots when dealing with sold sex as an aspect of social history? Is it possible to “rescue and rehabilitate” this concept? Should we even try?

Legal Constructs of Prostitution

The idea of coercion/voluntarism as a popular discourse about sold sex developed in western Europe and the United States in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The concept emerged along with the interrelated issues of entrenched modes of capitalist production and labour, pervasive processes of medicalization of society and urban spaces, shifts in conceptualizations of the relationship between the individual and society, and increasingly powerful feminist movements. It is within this context that the issue of sex work arose as a concern of public debate and government legislation as women began to participate in greater and greater numbers in wage labour. Additionally, developments in transport led to large-scale migrations for work, leading to anxieties about women's movement and place in society. Additionally, disease was identified as a threat to urban environments, and prostitutes were vilified as a critical vector in the spread of venereal diseases, which were perceived to be existential threats to the state. This also went hand-in-hand with shifts of what were perceived to be "proper" expressions of sexuality which proliferated along with an explosion of discourses on sex from the points of view of such fields as psychology, biology, sociology, and anthropology. Feminist movements, revolted by the state-sanctioned system of registered prostitution that led to the forced registration of women selling sex, pushed for the abolition of regulationism and, ultimately, as the social purity movement gained political clout, sought the eradication of all forms of sold sex. Adopting a similarly purist stance, Christian missionaries abroad set themselves the task of "saving" women through missions and interventions. Taking up prostitution as a "social affliction", researchers over the past two centuries have set about trying to understand this "problem", and the predominant analytical models that emerged were coerced prostitution and its hotly debated opposite, voluntary sex work. This either/or understanding of sold sex would go on to inform how sold sex has been discussed to date, but how did these concepts emerge and in what ways have they impacted how we perceive sold sex?

The urban overviews for this project and other historical research on the issue of sex work indicate that in early modern Europe¹ there was a general

1 See, for example, James A. Brundage, "Prostitution in the Medieval Canon Law", *Signs* 1 (1976), pp. 825–845; Marjorie Ratcliffe, "Adulteresses, Mistresses and Prostitutes: Extramarital Relationships in Medieval Castile", *Hispania* 67 (1984), pp. 346–350; Ruth Mazo Karras, "The Regulation of Brothels in Later Medieval England", *Signs* 14 (1989), pp. 399–343; Randolph Trumbach, "Sex, Gender and Sexual Identity in Modern Culture: Male Sodomy and Female Prostitution in Enlightenment London", *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 2

pattern in which sold sex was perceived to be more or less as a “necessary evil”, and although there were bouts of moral fervour accompanied by efforts to eradicate it,² in general the authorities were content with maintaining a modicum of control over this “sin” via forms of registration and taxation. In early modern Tuscany, for example, there were various conceptualizations of what a “prostitute” was, ranging from streetwalkers to brothel prostitutes and parlour whores to courtesans, and authorities were often asked to determine whether or not women engaging in promiscuous behaviour “counted as public prostitutes”. But rather than being perceived by the lower classes as a crime or a sin per se, it appears that prostitution was often seen as a “rational strategy” for survival.³ Similarly, in early modern Bruges, there was ambiguity surrounding terminology; the terms “whore” and “dishonest women” did not just refer to women who sold sex, but also to women who committed adultery and sexually active women who were unmarried.⁴ Similar terminological vagueness was common in early modern London.⁵ By the mid-eighteenth century, the notion of the “sinfulness” of sold sex carried out by “bad women” began shifting towards discussions of it as a “condition”⁶ along with medicalizing discourses on sexuality that sought to sequester prostitution in regulated zones to protect society from the “moral and physical” danger that regulationists claimed it posed for society. In this process, prostitution as a term of legal jurisprudence emerged. The creation of “the prostitute” as a body subject to state laws and as an object of scientific enquiry involved a conceptual shift from her as a “bad woman” to either a “victim” or a “sexual deviant”, depending on whether she was perceived to be a victim of patriarchal and capitalist violence (the feminist and abolitionist claim) or “genetically predisposed” to sexual perversion (the regulationist argument); both of these conceptualizations, of course, centred on notions about coercion and voluntarism.

The advent of the “victim” concept was predicated upon two mutually self-supporting ideas promoted by nineteenth and early twentieth century

(1991), pp. 186–203; John K. Brackett, “The Florentine Onesta and the Control of Prostitution, 1403–1680”, *Sixteenth Century Journal* 24 (1993), pp. 273–300; Susan P. Conner, “Public Virtue and Public Women”, *Eighteenth Century Studies* 28 (1994–1995), pp. 221–240; Diane Yvonne Ghirardo, “The Topography of Prostitution in Renaissance Ferrara”, *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 60 (2001), pp. 402–431.

2 Rhys Glyn Llwyd Williams, “Towards a Social History of London Prostitution”, unpublished paper collected for the project “Selling Sex in the City”, 2013; Conner, this volume, Paris.

3 Turno, this volume, Florence.

4 Mechant, this volume, Bruges.

5 Williams, “Towards a Social History”.

6 Conner, this volume, Paris.

abolitionists. First, many abolitionists and feminists claimed that chastity was a characteristic of women and it should also be promoted among men, who were thought of as having the potential to be predatory. Secondly, it was claimed that no woman could willingly sell her body for sex. This move involved the replacement of the dualistic categories of “whore” versus “sexually virtuous woman” with “good woman” and “good woman-but-fallen-victim” stripped of agency, with men positioned as the active elements leading to her “demise”. In contrast, proponents of state-regulated prostitution argued that women who persisted in engaging in sold sex were sexually deviant by nature and that this deviance was often hereditary, thus effecting a shift from the notion of the “bad woman” to a “deviant” which the state needed to control.

“White Slavery” and Narratives of Victimhood

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as panic over “white slavery” gave way to international movements against “trafficking in women and children” launched by feminist groups and later the League of Nations, the notion of the “victim” persisted. Although the abolitionist movement was by no means monolithic, with some reformers collapsing “white slavery” and prostitution while others maintained that there were differences between the two, it was increasingly argued that the regulationist system had to be eradicated for the reason that it promoted trafficking in women.⁷ At the heart of the debates was the issue of consent. Regulationists argued that prostitution was a “necessary evil”⁸ requiring scientific legislation and control, and that “while ‘innocent’ women needed protection from immorality, it was society that needed protection from immoral women”⁹ who were by nature dissolute. As Jo Doezema points out,

In this, feminist abolitionists shared a view of women’s sexuality that was common to all the various anti-slavery campaigners. Women were

7 Jo Doezema, “Loose Women or Lost Women? The Re-emergence of the Myth of White Slavery in Contemporary Discourses of Trafficking in Women”, *Gender Issues*, 18 (2000), pp. 23–50, 25.

8 The classic “safety valve” argument posited that male sexuality needed release or else it would be channelled into “improper” modes of expression such as homosexuality, or it would result in increased harassment of “virtuous” women in public.

9 Jo Doezema, “Who Gets to Choose? Coercion, Consent, and the UN Trafficking Protocol”, *Gender and Development*, 10 (2002), pp. 20–27, 22.

considered sexually passive, which made them more “virtuous” than men, but, paradoxically, once that virtue was “lost” through illicit sexual behaviour, women’s sexual nature became dangerous. Consequently, calls for the need to protect women’s purity alternated with attempts to reform and discipline prostitutes.¹⁰

In subsequent decades, the League of Nations assembled an “expert” committee to study the problem of the international “trade” in women, and the concept of the “victim” persisted, leading to a conceptualization in which coercion and agency did not occupy a continuum. As pointed out by Magaly Rodríguez García, “A rationale suggesting that deceit and agency are necessarily exclusionary led the experts—along with many contemporary scholars and radical feminists—to conclude that most women found in foreign brothels were not free agents and thus that ‘a traffic of considerable dimensions’ did exist.”¹¹ The only agency ascribed to women by the League’s Body of Experts was the moment when a woman chose to stop being a prostitute and turned herself over for rehabilitation. It was also argued that procurers were the “agents of traffic” for the reason that women would not of their own volition move to another country for the purposes of prostitution.¹² Among female delegates in the League, this approach was grounded on a “strong gendered logic” positing that men represented the active danger for women, while male delegates tended to focus on female vulnerability.¹³

Positioning all women who sell sex as victims is a precarious balancing act, however. In the 1930s, the League of Nations began to increasingly employ psychiatrists in analyses of prostitution.¹⁴ Its publication dating from 1938 titled *Enquiry into Measures of Rehabilitation of Prostitutes* is indicative of how the positioning of prostitutes as victims was in fact an uneasy move that was subtly undermined by latent notions of female sexual deviancy, a carryover from the regulationist argument that “confirmed prostitutes” were genetically inclined

10 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

11 Magaly Rodríguez García, “The League of Nations and the Moral Recruitment of Women”, *International Review of Social History*, 57 (2012), pp. 97–128, 108.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 109. Rodríguez García points out that while there were dissenting voices within the League of Nations on the matter of consent, such as one delegate who argued that a piece of legislation under consideration at the time could lead to the “infringement of the liberty of adult women who consent to prostitution”, these arguments went unheeded in favour of the idea that such “unfortunate” women could never willingly engage in prostitution abroad.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 122.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 104.

to prostitution. Stating that “the existence of licensed houses was undoubtedly an incentive to traffic, both national and international” and that abolishing licensed brothels was the best way to reduce that traffic, the report noted “whenever licensed houses are closed, it is essential that measures should be adopted to rehabilitate the women concerned.”¹⁵ *Enquiry into Measures of Rehabilitation of Prostitutes* was compiled through data collected via questionnaires that were sent to fifteen governments regarding the social profiles of registered prostitutes in their countries with the ostensible aim of providing a framework for thinking about methods of rehabilitation. Taking a psychological approach to profiling prostitutes, the report sought to determine the reasons why these women had become “victims” by determining their ages, upbringings, education levels, employment histories, and age at which they began prostitution. Notably, however, data about past criminal convictions was also collected, hinting at ways that sex workers were construed as “social deviants”, and in a similar way, the recording of intelligence levels echoes regulationist arguments which drew on eugenic discourses of hereditary deviance; in fact, even though the report is ostensibly about rehabilitation of “trafficking victims”, the report’s conclusion notes:

[...] some of the most powerful predisposing causes of prostitution seem to lie in the mentality and temperament of the individual. A third of the women described in this enquiry were considered to be mentally abnormal or sub-normal, and this, for the most part, without special tests or examination by expert psychologists. Whenever the examination was more thorough, an even larger number was found to be below normal. Only a few of the women were considered to be imbecile or insane; in the great majority, the defects were too slight to entitle them to special care or treatment, although apparently serious enough to handicap them in their life and work.¹⁶

15 League of Nations, *Enquiry into Measures of Rehabilitation of Prostitutes (Part I), Prostitutes: Their Early Lives*, p. 5.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 64. There were substantial differences, however, regarding perceptions of prostitutes’ intelligence levels, and some were less nuanced than others, as indicated in some unpublished reports on the issue. Consider, for example, the following statement, which is indicative of the League’s contradictory position on the topic: “The United Kingdom Government remarks in its analysis that ‘It’s a matter of some surprise that so many of the women concerned have been considered to be of normal or superior intelligence’. This remark applies to most of the answers received. Dr. Kemp, however, argues in his study that of the prostitutes examined 80 per cent were retarded, debile, or imbecile, which suggests that the mental assessment might have been different in some of the other cases if the

Two other characteristics pointed out by the experts as regards brothel workers were “laziness and the love of luxury” and a team specialist, Dr. Kemp, “attributed the aversion to work, in many of the women he examined, to a mental condition.”¹⁷ This positioning of trafficking victims within frameworks of criminality, deviance, and feeble-mindedness is indicative of two interrelated notions. First, the implicit idea is that (although they are victims) these women “are doing something wrong”; however, because of a “lack” of intelligence, they are simply not capable of making rational decisions, nor are they able to engage in “proper” forms of labour. This rather uncomfortable compromise reflects an inherent moral judgement of “improper” expressions of female sexuality (criminal), while at the same time writing off this “deviance” as the result of mental deficiency, allowing for the rehabilitation project to proceed; all these women need is to be rescued from the shackles of sexual slavery and obtain some education to be set “free”.

The “white slave scare” and “trafficking in women” have functioned as cultural myths which “were indicative of deeper fears and anxieties concerning national identity, women’s increasing desire for autonomy, foreigners, immigrants and colonial peoples.” In this context, as greater numbers of women began migrating abroad in search of work, the “white slave scare” was transformed into a larger project based on a “need to regulate female sexuality under the guise of protecting women”, and in the process, the notion of the “innocent”, unwilling victim was perpetuated:

Only by removing all responsibility for her own condition could the prostitute be constructed as a victim to appeal to the sympathies of the middle-class reformers, thereby generating public support for the end goal of abolition. The “white slave” image as used by abolitionists broke down the old separation between “voluntary” sinful and/or deviant prostitutes and involuntary prostitutes. By constructing all prostitutes as victims, it removed the justification for regulation.¹⁸

examination had been made from a psychiatric standpoint.” League of Nations, *Enquiry into Measures of Rehabilitation of Adult Prostitutes*, Traffic in Women and Children Committee, Part III (unpublished report), 1936, p. 17. I would like to thank Magaly Rodríguez García for bringing my attention to this report.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 65.

18 Doezema, “Loose Women or Lost Women?” p. 24. For further discussions of the cultural construction of myths surrounding “white slavery”, see also Frederick Grittner, *White Slavery: Myth, Ideology and American Law* (New York, NY, 1993); Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900–1918* (Baltimore, MD, 1982); Judith Walkovitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in late-Victorian London* (Chicago, IL, 1992).

Various devices were employed in constructing the innocence of the victim, such as highlighting her youth/virginity and whiteness, in addition to attributing to her an “unwillingness” to sell her body for sex. This in turn was bolstered by the construction of the “evil trafficker”, a male figure, and in this way the realities underpinning prostitution were simplified.

Contested Hegemonies: The Paradox of the Agentic “Victim”

Following World War I, the “racially charged term white slavery was dropped from the parlance of the League of Nations”¹⁹ to be replaced with the term “trafficking”, but the discourse of the victimization of women who sell sex was retained. And the victim’s dark counterpart, the impossible “voluntary” prostitute continued her shunted existence in the eyes of the law, subject to state violence, incarceration, and deportation in the case of migrants—as is the case in most countries today. International decrees have often retained an obsession with the idea of the “victim”. In 1910, the same year in which the International Convention for the Suppression of White Slave Traffic was promulgated as an expansion of legislation drafted in 1904, the United States passed the Mann Act, which initiated criminal penalties for individuals caught in the transportation of women across state lines for the purposes of prostitution. However, the majority of people convicted under the law were women voluntarily engaging in sex work, not procurers (as a reflection of the racial aspect of discourses on “white slavery”, the law was also used to charge non-white men with the “crime” of having relations with white women).²⁰ This is the grey area inhabited by “bad” women who were found, in fact, to not be “victims of the slave trade” but rather women whose sexuality transgressed moral and ethical boundaries.

While the agreements dating from 1904 and 1910 did not conflate “white slavery” with prostitution, in 1933 the League of Nations Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women was inherently abolitionist, as was the League’s Draft Convention for Suppressing the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others (1937) which was intended to fill the gap in the existing conventions by protecting adults of either sex against procuration, even when they consented and were not taken abroad; this would later constitute the basis of the UN Convention promulgated in 1949. The agreement dating from 1933 urged

19 Penelope Saunders, “Traffic Violations: Determining the Meaning of Violence in Sexual Trafficking Versus Sex Work”, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 20 (2005), pp. 343–360, 346.

20 Doezema, “Who Gets to Choose?” p. 24.

countries to actively punish “any person who, in order to gratify the passions of another person, procures, entices or leads away, *even with her consent*, a woman or girl of full age for immoral purposes to be carried out in another country.”²¹ Perpetuating this discourse, in 1949 the United Nations issued the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and Exploitation of Prostitution of Others, an abolitionist document which promoted the punishment of all parties involved in the facilitation of prostitution even if there is consent.²² Following the fall of the Soviet Bloc and the increased liberalization of economies around the world in the 1980s, large-scale international migration by both women and men has gathered pace, and correspondingly there has been a resurgence in concerns about the movement of women’s bodies across national borders. It has been argued that, “As in the earlier spate of interest in ‘white slavery’ in the early 1900s, concerns about women’s movement, women’s sexuality, women’s place in society, and women’s bodies, rather than changes in trafficking itself or some objective interest in harm to women, are driving the international focus on trafficking.”²³ Not unexpectedly, the United Nations has also taken up the issue, which has been marked by fierce debate on the nature of women’s agency in migration.

The UN Protocol to Suppress, Prevent and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children was finalized in 2000 after two years of strenuous negotiations and feminist lobbying. The primary point of contention during negotiations over the wording of the document was the notion of consent. The Human Rights Caucus (HRC),²⁴ arguing that sex work is a legitimate form of labour, stated:

Obviously, by definition, no one consents to abduction or forced labour, but an adult woman is able to consent to engage in an illicit activity (such as prostitution, where this is illegal, or illegal for immigrants). If no one is forcing her to engage in such an activity, then trafficking does not exist.²⁵

In this way, the HRC (and sex workers’ rights activists) have utilized a dual conceptualization of coercion/voluntarism, stating that a distinction must be

21 *Ibid.*, p. 23. Emphasis added.

22 Saunders, “Traffic Violations”, p. 346.

23 Molly Dragiewicz, “Teaching about Trafficking: Opportunities and Challenges for Critical Engagement”, *Feminist Teacher*, 18 (2008), pp. 185–201, 186.

24 The Human Rights Caucus is a conglomerate of NGOs from Asia, Africa, eastern and western Europe, Latin America, and North America.

25 Cited in Doezema, “Who Gets to Choose?” p. 21.

made between voluntary and forced prostitution, with the latter representing a form of violence.²⁶ Sex workers themselves have also made their voices heard on the issue of coercion/voluntarism, particularly through the organization Network of Sex Work, which has argued, “Historically, anti-trafficking measures have been more concerned with protecting ‘innocent’ women from becoming prostitutes than with ensuring the human rights of those in the sex industry.”²⁷ The other camp in the debates over the Protocol is represented by the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW), which asserts that prostitution is itself inherently a violation of women’s rights and that trafficking “should include all forms of recruitment and transportation for prostitution, regardless of whether any force or deception take place.”²⁸ Additionally, during negotiations over the Protocol pro-abolitionist delegations pushed for a definition of trafficking that included all situations, even when women had consensually agreed to migrate for sex work.²⁹ Also, the International Human Rights Network lobbied for prostitution to be defined as trafficking, and demanded that the word “consent” not appear in the Protocol.³⁰

As the above overview indicates, there are basically two approaches to the issue of coercion/voluntarism as regards sold sex. The first, as espoused by the HRC, promotes a dualistic model in which women can voluntarily engage in sex work as a form of labour, but they can also be subject to coercion and exploitation. In contrast, pro-abolitionist groups such as the CATW employ a singular model of coercion in which voluntarism is ideologically impossible, as they claim that all forms of prostitution represent patriarchal violence against women; in this model, “trafficked” women, whether or not they consciously consent to migration for sex work, are to be treated as victims.

26 Jo Doezema, “Now You See Her, Now You Don’t: Sex Workers at the UN Trafficking Protocol Negotiation”, *Social and Legal Studies*, 14 (2005), pp. 61–89, 70. Influenced by the sex workers’ rights movement, the Global Alliance against Trafficking in Women (GAATW) has also argued that a distinction must be made between “trafficking in women/forced prostitution” and “voluntary prostitution”. Doezema, “Loose Women or Lost Women?” p. 33.

27 Saunders, “Traffic Violations”, p. 347.

28 Doezema, “Who Gets to Choose?” p. 21. Emphasis added.

29 *Ibid.* As regards the position held by CATW, Doezema notes, “In the abolitionist feminist version of the trafficking myth, the sex worker ‘disappears’ through the denial of the possibility of consent. As the space for consent dwindles to nothing, the myth of trafficking grows to encompass all prostitution, and every woman selling sex becomes mythically positioned as a slave.” “Now You See Her, Now You Don’t”, p. 74.

30 Saunders, “Traffic Violations”, p. 348.

The latter approach has the effect of stripping women who engage in sex work of agency, while at the same time hyperscrutinizing sex work and generating discourses on migration that reproduce notions of “male agency” and “female vulnerability”.

In legislation produced by the League of Nations in the early twentieth century as regards trafficking, “women and children” were collapsed into a singular object of analysis.³¹ Echoing this, contemporary discourses on migration make the same conflation, as evident in the title of the UN Protocol from the year 2000 which refers specifically to “women and children”. It has been pointed out, however, that what is at work here is the issue of agency, or in the case of women, the supposed lack thereof: “[T]his phrase ‘women and children’ consistently dominates the issue [of migratory labour], to the point where the continuous repetition of the phrase has turned it into ‘womenandchildren’, which can easily collapse into ‘women as children.’”³² In this dynamic, where women are projected as “helpless” child-victims requiring protection,

The emphasis on innocence and vulnerability constructs a prohibitively gendered trafficking victim. Men, and women who violate gender boundaries of passivity, cannot access the trafficking discourse in order to include their narratives as legitimate experiences within the current framework. Furthermore, men are imagined as active agents, able to collude and participate in smuggling and illegal migration, while women (and children) are imagined as vulnerable innocents, not as agentive subjects.³³

Also, inherent in such formulations is the post-colonial notion that migrant women “trafficked” from developing countries are in need of the protection/guidance of the “West”,³⁴ whether by “paternal” states or “maternal” women’s organizations setting out to “save their helpless Eastern sisters.”

31 The category “women and children” occurs regularly in the names of the unit in the League of Nations dealing with “human trafficking”, which was: The Advisory Committee on the Traffic in Women and Children, Advisory Committee on Traffic in Women and Protection of Women, Advisory Commission for the Protection of Children and Young People—Traffic in Women and Children Committee.

32 Pardis Mahdavi and Christine Sargent, “Questioning the Discursive Construction of Trafficking and Forced Labor in the United Arab Emirates”, *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies*, 7 (2011), pp. 6–35, 16.

33 *Ibid.*

34 *Ibid.*

Post-colonialism: Moral Authority and “Unfree” Bodies

Discourses that present women from developing countries, particularly in the East, as “backward” and “uncivilized”, are often invoked in western-backed “interventions” such as raids on brothels. As Gretchen Soderlund notes,

Too often Western feminists have participated in producing the victim subjects that state actors step in to protect through the deployment of military, legal, or law enforcement strategies. Victim discourse has been implicated in the creation of feminists’ sometimes patronizing attitude toward non-Western women onto whom victim status is projected.³⁵

Of course, there can be widely varying amounts of agency even within cases of coercion, and this also depends on how agency is defined. “Victimization frameworks [...] often wrest autonomy from women and place it in the hands of states configured as masculine protectors.”³⁶ Doezema similarly has pointed out that “[p]ictured as poor, naive, and ‘unempowered’, women from the third world or former communist countries are perceived as unable to act as agents in their own lives or to make an uncoerced decision to work in the sex industry.”³⁷ Such women are “in need of rescue”, and in the process of being saved, “through her, the superiority of the saving western body is marked and maintained”³⁸—indicative of the ways that coercion can be deployed in a way that determines who speaks for who and from which “higher” moral ground. In light of this,

The “third-world prostitute”, oppressed by tradition and religion, exploited by western patriarchal capitalism, carrying the baggage of the colonial legacy of presumed backwardness and sexual innocence, is the perfect

35 Gretchen Soderlund, “Running from the Rescuers: New US Crusades against Sex Trafficking and the Rhetoric of Abolition”, *Feminist Formations*, 17 (2005), pp. 64–87, 82.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 72.

37 Doezema, “Loose Women or Lost Women?” p. 37. Doezema also notes, “It is by no means only western feminists who treat third-world sex workers as child-like and unable to speak for themselves. Third-world anti-trafficking activists can also take a ‘matronizing’ stance towards sex workers. The CATW lobby in Vienna had many third-world activists who, with the rest of the lobby members, supported a definition of trafficking in women that collapsed trafficked women and children into a single category.” “Now You See Her, Now You Don’t”, p. 73.

38 Jo Doezema, “Ouch! Western Feminists’ ‘Wounded Attachment’ to the ‘Third World Prostitute’”, *Feminist Review*, 67 (2001), pp. 16–38, 31.

figure to hold up to the world as the image of sexually subordinated womanhood. Her victimhood, established by over a century of feminist, abolitionist and colonialist discourse, is indisputable.³⁹

It is such an approach that lays the groundwork for a situation in which such “victims” cannot speak for themselves but must be spoken for, and cannot act for themselves so must be acted upon. This marks one difference between discourses on trafficking in the early twentieth century and today; the “white slavery” panic was about (“our”) western women being “trafficked” outwards, whereas today it is largely about (“their”) women from “underdeveloped” countries coming to the “West.” But in both cases, the popular argument is that women cannot possibly make such a move voluntarily, but must have been coerced. As the overviews for this project (and also other case studies) indicate, however, this does not always seem to be the case. The on-the-ground realities are much more complex, and there is much more discontinuity and flux than a singular definition of coercion can account for. As Holly Wardlow has suggested, the commonly invoked notion of sex work, which itself is primarily a western construct, cannot accommodate the multitude forms of exchanging sex for money that have existed around the world.⁴⁰ Indeed, a reading of the overviews for this project demonstrates that sex work cannot even simply be defined strictly in terms of monetary value, but also in terms of exchanges for goods, power, and influence.

Problematics: A Way Forward?

A more nuanced framework for thinking about coercion/voluntarism seems to be needed here. It has been argued that accounts of sold sex should be viewed as “a continuum of forced and voluntary decisions”⁴¹ and that in current protocols there is assumed to be “a neat line of demarcation between oppositional

39 *Ibid.*, p. 33. In their study of Muslim women and foreign prostitutes in Norway, Christine M. Jacobson and Dag Stenvoll note that “foreign women who sell sex [...] are constructed as people who need ‘our’ help and protection from ‘the other men’ in order to become emancipated and equal.” Christine M. Jacobson and Dag Stenvoll, “Muslim Women and Foreign Prostitutes: Victim Discourse, Subjectivity, and Governance”, *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society*, 17 (2010), pp. 270–294, 275.

40 As cited by C. Heike Schotten in “Men, Masculinity, and Male Domination: Reframing Feminist Analyses of Sex Work”, *Politics and Gender*, 1 (2005), pp. 211–240, 233.

41 “Conference Report: The Globalization of Sexual Exploitation”, *Feminist Review*, 67 (2001), pp. 142–144, 143.

categories of migration—voluntary and consensual versus involuntary and non-consensual migration—an assumption that research shows to vastly oversimplify the systems and processes that facilitate irregular migration in the real world.⁴² So, in light of this need for a sufficiently nuanced approach that is sensitive to the cultural and temporal variations in discursive practices of sold sex and the myths and discourses they have produced, it will be helpful to read the overviews created for this project with the following questions in mind: Just how is sold sex defined—or better yet, what particular understandings of sold sex have been produced in cities around the world in the past four centuries—and how does the concept of coercion/voluntarism fit in (or not fit in) with these conceptualizations?

But before addressing the overviews, there is one last issue that must be addressed: How has it been determined that states of coercion/voluntarism occur? Ever since sold sex came to be constructed as an extremely politicized and polarized object of “scientific” scrutiny in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, first by regulationists and then by abolitionist groups and subsequent organizations including, but of course not limited to, the League of Nations and UN, there has been an overwhelming concern (bordering on an obsession with the fetishized body of the “victim”) with compiling statistics about why individuals have engaged in sold sex and how many are doing so. Often, the motivating factor is to “prove” something, to “find sensationalist stories that grab the attention of readers and legislators”,⁴³ but sensational stories function by smoothing over complexity and ambiguity in favour of black and white depictions of so-called “facts”. It has also been pointed out that the figures produced by different sources “vary significantly, and these discrepancies in data reflect the political convictions and motivations that shape and generate such investigations.”⁴⁴ Additionally, “many researchers may feel pressure from colleagues and activists to declare ‘whose side’ they take in relation to prostitution and trafficking”, and organizations providing funding for research also tend to support one view over the other (i.e., all forms of sold sex as coercion/violence versus sex work that can be voluntary as well as forced).⁴⁵ And of course the

42 Julia O’Connell Davidson, “Will the Real Sex Slave Please Stand Up?” *Feminist Review*, 83 (2006), pp. 4–22, 9.

43 Julie Cwikel and Elizabeth Hoban, “Contentious Issues in Research on Trafficked Women Working in the Sex Industry: Study Design, Ethics and Methodology”, *The Journal of Sex Research*, 42 (2005), pp. 306–316, 314.

44 Mahdavi and Sargent, “Questioning the Discursive Construction”, p. 13.

45 Saunders points out that “[f]unding restrictions on antitrafficking programs within the United States Agency for International Development now prohibit agencies who ‘advocate prostitution as an employment choice or which advocate the legalization of prostitution’ from receiving funds.” “Traffic Violations”, p. 352.

theoretical approach that is used (for example trauma theory, human rights, migration, sexology, legal aid) will determine the types of questions that are asked and how they are perceived by respondents.⁴⁶

But the difficulties don't stop there. The individuals being interviewed may have their own reasons for not providing "the desired facts" regarding their situation:

Women's vulnerability may also lead to situations where [they] are afraid to provide information about their trafficking or migration history. Alternatively, they may provide researchers and authorities with false statements to protect themselves, their families, and "those who have been kind to them"; the latter may include traffickers or agents in the source country.⁴⁷

Alternatively, women who migrate illegally for sex work often know that they will be denied rights as voluntary sex workers if they are caught, so they may find it in their interests to project an image of victimization. Another issue is that, out of fear of being tipped off to the police, individuals engaging in sold sex outside of brothels, whether as temporary work or not, tend to keep a low profile and hence may slip through statistics; for this reason, women working in more permanent brothels, because they are more accessible, tend to predominate in the literature.⁴⁸ Lastly, it should also be noted that a critical issue is *when* an individual engaging in sold sex is interviewed. She may have initially entered sex work voluntarily, but later found herself in a situation of coercion through, for example, debt bondage. Conversely, she may have been forced into sex work and later exited, but then returned due to a lack of other means of income.⁴⁹

As the discussion above indicates, the issue of coercion/voluntarism is problematic at numerous levels, from the ideological to the statistical. Bearing these difficulties in mind, however, and allowing them to highlight points of difference and similarity in the nuances of the discursive production of sold sex across time and geographies, will permit a reading of prostitution

46 Cwikel and Hoban, "Contentious Issues", p. 310.

47 *Ibid.*

48 As regards women who have faced coercion, Cwikel and Hoban note: "There will never be an accurate census of trafficked persons, because of the ramifications of their legal status: they are mobile, may have illegal papers or lack documents such as national identity cards or social security numbers..." *Ibid.*, p. 312.

49 Joanna Busza, "Sex Work and Migration: The Dangers of Oversimplification—A Case Study of Vietnamese Women in Cambodia", *Health and Human Rights*, 7 (2004), pp. 231–249, 232.

as a highly complex social phenomenon embedded in contested notions of women's sexual agency. And, just what prostitution means is at the heart of the matter of coercion/voluntarism. One of the most striking things that emerges from the overviews is that sold sex often appears to be a fluid part of urban environments, not always perceived as a full-time "occupation" and often differing from western practices of sold sex from which emerged the coercion/voluntarism model.

Imperialisms of Sold Sex

Although the early modern Ottoman era bears numerous similarities as regards sold sex to what was happening contemporaneously in Europe, the historical outcome offers striking differences. In pre-modern Cairo (prior to colonial control), sold sex had a public presence that was tolerated and subject to governmental controls and taxation, as well as policing within the urban environment. Although they were not part of the guild system, women who sold sex were unofficially recognized but still, as in Europe, they were a marginalized group of people working in a highly informal sector that occasionally was subject to repressive government measures.⁵⁰ Sold sex in Ottoman Istanbul presents similar patterns. Although the taxation of sold sex was abolished by the authorities in the sixteenth century, it was more or less tolerated until the nineteenth century, when the municipal authorities initiated a system of forced registration. There were periods in which the authorities actively sought out and banished women engaging in sold sex, along with the men who were caught with them, but these were generally times of social strain and women selling sex were an easy target for authorities seeking to root out the "moral corruption" of society. Pressure to eliminate prostitution from the streets of Istanbul increased throughout the nineteenth century, most likely as a reaction against "westernizing" reforms, increased social upheaval, and the spreading belief that prostitution was a western import, and discourses on sold sex became increasingly bound up with competing forms of nationalism as the Ottoman Empire slowly disintegrated.⁵¹ Unlike in Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, large-scale public discussions of "victims" did not emerge in Cairo and Istanbul, and correspondingly, nor were there large-scale projects to "rehabilitate" women who sold sex. The "necessary bad woman" seems to have remained just that. Although systems of regulated prostitution were implemented in both cities, there was not a powerful backlash

50 Hammad, this volume, Cairo.

51 Wyers, this volume, Istanbul.

against them as a form of patriarchal violence. There were active women's movements in Cairo and Istanbul that denounced the regulatory system, but they lacked the political traction to push their views through the newly founded Turkish government in Istanbul, or through the colonial government in Cairo. While sex work was taken up as an object of "scientific knowledge" in early twentieth century Istanbul (primarily by male authorities), the abolitionist model of "coercion" did not become entrenched⁵² and the regulationist system has remained in place in Turkey.

While sold sex in pre- and early-modern Europe and the Ottoman Empire may have shared common characteristics as regards perceptions of sold sex as a more or less "tolerable evil", a different picture regarding notions of "coercion/voluntarism" emerges in Lagos (and across Nigeria), India, and Shanghai. For several places it has been suggested that European forms of prostitution did not have an historical precedent and were in fact a colonial import.⁵³ Within the tolerated courtesan practices of Calcutta and Shanghai, and within traditions in the area of precolonial Nigeria as regards autonomous female sexuality, the coercion/voluntarism dichotomy does not appear to historically fit with local practices. It seems, however, that the colonial introduction of regulated systems of licensed brothels and subsequent abolitionist legislation on trafficking have reproduced the coercion model and its incumbent violence against women who sell sex, regardless of whether they are victims of deception/coercion or voluntary sex workers, and the same holds true around the world.

The Power to Wound: Violence and Bodily Rights

Violence, whether perpetrated against "suspect" women by state actors, third parties or otherwise, has long been part and parcel of sex work. While abolitionism was initially not anti-prostitution per se, and while there were dissenting voices within the movement as regards the abolishment of licensed houses, as the movement gained momentum in the early twentieth century it became increasingly associated with the purity movement and the push to

52 A brief experiment with abolition was attempted by the Turkish government in the early 1930s, but the system of registered sex work was quickly reinstated based on fears that venereal diseases would undercut the country's development, as Turkey was critically underpopulated as the result of military losses during the Balkan Wars and World War I along with the deportation and large-scale elimination of religious minorities. Mark David Wyers, *"Wicked" Istanbul: The Regulation of Prostitution in the Early Turkish Republic*, (Istanbul, 2012).

53 Ekpoou, this volume, Lagos; Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai.

completely eliminate regulation (and prostitution along with it).⁵⁴ During and after the “white slave scare”, anti-trafficking measures, which ostensibly sought to “protect” women (read “innocent” women) by criminalising procuring and the transport of women across state lines, were implemented across the globe. Invariably, however, experience has shown that this legislation has been primarily used against women, not the “profiteers” and “white slavers” it ostensibly targets. Even where prostitution itself is not criminalized, anti-trafficking laws have in effect pushed it underground and given the police and health authorities wide-ranging powers. As Saunders notes:

Human rights studies have revealed that sex workers are mistreated by traffickers and by immigration systems that stigmatize prostitutes, deport them when they seek assistance, sexually harass them with impunity, and leave them stateless. This observation dovetails with sex workers’ own reports of their most pressing issues in regard to abuse: confrontations with the police and other state authorities such as immigration and health workers who subject them to rape, beatings, harassment, arrest and extortion.⁵⁵

Saunders also points out that “[c]ampaigns and policies based on the impulse to protect women from migration and sexual danger are frequently punitive, just as campaigns against White Slavery punished bad women and demonized migrant men.”⁵⁶ In effect, women migrating for sex work in today’s world turn to “irregular modes of migration” and seek assistance from “middle men and recruiters who facilitate migration without contracts or visas” which opens up a space for violence.⁵⁷ Once in the destination country, they can be subject to debt bondage⁵⁸ and violent police raids and arrests.⁵⁹

54 See Rodríguez García, “The League of Nations”, pp. 101–102.

55 Saunders, “Traffic Violations”, pp. 353–354. Of course, just as we must remain careful about sex workers’ statements against alleged traffickers and violent pimps, we must also take similar statements against public authorities and social workers with the same amount of circumspect.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 355.

57 Mahdavi and Sargent, “Questioning the Discursive Construction”, p. 28.

58 While illegal in most countries, forms of debt bondage in sex work appear to be quite common. See for example Nuñez and Fuentes, this volume, Mexico City; Schettini, this volume, Buenos Aires; Ekpootu, this volume, Lagos; Amir *et al.*, this volume, Tel Aviv/Jaffa; and Tracol-Huynh, this volume, Hanoi.

59 Busza, “Sex Work and Migration”, p. 245.

In the overviews for this project, the theme of violence appears often, particularly as regards state authorities. With the widespread implementation of regulation in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,⁶⁰ the police were granted wide-ranging powers to detain women suspected of “illicit” behaviour, which could be broadly interpreted, resulting in increased violence against women suspected of or actually engaging in sold sex.⁶¹ Anti-trafficking laws, which similarly grant broad powers to state authorities, have also resulted in widespread violence against sex workers at the hands of those who are supposed to defend human rights.⁶² Naturally this has led to sex workers’ suspicion of law enforcement officers, and in this disempowered position, individuals who sell sex are unable to apply to the authorities when they have suffered at the hands of their clients.⁶³

The violence associated with anti-trafficking legislation is predicated upon morally-charged discussions of just who should be accorded the rights of a “victim” of trafficking. As Doezema argues, “...women who knowingly migrate to work in the sex industry and who may encounter exploitation and abuse are not considered to have a legitimate claim to the same sorts of human rights protections demanded for ‘trafficking victims.’”⁶⁴ So in order to be accorded human rights as a migrant, first an individual must prove that she did not consent to sex work, and secondly that she was subject to suffering. It has also been pointed out that violence has been utilized as a sensationalist discursive tool in constructing notions of victimization; the more violence that has occurred, the more entrenched the concept of the victim becomes: “The construction of a ‘victim’ who will appeal to the public and policy makers demands that she be sexually blameless.”⁶⁵ The ultimate form of violent coercion is thus the

60 Of course not all countries have experimented with regulation. Among the exceptions are Israel, Brazil, and the United States. However, Brazil has a system of de facto regulation controlled by the police.

61 Absi, this volume, Bolivia; Turno, this volume, Florence.

62 Blanchette, this volume, Rio de Janeiro; Ekpootu, this volume, Lagos; Amir *et al.*, this volume, Tel Aviv/Jaffa; Tracol-Huynh, this volume, Hanoi; Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai; Schettini, this volume, Buenos Aires; Nuñez and Fuentes, this volume, Mexico City; Cabezas, this volume, Havana.

63 In the case of Bolivia, however, where sex workers’ rights have been afforded greater protection under law, violence in state-recognized brothels has fallen away, and it is primarily outside these brothels beyond the purview of authorities that it persists. Absi, this volume, Bolivia.

64 Doezema, “Loose Women or Lost Women?” p. 37.

65 *Ibid.*, p. 36.

enslavement of another human, and this shunts aside any and all notions of voluntarism.⁶⁶

Slavery and Sex Work

Despite its contested usage today as a popular trope of exploitation, sexual slavery does have a historical precedent; as the overviews indicate, slavery has been associated with bartered sex in locales around the world throughout history. In the pre-modern Ottoman Empire, imperial edicts forbidding the short-term sale of female slaves for the purpose of prostitution suggest that this was a social phenomenon that had alarmed the authorities to the extent that guilds were entrusted with preventing it from occurring.⁶⁷ In mid-nineteenth century Rio de Janeiro, black slaves were bought and exploited as prostitutes, in addition to being wives and concubines,⁶⁸ and a similar situation was reported in Havana.⁶⁹ But it appears that, at least in Mexico City, slaves were not always forced into sold sex by their owners; in one case, the black slave of a judge managed to buy her freedom from the earnings she made through prostitution.⁷⁰ In Nigeria, slaves were used for sexual purposes as well, although this may not have been perceived to be “prostitution” *per se*.⁷¹ As colonial Singapore grew in size and importance, Chinese and Japanese families purportedly sold their daughters into prostitution in a form of debt bondage,⁷² a situation that was reported for late nineteenth-century Australia as well for women from impoverished rural regions of Japan.⁷³ But at this point, it should be pointed out that in terms of sex work, as it is popularly used in contemporary discourses, the concept of slavery is problematic. At what point, for example, does debt bondage, which was and continues to be a common form of violence against

66 Soderlund points out that both the Trafficking Victims Protection Act and UN Protocol “label the objects of anti-trafficking interventions ‘sex slaves’, a term that functions to obliterate distinctions between involuntary and voluntary sex work.” “Running from the Rescuers”, p. 74.

67 Wyers, this volume, Istanbul.

68 Blanchette, this volume, Rio de Janeiro.

69 Cabezas, this volume, Havana.

70 Nuñez and Fuentes, this volume, Mexico City.

71 Ekpootu, this volume, Lagos.

72 Herzog, this volume, Singapore.

73 Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth.

women the world over in the sex industry,⁷⁴ shade into slavery? As Davidson points out, can a clear line really be drawn between slavery and exploitative “free” wage labour?

The problem is that even when understood as defined in the Slavery Convention of the League of Nations (1926), which states that slavery is “the status or condition of a person over whom any and all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised”, slavery implies a *package* of unfreedoms, not all of which are unique to slavery.⁷⁵

To use Davidson’s term, the “packaged” notion of “free versus unfree” elides more than it reveals; perhaps it would be more useful to think of “a continuum of various degrees of servitude rather than a dichotomy”⁷⁶ because such a definition allows for nuances of experience in varying locales and time periods rather than an essentialized either/or conceptualization based on the idea of “total control” over another.⁷⁷ In other words, what may be needed is an approach sensitive to the ranges of force and choice occurring in the sexual economy and the political and practical repercussions therein. As the overviews for this project indicate, the vast array of experiences of sold sex in terms of coercion and voluntarism, often overlapping and interweaved both temporally and spatially, defy clear-cut categorization. In terms of on-the-ground realities,

74 See, for example, Nuñez and Fuentes, this volume, Mexico City; Schettini, this volume, Buenos Aires; Ekpootu, this volume, Lagos; Amir *et al.*, this volume, Tel Aviv/Jaffa; Tracol-Huynh, this volume, Hanoi; Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth. Of course, debt bondage also exists outside the sex industry.

75 Davidson, “Will the Real Sex Slave Please Stand Up?” p. 6. Emphasis retained from the original.

76 Ehud R. Toledano, “Late Ottoman Concepts of Slavery”, *Poetics Today*, 14 (1993), pp. 477–506. Toledano argues that in the late Ottoman Empire, there were various categories of servitude which Europeans at the time lumped together under the term “slavery” in the drive to abolish the slave trade. One such category was *kul*, which were male “slaves” bought at a young age to be raised in the homes of elites for the purpose of eventual service in high-ranking state positions which afforded financial control over sizable amounts of wealth, a form of servitude which differed greatly from American and British practices of agricultural slavery.

77 Davidson, “Will the Real Sex Slave Please Stand Up?” p. 6. Davidson points out that “... not all slaves in the slave societies of the Caribbean and America, for example, were completely controlled by their owners—some were in a position to engage in autonomous trading (including the trade of sexual services) and/or to engage in a range of different types of resistance.”

“identifying [victims of trafficking] in the sex sector requires the authorities to distinguish between forced labour and extremely poor working conditions, and this is no easy task”.⁷⁸

Elusive Definitions: Just Who is a Sex Worker?

It is precisely the flux of sex work—in other words, a continuum of practices—that defies neat classification. In Shanghai, for example, there are seven “quasi-official categories” used for defining sold sex.⁷⁹ It has been noted that in Bolivia, one form of sex work involves the distribution of flyers to advertise, but even within that approach, various practices occur with differing levels of exploitation: “These ‘small ads’, which include photos of naked women and telephone numbers, may be a front for women working independently, either alone or with other women, or negotiated by police or pimps. On the whole, they reveal the existence of women seeking to leave street prostitution, whilst also hinting at a reality far more complex than the one-dimensional concept of sexual exploitation...”⁸⁰ It was noted that in Lagos multiple forms of sold sex interweave throughout the urban geographies of the city: “High class prostitutes or sex workers are mostly young women with more than secondary schooling, often in university or other tertiary institutions like polytechnics”, while less educated women are more likely to participate in higher-risk sexual services as a survival strategy.⁸¹ In Singapore, as in many other cities in the world, “freelancers” operate in such places as nightclubs, karaoke bars, and strip clubs,⁸² but this may not be perceived as a full-time, life-long occupation. Increasingly, the internet has become a commonly used means for sex workers to attract clients. While this has opened up ways for sex workers to work independently, it can also be involved in practices of exploitation by third parties, a reflection of the fact that women who sell sex even within the same city and through the same media can occupy radically different positions as regards autonomy and control over their income. It should also be pointed out that not all women engaging in the barter of sex for material gain perceive themselves as prostitutes,

78 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

79 Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai. These include a form of second wife, “contracted wives”, escorts and hostesses, “ding dong girls” who call men at hotels, “massage parlour girls”, streetwalkers, and itinerant sex workers “who service the poorest men.”

80 Absi, this volume, Bolivia.

81 Ekpootu, this volume, Lagos.

82 Herzog, this volume, Singapore.

as in the case of female university students in Nigeria taking up “runs”⁸³ or rural women seeking access to networks of empowerment through sex.⁸⁴ Admittedly, while this brief survey of practices of sex work is by no means exhaustive, it does indicate the broad continuum of practices of sold sex that exists and the spaces for voluntarism and coercion that are produced therein.

Another aspect of this continuum that should be mentioned here is the temporal fluidity that tends to be a hallmark of the sex industry. As the urban overviews indicate, while it is taken up as a long-term survival strategy, a significant number of individuals who engage in sex work have seen it in varying ways. Some see it as a temporary means to supplement their existing income,⁸⁵ accumulate capital for entrepreneurial ventures,⁸⁶ improve their social position,⁸⁷ participate in global consumer culture,⁸⁸ liberate themselves from patriarchal systems of power or familial exploitation and seek financial independence,⁸⁹ meet potential marriage partners,⁹⁰ or any number of combinations of the above motivations, thus problematizing the singular coercion model even further. Discussions in the overviews on rescue and rehabilitation are also revealing in this manner, indicating that “catching victims”⁹¹ in the sex industry and “rehabilitating” them often results in prison-like living conditions, violence, and inappropriate solutions that ignore the underlying economic disparities that create situations in which sex work can be just one

83 Ekpootu, this volume, Lagos.

84 Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai. In Bolivia, many sex workers strongly object to the term “prostitute” (*puta*): “They consider ‘prostitutes’ to be women who sleep around and do not charge and, as they tell their clients, ‘the *puta* is your wife who has sex with other men while you’re working.” Absi, this volume, Bolivia.

85 See for example Mechant, this volume, Bruges; Conner, this volume, Paris; Hammad, this volume, Cairo; Ekpootu, this volume, Lagos; Babere Kerata Chacha, “An Over-view History of Prostitution in Nairobi: From the Precolonial Period to the Present”, unpublished paper collected for the project “Selling Sex in the City”, 2013; Tracol-Huynh, this volume, Hanoi; Herzog, this volume, Singapore.

86 Absi, this volume, Bolivia; Ekpootu, this volume, Lagos.

87 Blanchette, this volume, Rio de Janeiro; Schettini, this volume, Buenos Aires; Absi, this volume, Bolivia.

88 Ekpootu, this volume, Lagos; Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai.

89 Absi, this volume, Bolivia; Ekpootu, this volume, Lagos.

90 Ekpootu, this volume, Lagos.

91 The act of “catching victims” is underpinned by the notion that the victims are perhaps “not so innocent” after all. Davidson argues that while the UN Protocol does provide provisions for people trafficked for reasons other than prostitution, most countries’ efforts primarily target individuals illegally migrating for sex work. Davidson, “Will the Real Sex Slave”, p. 11.

choice among none, or a means of achieving desired ends with varying ranges of freedom of choice.⁹² As the overview on Lagos notes, “The extent to which coercion or choice determines a prostitute’s sexual activity is dependent on the position she occupies in the hierarchy of sex work.” In this way, the question of coercion is problematized by class: “the freedom of ‘choice’ is not so free but can only be exercised by a select few”, as poverty places strict limitations on the options that are available whereas higher levels of education and access to networks of power increase a sex worker’s ability to negotiate with clients.⁹³

Conclusion

Approached in light of these issues, it becomes clear that the array of practices of sold sex in cities around the world cannot be neatly fitted into a dualistic either/or model of coercion and voluntarism, much less be accounted for with a western-based abolitionist framework that denies any space for agency at all. As the overviews and other research have indicated, migrating women often know they are going to be involved in sex work,⁹⁴ but much of the time the working conditions they find themselves in are far worse than anticipated. But whether migrant or not, sex workers are vulnerable to multiple layers of coercion and exploitation that can coincide with voluntary sold sex,⁹⁵ and this must be taken into consideration along with cases in which women are forced either by severe economic duress and/or third parties, including families, to engage in prostitution.⁹⁶ In this way, it appears that it would be more useful

92 Cabezas, this volume, Havana. Soderlund notes, “Reports from sex worker rights organizations and testimonials from individuals who manage shelters suggest that rescue escapes are exceedingly common throughout India and Southeast Asia. It appears that while some women use brothel raids and closures as an opportunity to leave the sex industry, others perceive the rehabilitation process itself as a punitive form of imprisonment thereby complicating the captivity/freedom binary asserted by abolitionists.” Soderlund, “Running from the Rescuers”, p. 66.

93 Ekpootu, this volume, Lagos.

94 Doezema, “Now You See Her, Now You Don’t”, p. 66.

95 “Evidence from countries, including Russia, Nepal and China, suggests that sex workers’ experiences fall along a continuum, with women who have undergone widely varying degrees of choice or coercion working alongside each other in the same sites.” Busza, “Sex Work and Migration”, p. 232.

96 As Mahdavi and Sargent in “Questioning the Discursive Construction”, p. 27, note, “To universalize meanings and values that different individuals ascribe to sexual labour would be to silence and deny the diversity of voices worldwide articulating manifold and

in social history to think of sexual labour as a field in which varying degrees of coercion can simultaneously occupy the same space as agentic labour in a continuum that is in constant flux spatially and temporally. The conflation of trafficking and “sexual slavery” so commonly found in the media and legislation, however, seeks to smooth over this complexity, leading to a situation in which sex workers are awkwardly articulated as “criminal-victims” under laws ostensibly put into place to protect them and thus subjected to even greater violence.⁹⁷ The overviews also suggest that far from seeing themselves as “enslaved”, some women take up sexual labour as a means of achieving financial independence and liberation from male oppression, thus further problematizing the abolitionist-social purist notion that prostitution is the ultimate expression of patriarchal violence via exploitative coercion.

As a final note, perhaps we should consider just what hidden historical baggage the term “consent” might be carrying with it and what implications that could have on future research into histories of sexual labour. In current legislation and debates over the rights of sex workers, consent is a pivotal term; abolitionists argue that regardless of consent, prostitution is a breach of human rights, while sex workers and their supporters argue that so long as an individual consents to sex work, it should be treated (and protected under law) as any other form of labour and that victims of coercion should be protected as well. A noteworthy point here is that in discourses on labour, the issue of consent has been hyper-scrutinized in terms of female sold sex, not other forms of work. We do not speak of whether or not men consent to cross borders to find employment, nor if women consent to be employed as domestic workers, whether migratory or not; there is also a rather notable silence on the issue of queer sex workers in the coercion/voluntarism debates, likely because taking into account same-gender sold sex would destabilize the argument that constructs prostitution as the violent male penetration of women. It would appear that the sticking point here is an underlying *moral* prejudice about hetero female sexuality and how it “should” be practised. This is evident in the ways that alleged victims of trafficking are accorded human rights, whereas women who

sometimes contradictory reasons for entering into commercial sex work and experiences with migration and sex work.”

97 Saunders in “Traffic Violations”, p. 354, points out that “It should not be surprising that sex workers rarely seek formal channels to redress other forms of violence such as sexual assault, physical assault, and robbery perpetrated against them. Although the anti-trafficking framework works to define some of these migrants as victims, it also works to heighten border and police controls, thus making migrant sex workers even more vulnerable to abuse.”

voluntarily migrate for sex work are not—they are “bad women” who “get what they deserve”. Also at work here is the conceptual blurring of the line between promiscuity and prostitution, as evident in such expressions as “whore” and “puta”, and ways that “suspect” women are subject to harassment by police, reformers, or otherwise. This is significant: the underlying idea here is a moralistic valuation which states that, along the lines of the anthropology of the sexual deviant, if a woman agrees to sell sex (or be promiscuous for that matter) there is “something wrong with her”. Seen in this way, the idea of consent is saturated in socially constructed notions of “proper” expressions of sexuality, and as such carries with it prejudices that impact how we think about sexual labour. Perhaps we need to “[overcome] the ‘voluntary/forced’ dichotomy, and the concept of consent implicated in it, that the myth of trafficking both depends on and propagates”.⁹⁸ In this way, we may be better equipped to undertake social histories of sexual labour and avoid the conceptual traps that our tools of analysis might lay for us.

98 Doezema, “Now You See Her, Now You Don’t”, p. 82. It has also been argued that “instead of focusing on whether the women were forced or not [...] it is more important to look at the living and working conditions of the women, to identify where violations of their rights are occurring, and to find ways to ameliorate these”. Leyla Gülçür and Pınar İlkkaracan, “The ‘Natasha’ Experience: Migrant Sex Workers from the Former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in Turkey”, *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 25 (2002), pp. 411–421, 411.

A Gender Analysis of Global Sex Work

Elise van Nederveen Meerkkerk

Introduction

Sexual objectification is the primary process of the subjection of women. It unites act with word, construction with expression, perception with enforcement, myth with reality. Man fucks woman; subject verb object.¹

In an article published in *Signs* in 1982, Catherine MacKinnon claimed that feminist theory, as opposed to traditional—as well as Marxist—approaches, was “consciousness raising”. In her article MacKinnon argued that (hetero) sexuality institutionalizes male dominance over women through the process of women’s “sexual objectification”. Instead of analysing sexuality as a neutral concept, she, and other feminists at the time, argued that sexuality should be seen as a form of power that is embodied by gender and hence reinforces inequalities between women and men.² Feminists since the 1970s have pointed to the importance of sexual relations in constituting gender inequalities. By emphasizing women as the “other”, or the second sex, women were “the sex” in (otherwise unproblematized, male-defined) humanity. Thus, feminism “helped to place sexuality at the centre of new historical narratives.”³ In fact, an important reason for replacing the term “sex” with “gender” was to point to the constructivist elements in social power relations and try to avoid biological determinism in the power relations between men and women.⁴

Much of the debate in the field of the history of sexuality since then has centred on the question about whether we should understand it as a history of repression or as the emancipation of women.⁵ Many of the earlier feminist studies

1 Catherine A. MacKinnon, “Feminism, Marxism, Method and the State: An Agenda for Theory”, *Signs*, 7 (1982), pp. 515–544.

2 *Ibid.*, pp. 526–533.

3 Victoria Harris, “Sex on the Margins: New Directions in the Historiography of Sexuality and Gender”, *The Historical Journal*, 53 (2010), pp. 1085–1105.

4 Joan Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis”, *The American Historical Review*, 91 (1986), pp. 1053–1075.

5 Harris, “Sex on the Margins”, p. 1093.

seemed to view the history of sexuality in terms of the former, prostitution being the *sublimation* of this oppression of women. According to MacKinnon, both traditional and Marxist historians before the 1980s had wrongly understood prostitution “either as mutual lust and degradation or an equal exchange of sexual need for economic need” instead of subjugation.⁶ However, more recent historical scholarship has revealed that women working in prostitution have quite often not been purely victims falling prey to vicious male pimps or *souteneurs*.⁷ Likewise, it has been pointed out that sex worker-client relationships can defy “traditional” male–female power dichotomies. Simone de Beauvoir, who was generally very critical of prostitution, also noted that female prostitutes can attain a certain degree of independence not only economically via their earnings but also psychologically, as sleeping with numerous men means that these women do not ultimately belong to any of them.⁸ Some historians even contend that “[p]rostitution is an act of defiance, a resistance of the social space to which women are traditionally confined, a countering of prescribed notions of womanhood and thus a threat to patriarchy.”⁹ Indeed, many feminist scholars as well as activists since the late 1980s have stressed that prostitution should instead be called “sex work”, suggesting that free choice, agency, and sexual liberation are its most important parameters.¹⁰

With this comparative overview, I would like to expose the more dynamic and complex gender relations that exist in the history of sex work. It is undeniable that women throughout history have been objectified more than men and that this ultimately relates to their sexuality and bodies. However, I believe it would be ahistorical to construct from this a one-dimensional picture of female submission. This also holds true for the history of female sex workers. While I by no means wish to discard the all too real experiences of violence, harassment, and discrimination that women sex workers have suffered in the past and present, most of the articles in this volume provide evidence for a more nuanced history. Of course, female sex workers have often been in an

6 MacKinnon, “Feminism, Marxism, Method”, p. 531. See also Susan Migden Socolow, “Women and Crime: Buenos Aires, 1757–97”, *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 12 (1980), pp. 39–54.

7 For example, women sometimes “recruited” their own pimps. Magaly Rodríguez García, “The League of Nations and the Moral Recruitment of Women”, *International Review of Social History*, 57 (2012), pp. 97–128, 110–111.

8 Simone de Beauvoir, *De tweede sekse: Feiten, mythen en geleefde werkelijkheid* (Utrecht, 2000), p. 662.

9 Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria.

10 Sheila Jeffreys, “Prostitution, Trafficking and Feminism: An Update on the Debate”, *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 32 (2009), pp. 316–320, 316.

unfavourable position, but they still generally had room to manoeuvre and at times could exert outright power over their male clients or pimps. Also, although we know relatively little about the history of male or transvestite/transgender prostitutes, some of the chapters here suggest that men have mostly not been very high up in the social hierarchy of sex workers. Moreover, female-female relationships can also result in highly unequal terms, for instance between madams and the prostitutes in their brothels.

I want to explore these gender dimensions of sex work on several levels. First of all, I will analyse them on the level of the labour market. To what extent was prostitution considered to be work in different times and places of the world? And, while we know that in most societies women and men have had different ranges of access to professions, how did the existence of such a gendered labour market affect women's entrance into prostitution? Secondly, I aim to investigate the role of gender relations in intermediation. To what extent have relationships between procurers and sex workers been influenced by gender? Have there been, for instance, noticeable differences between pimps and madams in this respect? Thirdly, I will deal with prostitute-client relations. As clients were and are often (but not always) of a different sex than their "service providers", gendered power relations come into play. This chapter therefore also looks into male and transvestite/transgender prostitution. Lastly, I will deal with prostitutes in relation to their families. As daughters, sisters, or mothers they have had specific gender-related responsibilities and in the family context certain expectations have existed. Of course there are myriad ways in which families have responded to a family member involved in prostitution; they may disapprove of and even expel a family member who works as a prostitute; they may simply ignore her activities, especially when she has (temporarily) migrated; they may support her; and, at the other extreme of the spectrum, family members may provide a network for prostitutes to perform their work by selling their daughters or wives or even doing the work of procuring themselves. On all of these levels, the rich urban overviews in this volume offer information that can be used to draw conclusions about gender relations in sex work over the past five centuries.

Sex Work in the Gendered Labour Market

In this section I investigate the place of prostitution in the labour market in the course of the last few centuries. The editors of this volume have explicitly defined prostitution as "a societal phenomenon as well as a form of labour", but not all historical agents nor all historians have regarded it as work. Therefore,

I will briefly discuss this issue first, mostly by drawing upon the information in the urban overviews presented here. Secondly, labour markets in the past and present have tended to be highly segmented based on class, ethnicity, and especially gender. Many of the chapters in this volume indeed seek out explanations for the occurrence of sex work within the scope of the unequal access to the labour market available to men and women. Therefore, I will pay attention to prostitution in relation to labour alternatives for women. Lastly, this section will address what has been called the “outsourcing of women’s subordination”, meaning either poor women from poor countries being drawn to wealthier countries to perform sex work, or sex tourism by westerners in poor regions of the world.¹¹ Are we indeed witnessing a new global gender division of labour in this respect or does history refute this image?

Sex Work as Work?

The general idea of prostitution as “sex work” was developed by sex workers’ rights organizations in the 1980s.¹² This does not mean that prostitutes did not regard themselves as workers before this period or that *all* prostitutes since then have considered themselves to be workers, but the issue has been on the (international) political agenda since then. As mentioned in the introduction, this was related to the more general shift in feminist views on prostitution as an exponent of women’s submission to women’s freedom. In my opinion, both the proponents of prostitution as “female (sexual) freedom” and of prostitution as “female (sexual) submission” make it difficult to analyse prostitution as “work” because both tend to sublimate the female body as a symbol for (all women’s) agency or lack thereof. After all, both interpretations grant a much broader, cultural-ideological and psychological dimension to prostitution and thus to the women practicing it. However, as Harris has recently stated, “The prostitute engages in sex for money, but this is entirely separate from how she might define her sexual self.”¹³ In other words, we need to avoid conflating the act of sex work with prostitutes’ (sexual) identities.

In order to historically analyse prostitution as work, it is thus important to ascertain to what extent prostitutes themselves, as well as the societies they lived in, considered their activities as work. This is of course a difficult task, as

11 Jeffrey, “Prostitution, Trafficking and Feminism”, p. 317. See also Sheila Jeffrey, *The Industrial Vagina: The Political Economy of the Global Sex Trade* (London, 2009).

12 Gail Pheterson and Margo Saint James (eds), *A Vindication of the Rights of Whores* (Seattle, 1989); Valerie Jeness, *Making It Work: The Prostitutes’ Rights Movement in Perspective* (New York, 1993).

13 Harris, “Sex on the Margins”, p. 1096.

the voices of the “subaltern”, most notably women, do not easily emerge from archival sources. Moreover, views on sold sex as “work” are definitely historically and geographically contingent. Also, societal and even juridical norms may have worked out rather differently in practice.

In the preindustrial period in many of the regions under study here, prostitution was not necessarily regarded as a profession as such. Sexual offences were mostly treated under the more general umbrella of “adultery”, which was a crime for men and women alike, although women were more likely to be prosecuted for it. In Russia, for example, the ecclesiastical literature did not distinguish between women who slept with men to whom they were not married for money and those who did it for other reasons. Both categories of women were called *bludnitsa* (“a woman who has gone astray”) in the tradition of the Slavonic Church, and both were equally subject to judgement by the ecclesiastical authorities.¹⁴ In seventeenth-century Florence, adultery committed by women was perhaps even considered to be worse than prostitution, “as it undermined the institution of the family and challenged male prerogatives.”¹⁵ We see similar conflation of extra-marital sex offences in other European countries¹⁶ and also in other parts of the world. In eighteenth-century Buenos Aires, for example, almost all crime convictions involving women were of a sexual nature. In particular, the sexually deviant behaviour of women who were married was both societally and judicially condemned.¹⁷ Despite the judicial focus on women as regards sexual offences in early modern times, there were countries such as Sweden where both men and women could be accused of being “a whore” or for “whoring” in cases of extra-marital sex.¹⁸ This type of stigmatization, especially for women, was however not restricted to the early modern period. Even today women who do not conform to society’s explicit or implicit sexual norms are branded as “whores” or “sluts”. In present-day Bolivia, for instance, terms such as “*puta*” are commonly used to denounce a woman who is considered to be displaying deviant sexual behaviour.¹⁹

Notwithstanding societal views on this issue, during the entire time period studied here many prostitutes as well as their procurers chose to make a living

14 Hetherington, this volume, St. Petersburg/Moscow.

15 Turno, this volume, Florence.

16 See Mechant, this volume, Bruges, who notes: “Whores were women having sex outside of marriage.” For the early modern Netherlands, see Lotte van de Pol, *Het Amsterdams Hoerdom: Prostitutie in de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw* (Amsterdam, 1996).

17 Socolow, “Women and Crime”, p. 42.

18 Svanström, this volume, Stockholm.

19 Absi, this volume, Bolivia.

in this sector, sometimes earning a substantial amount of money. While not all of them performed sex work of their own free will, there is an abundance of evidence which suggests that for many women (and men) it was a conscious choice, even if it meant working illegally. Sometimes, such as in precolonial Cairo, the authorities decided that prostitution should be taxed. A female tax collector (*Daminat al-Maghani*) would obtain the right to collect taxes from prostitutes, recording them and their profits, and they earned a percentage of the profits themselves. In return, the prostitutes received some state protection. Biancani and Hammad label this early modern *maghani* tax as “state recognition of sex workers as a professional group.”²⁰ In many regions and time periods, prostitution was bound to a certain period in women’s life cycles; aside from the exceptions, prostitutes have generally been young unmarried women. For all of these reasons, we can safely assume that many of the women involved in sold sex must have seen their activities not as constituting a lifelong identity but as generating income they could use to get by in a certain stage of their life. Examples of women (and men) occasionally providing sexual services in difficult economic times, as was the case in nineteenth-century Johannesburg, colonial Nigeria, and present-day Florence and Australia, attest to this rather pragmatic attitude. Many of the women and men reported on in this volume did not necessarily self-identify as sex workers but rather considered it to be one of the available strategies for survival.²¹ However, if we move away from the traditional (often gendered) view of work as a lifelong occupation with a particular career trajectory and employ a more inclusive definition of work,²² we can safely say that prostitution in these cases *was* work. Many prostitutes—either very explicitly or more implicitly—considered themselves to be workers, even if they did not think of their work in terms of an occupation or lifelong career.

Over the past few decades, the number of sex workers’ organizations has increased tremendously, indicating that prostitution indeed is a form of work akin to any other job and deserving of similar rights. The question of course is whether all sex workers want to identify themselves as such, or if they would rather see their work if not as “normalized” at least just as a means to make a living, temporarily if possible. However, over the past couple of years radical feminists

20 Biancani and Hammad, this volume, Cairo.

21 Ziyad Choonara, “Selling Sex in Johannesburg: From 1886 to the Present”, unpublished paper collected for the project “Selling Sex in the City”, 2013; Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria; Turno, this volume, Florence; Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth.

22 Marcel van der Linden, *Workers of the World: Essays toward a Global Labor History* (Leiden, 2008), esp. Chapter 2, pp. 17–38.

instead have increasingly objected again to the “common but erroneous theory that prostitution is simply work” and even more so if it involves migration or trafficking.²³ While I acknowledge that these layers of (non-)identification and moral judgement are, and have historically been, present in the debates on women’s prostitution, I nevertheless believe that many prostitutes throughout history have considered themselves to be economically active, even if it may not always have been “simply work” for them. In light of the broader definition of work proposed by recent studies on labour history, I think it is legitimate to analyse prostitution as one form of women’s work in the historically gendered labour market.

Alternatives in the Labour Market

Many historians of women’s work have pointed to the dualistic or segmented labour markets that have influenced women’s and men’s economic activities in very different ways. While full gender equality in the labour market has yet to be achieved, it is clear that in most societies in history labour markets were even more segmented and access to most occupations was often highly restricted for women.

We know that in mediaeval and early modern times many of the limitations for women in the labour market were institutionalized in (formal or informal) guild regulations. Several of the articles in this volume mention the role of guild exclusion and marginalization for women in the labour market in general as regards prostitution. Many guilds did not welcome (single) women and in the course of the mediaeval period they started to exclude them, which ruled out a whole range of profitable job opportunities for women. This was the case in Cairo²⁴ and also in Istanbul, where “it is likely that sex work was one of the only options for lower-class women in times of duress.”²⁵ In Europe as well this gender segmentation of the early modern labour market in which men were able to hold positions that required more skills and were better paid led to a crowding of many women into lower-paid occupations such as spinning, lace-making, and domestic service.²⁶ Indeed, in their court testimonies, (alleged)

23 Melissa Farley, “Theory versus Reality: Commentary on Four Articles about Trafficking for Prostitution”, *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 32 (2009), pp. 311–315, 311. See also Jeffreys, *The Industrial Vagina*.

24 Biancani and Hammad, this volume, Cairo.

25 Wyers, this volume, Istanbul.

26 Merry Wiesner, “Spinsters and Seamstresses: Women in Cloth and Clothing Production”, in Margaret Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy Vickers (eds), *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago, 1986), p. 202; Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk, “Segmentation in the Pre-industrial Labour Market:

prostitutes often mentioned textile work, lace making, needlework, and domestic service as their main economic activities.²⁷

Thus, most women involved in prostitution seem to have been involved mostly in “menial and least-paid occupations”²⁸ for which—especially in times of economic hardship—they may have sought out a complementary source of income. To be sure, we cannot always tell whether sex workers reported to the authorities that they were involved in another occupation because they were really doing it or because they wanted to appear to have “decent work”. In Stockholm, for instance, the early modern urban authorities were notably under the impression that prostitution was often carried out by women pretending to be fruit-sellers. Later, in the nineteenth century it was assumed that Swedish “orange girls” (young girls selling oranges) provided sexual services.²⁹ In nineteenth-century colonial Nigeria, petty trading and hawking by black women were also seen as being intimately related to prostitution, at least in the colonial narrative and popular imaginary.³⁰

Perhaps more than “selling fruit” and street vending, the sale of alcohol was in many parts of the world intrinsically bound up with prostitution. In Stockholm at the beginning of the nineteenth century there were 1,200 establishments licensed to sell liquor such as taverns, coffee-houses, restaurants, and beer houses. These were frequently run by women, but more often women worked as servant girls. As Svanström notes, “the assumption that several of these establishments were brothels seems reasonable.”³¹ Also, in nineteenth-century Johannesburg women often worked part-time as barmaids in canteens or bars. The association between alcohol and prostitution was utilized by bar owners who employed women to attract male customers.³² In particular, black women could employ the beer brewing skills that they had learned at home and many of them started their own businesses in the townships of Johannesburg. Because of the limited alternatives available to them in the labour market, “beer brewing and prostitution seemed to go hand in hand”, especially since

Women's Work in the Dutch Textile Industry, 1581–1810”, *International Review of Social History*, 51 (2006), pp. 189–216.

27 See Conner, this volume, Paris; Mechant, this volume, Bruges; Svanström, this volume, Stockholm. See also Van de Pol, *Amsterdams Hoerdom*, pp. 27–28. We cannot, of course, be sure if this was their actual (side) job, their previous occupation, or a cover-up for their activities in prostitution.

28 Conner, this volume, Paris.

29 Svanström, this volume, Stockholm.

30 Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria.

31 Svanström, this volume, Stockholm.

32 Choonara, “Selling Sex in Johannesburg”.

it paid three or four times more than providing household services or working in factories.³³ In colonial Nigeria and Nairobi, brewing and selling beer also were “usually an adjunct of prostitution rather than a separate occupation”, thus forming a profitable part of some women’s incomes.³⁴

Many of the chapters presented here stress the often casual nature of sex work, which has been performed along with other economic activities either in low-paid industry or domestic service, or—perhaps in a more directly related way—in bars and taverns. The general impression from the industrializing period is that while male migrants also had difficulties adapting to the urban job market, women encountered even greater barriers due to the smaller range of occupational options they had, and they often combined other economic activities with prostitution. In the nineteenth century, industrialization and the lure of the urban economy may have raised people’s expectations but generally it did not have much impact on the real opportunities available to women in the labour market. In Cairo, for instance, it seems that there was a “diffusion of prostitution as a response to the increased economic and social vulnerability of women within the capitalist wage labour market.”³⁵ In nineteenth-century Mexico City as well as in Florence and in Russia, most registered prostitutes were crowded into domestic work or needle work. There were also groups of women who (as former farm labourers) had moved to the city to become factory workers but were either fired or had not succeeded in getting a job in the first place.³⁶ Young unmarried migrant men earning low wages competed with single migrant women in the nineteenth century, leaving them even fewer job opportunities.³⁷ Moreover, prostitution was not just a survival strategy for *unmarried* women. As Sue Gronewold notes for Shanghai, “job security was uneven at best, so many women (married or not) moved in and out of prostitution to supplement their income.”³⁸

In many parts of the world, mechanisms of labour market segmentation had distinct ethnic and religious features. For instance in Johannesburg, as in all of colonial South Africa, most domestic services were provided by black men,

33 *Ibid.*

34 Babere Kerata Chacha, “An Overview History of Prostitution in Nairobi: From the Precolonial Period to the Present”, unpublished paper collected for the project “Selling Sex in the City”, 2013; Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria.

35 Biancani and Hammad, this volume, Cairo.

36 Nuñez and Fuentes, this volume, Mexico City; Turno, this volume, Florence; Hetherington, this volume, St. Petersburg/Moscow.

37 See Conner, this volume, Paris.

38 Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai.

leaving even more limited options for women in the urban labour market.³⁹ And in Istanbul around 1920, small-scale male-dominated workshops still tended to dominate the urban economy. While industrialization in this period created new opportunities for some women to work, primarily non-Muslim women were involved in factory labour. This limited access to work, in combination with economic duress following World War I, led to a noticeable increase in prostitution by Muslim women in Istanbul (although Christian and Jewish sex workers were also active).⁴⁰

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, labour market alternatives—or rather a lack thereof—were still an important reason for women to engage in prostitution. Although in comparison to earlier periods the gender segmentation of the labour market may be less of a problem in western countries today, it appears to be persistent elsewhere in the world. It has been noted that in Israel in the 1990s women were crowded into a small number of occupations and there were higher unemployment rates for women than for men.⁴¹ In Turkey, urban labour market participation rates are strikingly lower for women (22%) than for men (70%), and moreover women's wages are significantly lower.⁴² All this seems to drive women much more than men into the informal spheres of the economy. In present-day Nigeria, only 8.3% of women are listed as wage employees while 74.5% are self-employed. Thus, “women remain coded in patriarchal terms and encased in narrow confines with gender appropriate jobs. Men continue to dominate in the political space.”⁴³

In this “informal economy”, the income that can be made through sex work is often more than what can be earned with the available alternative jobs, especially for illiterate and unskilled workers.⁴⁴ In Bolivia, women from the working classes employed in the informal market as domestic workers, waitresses, or saleswomen can earn about €50 to €100 per month. But as the ambitions of these women grow and they consider owning a business themselves, they often turn to prostitution as a way of earning start-up capital to realize their dreams.⁴⁵ Also, sex work is seen by many women as a means to obtaining a more luxurious lifestyle and hence it is a supplement for or alternative to other work. As Gronewold has noted for Shanghai, “shop girls or women in sweatshop

39 Choonara, “Selling Sex in Johannesburg”.

40 Wyers, this volume, Istanbul.

41 Amir *et al.*, this volume, Tel Aviv/Jaffa.

42 Wyers, this volume, Istanbul.

43 Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria.

44 See Dasgupta, this volume, Calcutta.

45 Absi, this volume, Bolivia.

jobs can aspire to own the urban style clothes, jewellery, and apartments that their meagre incomes would not ordinarily allow."⁴⁶

Indeed, the income that can be earned through sex work historically was and still is higher than many other kinds of women's work and this may be seen as contributing to even more than economic independence. As Blanchette states in his thematic overview in this volume, "unpaid sex, seen as an integral form of other female labouring roles, is often more oppressive than paid sex. [...] [T]he ability to earn in one sex act what a male earns in a day is a non-trivial means of achieving one's socio-economic desires which can counterbalance the stigma of prostitution and the need to perform sex without desire."⁴⁷ To be sure, working conditions for prostitutes may not always have been optimal, but in many countries the alternatives have turned out to be worse. In Calcutta, for instance, about half of the prostitutes who were interviewed reported that they had experienced sexual assault in their previous jobs when they worked as domestic servants, construction labourers, and secretaries. In these jobs, they were sexually harassed by male recruiters and bosses. As one former secretary remarked as regards a boss who constantly asked her for sexual favours, "Well, then I decided I might as well get paid for sex."⁴⁸

A "New Division of Labour"?

Over the past decade or so, trafficking has received increasing attention in both societal and academic debates.⁴⁹ It has been argued that a new international division of labour has emerged in which women from poor countries go to western countries to provide sexual services under deplorable labour conditions. Some have even talked about "modern day slavery".⁵⁰ Often, ethnicity plays an important role in these debates, as (illegal) immigrants, often of non-western origin and sometimes just barely adult women, are particularly vulnerable to exploitation by (white male) traffickers. As noted in many chapters in this volume, both the issues of trafficking and ethnicity are far from being new elements in the history of sex work. In particular, colonialism as well as

46 Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai.

47 Blanchette, this volume, Seeing beyond Prostitution: Agency and the Organization of Sex Work.

48 Dasgupta, this volume, Calcutta.

49 See Farley, "Theory versus Reality"; Jeffreys, "Prostitution, Trafficking and Feminism"; Rodríguez García, "The League of Nations", pp. 97–98.

50 For a fierce criticism of the debate, see Thaddeus Blanchette and Ana Da Silva, "On Bullshit and the Trafficking of Women: Moral Entrepreneurs and the Invention of Trafficking of Persons in Brazil", *Dialectical Anthropology*, 36 (2012), pp. 107–125.

early twentieth-century anxieties about globalization have played a major part in ethnicizing sexual encounters and debates.

The presence of predominantly male Europeans in the colonies affected gender and ethnic relations in the Americas, Asia, and Africa. In early modern Havana, sex work was dominated by the indigenous population, *Mulatas*, slaves, and free women of colour. They worked in saloons and lodging houses, and they offered both household services and sexual services to soldiers and sailors.⁵¹ The same has been noted for Mexico City. In Africa as well indigenous women were often the first people with whom colonisers had close relationships, and as Chacha notes, this was “their first strong encounter of these ‘others.’”⁵² Colonial master–slave relationships obviously added another dimension to sexual services, as these were generally distinguished from prostitution.⁵³ In Southeast Asia, the concept of “temporary marriage” between local women and merchants was also quite common, but over the course of the seventeenth century, many foreign traders increasingly preferred female slaves for their sexual relationships.⁵⁴ Indeed, female slaves as well as “free” prostitutes seem to have flooded the sex markets of pre-1800 port towns such as Singapore, Batavia, and Malacca.⁵⁵

This does not mean, however, that white women were not involved in colonial prostitution. In nineteenth-century South Africa, for example, women from all ethnic groups worked as prostitutes, and many of the white sex workers were from eastern Europe.⁵⁶ Especially from the late nineteenth-century onwards, when European women increasingly were settling overseas, “white slavery” was of utmost concern to the authorities. Schettini has shown that in the case of Argentina regulations and legislation from the 1890s onwards particularly targeted white women, thus enhancing their visibility. Other groups of vulnerable women, such as Argentinian-born prostitutes, child sex workers, and women involved in violent domestic relationships were less problematized and therefore almost invisible.⁵⁷ More generally, in the late colonial period the international community (first and foremost the League of

51 Cabezas, this volume, Havana.

52 Babere Kerata Chacha, “An Overview History of Prostitution in Nairobi: From the Precolonial Period to the Present”, unpublished paper collected for the project “Selling Sex in the City”, 2013.

53 Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria.

54 Barbara Andaya Watson, *The Flaming Womb: Repositioning Women in Early Modern Southeast Asia* (Honolulu, 2006), pp. 125–127.

55 Herzog, this volume, Singapore.

56 Choonara, “Selling Sex in Johannesburg”.

57 Schettini, this volume, Buenos Aires.

Nations) became increasingly concerned about the “traffic in women and children”, and it was often assumed that “white” women were trafficked by Jewish men or “men of foreign race”.⁵⁸ It is clear that such approaches not only largely tended to overlook the problem of exploitation of non-white women, for instance in (former) colonies, but also depicted white prostitutes as the “helpless victims” of traffickers, which they often seem not to have been.

A similar attitude towards the migration of sex workers seems to prevail in present-day discussions, albeit now it is directed towards non-white prostitutes.⁵⁹ While there is, of course, an illegal circuit in which women are recruited against their will, most of the chapters in this volume suggest that today, the majority of women migrate voluntarily, usually—though not always—knowing that they will enter into sex work. Thousands of Nepalese and Bangladeshi women, for instance, migrate to India because they can earn money for their families by selling sex. Most of the time, they know what they are getting into and they aid in their own recruitment.⁶⁰ Also, in contemporary Bruges women mainly seem to enter sex work voluntarily, although physicians visiting prostitutes have admitted that the boundaries are not always clear. It is, for instance, very hard to get out of the business, as many women “fall back on what they know.”⁶¹ Interestingly, in 2011 most of the sex workers in Flanders were from Belgium (40%) and other European countries (almost 40%). Less than 10% were from Africa, and the percentages for other parts of the world were much lower still.⁶² While these percentages may less accurately reflect prostitutes’ profiles in larger hubs of international migration, many of the chapters here do suggest that statistics as well as representations of the share of migrants in prostitution may be overstated. This is partly a reflection of the fact that migrant women tend to end up relatively often in street prostitution and thus are in the more visible spectrum of the business. But sometimes more deliberate distortions are definitely the case. In China, for instance, the state authorities seem to have good reason to represent the issue of prostitution and trafficking as mainly a problem of migrant women, whereas the actual estimates of numbers (30 million) imply that the majority of sex workers are Chinese.⁶³

58 See Rodríguez García, “The League of Nations”, p. 107.

59 See Farley, “Theory versus Reality” and Jeffreys, “Prostitution, Trafficking and Feminism”.

60 Dasgupta, this volume, Calcutta.

61 Mechant, this volume, Bruges.

62 *Ibid.*

63 Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai.

Mediation and Gender Relations

Historically, sex workers have worked within the framework of various kinds of labour relations. They may act entirely independently, working from their own homes and soliciting costumers themselves. More often, however, some form of mediation is involved both in recruiting prostitutes and/or dealing with costumers. We may think of co-sex workers and recruitment agencies in this regard, but in the chapters in this volume pimps and brothel-keepers are particularly highlighted. Therefore, in this section these two categories will be discussed, as well as their gender dimensions because typically pimping is associated more with men and brothel-keeping with women (madams). Below I will briefly discuss how this has worked out in terms of the relationships between sex workers and their procurers in various parts of the world in different times. Lastly, I will discuss the role of the state but only in very broad terms, as this is more elaborately treated in the Conclusion to this volume.

Procuring and Pimping

Throughout history the act of pimping has been stereotypically thought of as a male activity.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, many examples from the urban overviews in this project show that procurers has also been widely carried out by women. In many early modern towns, women were found guilty of procurers and they were not always brothel owners. They were colleagues, former prostitutes, and even could be prostitutes' mothers.⁶⁵ Turno notes that in eighteenth-century Florence "in the economy of a neighbourhood life, prostitution was often an all-female affair."⁶⁶ In nineteenth-century Brazil it was fairly common for slave owners, often themselves poor but free—or recently freed—women, to hire out their slaves for sexual services. Often, the owner and slave lived under the same roof and were both working as prostitutes, and the owners would combine sold sex with other economic activities such as street vending or cleaning.⁶⁷ And in Cairo in the 1950s, a time when there were few male pimps,

64 See for instance the debates in the League of Nations Committee on Trafficking in the 1920s and 30s: Rodríguez García, "The League of Nations", pp. 113–114. In this debate it was acknowledged that women could also be procurers, but "pimp" (or the French word "*souteneur*") was the dubious privilege ascribed only to men.

65 In the Netherlands, female procurers were called "*koppelaarster*". See Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk, *De draad in eigen handen: Vrouwen en loonarbeid in de Nederlandse textielnijverheid* (Amsterdam, 2007), pp. 212, 218.

66 Turno, this volume, Florence.

67 Blanchette and Schettini, this volume, Rio de Janeiro.

“women dominated pimping and they were mostly old retired prostitutes.”⁶⁸ Still, it is quite hard to distinguish in the historical sources between female procurers and madams who owned brothels because pimping was simply not a term used for women. Indeed, most historians tend to describe female procurers as “madams”. Nevertheless, it is clear that women recruiting prostitutes were not necessarily madams but could also be friends, family members, or colleagues mediating, for example, to send women sex workers abroad.⁶⁹

However, the majority of procurers have probably been male, and I will therefore focus here on the gendered relationship between them and prostitutes. The relationships between female sex workers and male pimps have been complicated throughout history, to say the least. They range from genuine love relationships to forms of protection as well as abuse and outright exploitation, and they are often characterized by a mixture of two or more of these relations. Sometimes women have deliberately chosen streetwalking because it comes with a greater deal of independence than working in a brothel. Streetwalkers can of course choose to work independently, as sometimes happens, but women have more commonly worked with a pimp for the sake of protection.⁷⁰ However, this can limit their freedom considerably as their male pimps can turn out to be exploiters and abusers rather than protectors.⁷¹ In some cases, pimping has been harsher than the labour relations that sex workers have had with a brothel keeper, as was the case in Cairo and Mexico City. While pimps can protect women against violent customers and even against exploitative brothel keepers, they can just as well be an additional source of exploitation.⁷²

Pimps or *souteneurs* for instance demand part of sex workers’ earnings, often amounting to half or even more of their income.⁷³ Other forms of exploitation involve a debtor system in which men “loan” money to sex workers at such high interest rates that women have difficulty paying off their debts.⁷⁴ Furthermore, the pimp-prostitute relationship may be tainted by physical and/or sexual violence. Being involved with a pimp in a sexual and/or affective relationship may guarantee a prostitute more of her pimp’s goodwill and protection, but it can also add to her subordinate position and dependence. Throughout history

68 Biancani and Hammad, this volume, Cairo.

69 Rodríguez García, “The League of Nations”, p. 110.

70 Mechant, this volume, Bruges.

71 Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth.

72 Biancani and Hammad, this volume, Cairo; Nuñez and Fuentes, this volume, Mexico City; Amir *et al.*, this volume, Tel Aviv/Jaffa.

73 Mechant, this volume, Bruges.

74 Wyers, this volume, Istanbul.

men have used the pretence of a love affair to entice women into prostitution, sometimes convincing them to lose their virginity through false promises of marriage.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, there are also examples of reverse gender relationships. The reports issued by the League of Nations, for example, rather frequently noted that both in Europe and America women recruited their own pimps to help them travel abroad and mediate for them with brothels and/or clients.⁷⁶ This was also true in colonial Lagos, where most prostitutes seem to have recruited “jaguda boys” to mediate for them rather than the other way around. Sometimes they would not even pay their procurers anything.⁷⁷

Interestingly, some of the chapters here note that new digital means of communication, such as the internet and mobile phones, have tended to increase the independence of female sex workers from intermediaries. Apart from the economic advantages of these forms of self-employment, sex workers are also able to decrease the risk of violence and police harassment.⁷⁸

Brothel Owners

The urban overviews in this volume show that, perhaps except for the late twentieth century,⁷⁹ brothel-keepers throughout history have overwhelmingly been female (and therefore they are usually referred to as “madams”). In nineteenth-century Russia as well as in early twentieth century Australia, Istanbul, and Mexico City, the authorities stipulated that the owners or managers of brothels had to be women. In Mexico City, the female owners of brothels and assignation houses were also responsible for negotiating with representatives of the public authorities such as health inspectors, doctors, and police officers.⁸⁰ In nineteenth-century Paris, madams in a sense had become “agents of the government”⁸¹ and this formal position naturally gave them a lot of power. In the case of Russia, legislation even went as far to set a minimum age of thirty-five for madams, so in a sense they had to be “more mature” women.⁸² A similar trend, though not set by law, was visible among brothel house owners in Rio de Janeiro at the end of the nineteenth century, as most madams were over 30 years old.⁸³

75 Biancani and Hammad, this volume, Cairo.

76 Rodríguez García, “The League of Nations”, pp. 110–111.

77 Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria.

78 Wyers, this volume, Istanbul; Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria.

79 Conner, this volume, Paris.

80 Nuñez and Fuentes, this volume, Mexico City.

81 Conner, this volume, Paris.

82 Hetherington, this volume, St. Petersburg/Moscow.

83 Blanchette and Schettini, this volume, Rio de Janeiro.

Some of the chapters mention the fact that brothels also have had the potential to offer a setting for surrogate families. In pre-revolutionary China, very powerful fictive kin relationships existed within brothels, and madams were often addressed as “mother”, older women were called “aunts”, and other prostitutes were referred to as “sisters”. According to Gronewold, this language of family has persisted up until today in China. Sex workers often call their madam “mother” and, interestingly, even male managers are sometimes referred to as *mamasan*.⁸⁴ In present-day Bolivia, madams are also often considered to be a “house mother” especially by younger women, and they are referred to as “big mother”.⁸⁵ Obviously, the close relationships between prostitutes themselves can, apart from being sisterly, also result in lesbian love relationships, as was explicitly noted in the case of Russia.⁸⁶

Clearly, however, these familial relationships generally come at a price. As with pimps, sex workers have had to pay their madams for boarding, mediation, and the “protection” they received. Madams who owned a house in the desirable parts of a city might very well exploit that fact, as was seen, for instance, in Rio de Janeiro where madams sometimes owned two or three houses in the same district for which they charged prostitutes much higher rent than was the norm for the surrounding areas.⁸⁷ Moreover, apart from economic power, family-like ties can also mean that madams have greater (emotional) sway over their sex workers, as Gronewold has noted for the city of Shanghai.⁸⁸ At times madams have exercised control in another way by creating debt relationships, as happened for instance in early modern Bruges.⁸⁹ In Mexico City, madams often forced women to consume goods and services in the brothel offered by acquaintances and friends. In this way, sex workers were constantly in debt to their bosses, and it was more difficult for them to leave the brothel.⁹⁰ Similarly, Schettini notes for Argentina that it was not always the proverbial male pimp who bound female sex workers to the premises. One infamous example was Madam Blanca, who had set up a brothel in La Boca, Buenos Aires at the start of the twentieth century. She also made a habit out of imposing on the women working for her everlasting debt notes that they could never pay off.⁹¹

84 Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai.

85 Absi, this volume, Bolivia.

86 Hetherington, this volume, St. Petersburg/Moscow.

87 Blanchette and Schettini, this volume, Rio de Janeiro.

88 Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai.

89 Mechant, this volume, Bruges.

90 Nuñez and Fuentes, this volume, Mexico City.

91 Schettini, this volume, Buenos Aires.

Examples of madams resorting to physical violence also surface in some of the urban histories here. In eighteenth-century Bruges, a prostitute named Isabelle Boddin took on a job as a waitress in a bar. When her madam told her the next day to go upstairs with some soldiers who were drinking there, Isabelle refused at first, but she was beaten by her madam until she complied.⁹² A different form of physical abuse was noted for nineteenth-century Shanghai, where madams often got their workers hooked on drugs in order to keep them under their control.⁹³ Similar mechanisms were in place in Australia, especially after the criminalization of procuring by men in 1908. While sex workers did receive some protection in brothels, they were also often paid for their services not with money but with cocaine as a means of keeping them dependent on their employers.⁹⁴

The Role of the State

While states—except in times of war or mobilization—have rarely functioned as direct mediators for sex work, they have put into place institutional frameworks for mediation, thus indirectly impacting on gender relations. We have already seen that in many cases the state stipulated that brothel owners had to be women. But in other ways regulation, abolition, and prohibition have influenced gender relations. For instance, one of the major consequences of the ban on prostitution and female entertainment in nineteenth-century Cairo was that it deprived self-employed women of much of their autonomy, as it enhanced “subordination to the masculine figure of pimps and procurers in return for protection from state control and its coercive methods.”⁹⁵

Early twentieth-century Australian legislation was a case in point. The Police Offences Act was enacted in 1908, which made living off the earnings of prostitution illegal for men but not for women. As a consequence, most street prostitution disappeared and sex workers moved indoors, which did not always mean they were better off, as the example of the payment in hard drugs has shown. Moreover, as Frances puts it, “without their male associates women were more vulnerable to violence from clients and other men”, as well as police violence.⁹⁶ Indeed, police interventions in private matters in other parts of the world have also been legitimized by an argument based on the protection

92 Mechant, this volume, Bruges.

93 Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai.

94 Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth.

95 Biancani and Hammad, this volume, Cairo.

96 Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth.

of prostituted slaves, or European “white slaves”.⁹⁷ At times, state protection could in fact be real, as was the case in the Ottoman Empire, where Islamic law explicitly forbade the procuring of slaves for short-term sexual gratification in an attempt to prevent female slaves from being repeatedly bought and sold.⁹⁸

However, there are numerous examples in the chapters here that show how, especially in countries that criminalize prostitution, soliciting or procuring (or both) have led to state violence, which is often committed by the police. This held true in early twentieth-century Brazil and Australia as well as in late twentieth-century France and present-day Istanbul, where the police have the right to raid prostitutes’ homes.⁹⁹ In some cases, the police even de facto organize the trade, as increasingly happens in present-day Argentina.¹⁰⁰ However, we are again presented with a history that has many shades of grey, as prostitutes and brothel owners themselves all over the world have tried to establish friendly relationships with the police, even in locales where prostitution is illegal. As Ekpootu suggests, there may be interesting class elements to this, as the more educated women in Nigeria seem to be more successful at accessing the police than other sex workers.¹⁰¹

Relationships between Sex Workers and Their Clientele

Demand for Sexual Services

Since prostitution is said to be (one of) the world’s oldest professions, we should pay close attention to the demand for sex workers in history. Port and garrison towns, for instance, tend to (temporarily) draw large numbers of men away from their wives or fiancées. In metropolitan, imperial France, for instance, prostitution was accepted as “a natural outlet for masculine needs”, as it was argued that men, especially soldiers, could not be expected to be chaste.¹⁰² Colonial encounters often seem to have been a sublimation of such gender (as well as ethnic) imbalances. As Nuñez and Fuentes write in their overview on Mexico,

97 Blanchette and Schettini, this volume, Rio de Janeiro.

98 Wyers, this volume, Istanbul.

99 Conner, this volume, Paris; Wyers, this volume, Istanbul. See also Blanchette and Da Silva, “On Bullshit”, p. 121.

100 Schettini, this volume, Buenos Aires.

101 Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria.

102 Tracol-Huynh, this volume, Hanoi.

The conquest was a men's thing; men who left their women and children behind, and who could reinvent themselves by "setting sail to America". In spite of royal ordeals issued on the matter, very few married women came to join their husbands, leading to a complex and peculiar colonial society. Although colonial legislation was in essence the same as the Spanish one, its practice was more lenient. Carnal relations, whether stable or not, between white males and indigenous women or women from the various castes that emerged [did take place] [...]. Widows, orphans, and poor, single, or abandoned women found in selling their bodies a means to support themselves due to the lack of specific job opportunities for them.¹⁰³

In the British colonies, the imbalance between white male settlers and (white) women concerned colonial officials as well. From Singapore to Australia (often young) British men setting foot on the shores of remote countries led to a certain acceptance of domestic and sexual services offered by (native) women, sometimes leading to relationships and marriage.¹⁰⁴ While in Britain prostitution was condemned, early British authorities in the Indian subcontinent pragmatically accepted that professional courtesans in India had a status that was different from sex workers in the metropolis. However, during the Crimean war (1853–1856) the number of British soldiers suffering from venereal diseases increased to such an extent that the British Government drafted the Contagious Diseases Act (1864), which was enforced in various parts of the empire.¹⁰⁵ In the Dutch and French colonies, prostitution also became an issue of increasing concern, though it was mostly problematized in the same vein as cohabitation or mixed-race marriages, thus exposing imperial anxieties about interracial sexual contact and the "degeneration" of the "white" race.¹⁰⁶ While colonial concerns were thus usually directed towards non-white women, Nigeria nevertheless presents a somewhat different case. In Nigeria the colonial authorities tried to tackle the threat of venereal disease by examining not Nigerian prostitutes but the colonial army. Soldiers who were infected had to pay fines and they were also subject to more extreme measures such as "cock-pulling or

103 Nuñez and Fuentes, this volume, Mexico City.

104 Herzog, this volume, Singapore; Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth.

105 Dasgupta, this volume, Calcutta.

106 Ann Stoler, "Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers: European Identities and the Cultural Politics of Exclusion in Colonial Southeast Asia", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 34 (1992), pp. 514–551, 550.

public displays of [their] genitals." In contrast, prostitutes were not medically examined, nor were they supervised or registered by the state.¹⁰⁷

Aside from discussing racial anxieties and divisions, many of the chapters here also mention the class dimensions of sex work. There have been many types of prostitutes interacting with clients of various social standings, but it should be noted that these categories are not always rigid. In nineteenth-century China, for instance, an elaborate hierarchy had developed over the course of a thousand years in which there was a range of types of prostitution, from high-class courtesans (*guanren*) to "wild chicks" or "pheasants" (*yeji* or *zhiji*) who worked in lower class brothels or as street walkers.¹⁰⁸ While sometimes less developed, we see similar class-related client-sex worker relationships occurring in other regions such as Cairo, France, Russia, and Australia. Wealthy men often tended to visit large clubs, "grand brothels", or courtesans. There was also a broad middle segment consisting of brothels visited by men from varying levels of the middle class, men who were both married and unmarried and of moderate means. Streetwalkers generally offered services to men from all backgrounds, although of course because they charged less, they were more affordable for lower-class men and seamen. As Frances has noted for colonial Australia, "[t]he experience of working in the sex industry [...] depended very much on which part of the industry a woman worked in: women in the higher class brothels were expected to provide a greater range of both sexual and emotional services than those offering a cheap, quick outlet for the pent-up lusts of visiting seamen or bushmen."¹⁰⁹

Client-prostitute Relationships

Historical information about the relationships between sex workers and their clients is generally hard to obtain. In many periods and societies, prostitution was carried out clandestinely because it was illegal, even if the typically male clients were not persecuted.¹¹⁰ Moreover, sexual taboos also limit what sources have to say about both prostitutes and clients as regards their interactions. Nonetheless, many of the chapters provide some information about the multifaceted encounters that have occurred between sex workers and their clients.

107 Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria.

108 Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai.

109 Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth.

110 With the exception of present-day Sweden, Australia, and France (in France, there is currently also a heated parliamentary debate about legislation criminalizing prostitutes' clients).

While perhaps they are not aspects of the “regular” relationships between sex workers and their customers, physical violence and abuse is mentioned in many of the chapters and they seem to have been a common “occupational hazard”.¹¹¹ Differences in physical strength can clearly be a disadvantage for female sex workers dealing with male clients, but there are also cases of prostitutes physically or verbally abusing men. Humiliating clients can also be an effective strategy used by prostitutes to assert control.¹¹² More generally, some of the chapters note that performing sex work in the first place can be a way for women to exert power over men. As has been mentioned, some women have opted to provide sexual services in exchange for money rather than having to have unpaid sex.¹¹³ In this way, as we have seen with prostitutes in present-day Calcutta, getting paid for sex is sometimes preferred as a way of doing “decent work” which may grant these women economic independence and sometimes emotional empowerment as well.

Especially in societies with quite strict gender norms, sex work may be one way to provide women with some leeway, despite the cost of social stigmatization. It is estimated that in contemporary Turkey approximately 20 per cent of men have their first erotic encounters with sex workers, which may be attributed precisely to the strict (gendered) sexual norms in society.¹¹⁴ In present-day Bolivia, female sex workers regularly point out that they dominate men and their money. Bolivian prostitutes make it very clear to their male clients that just because the men have the money to pay them, that does not mean they have power over prostitutes: “By being bawdy with their clients the women rebel not only against traditional gender stereotypes but also against the society’s concept of a submissive, seductive prostitute willing to do anything for money.”¹¹⁵

Apart from abusive relationships, many of the chapters here also refer to affective relationships between prostitutes and their clients, ranging from occasional or part-time love affairs to actual marriage. In nineteenth-century Australia, for instance, it was quite common for women to marry their clients. They did not even always stop working after getting married, although this became more customary in the twentieth century following the legislation which

111 As mentioned by Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai. Other chapters also reported on violence; see Wyers, this volume, Istanbul; Turno, this volume, Florence.

112 Wyers, this volume, Istanbul; Absi, this volume, Bolivia.

113 Blanchette, this volume, *Seeing beyond Prostitution: Agency and the Organization of Sex Work*.

114 Wyers, this volume, Istanbul.

115 Absi, this volume, Bolivia.

made it a criminal act for men to live off earnings made from sex work.¹¹⁶ Interestingly, in present-day China we see that marriage-like relationships have emerged particularly among both the wealthiest and poorest in society. Among the elites, a new fashion is for men to have a concubine or second wife (*ernai*) who often lives in her own apartment, and among the lowest classes there are “women who live in a shed” (*xiagongpeng*) “who service the poorest men, usually migrant workers, sometimes living with or among them, exchanging sex for food, shelter, and basic survival.”¹¹⁷ In contemporary Nigeria, call girls in particular specialize in non-Nigerian (often white male) clients, sometimes marrying their customers. “Indeed”, notes Ekpootu, “this is often the target as derivable benefits from such liaisons are perceived to be very high.”¹¹⁸ And in Brazil, too, many women often enter into relationships with immigrant clients, and Blanchette and Schettini point out that these affective relationships are “extremely varied and complex and cannot be reduced to a homogenized narrative of Brazilian victims and foreign villains.”¹¹⁹

Male, Transvestite and Transgender Prostitution

While most of the chapters do not provide much information about male or transgender/transvestite sex work (and in most historical (legal) contexts prostitution has been defined as “female”), some countries such as China and the Ottoman Empire had a rich tradition of prostitution by men or boys.¹²⁰ Generally, their clients were men as well. In Cairo in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, brothels and “night clubs” often had both male and female singers, dancers, and prostitutes.¹²¹ In fact, when Abbas Pasha restricted female prostitution in Egypt, “men promptly filled the gap left by women dancers and singers”. Often, these men were immigrants from other ethnic groups, such as Turkish, Jewish or Armenian. Male brothel and night club workers occupied a social niche, and “they were perceived as fulfilling a respectable, morally sanctioned function during festivals and communal occasions”.¹²² In China, male entertainers, especially those who played female opera roles (*dan*), were

116 Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth.

117 Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai.

118 Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria.

119 Blanchette and Schettini, this volume, Rio de Janeiro.

120 Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai; Wyers, this volume, Istanbul.

121 Biancani and Hammad, this volume, Cairo.

122 *Ibid.*

quite popular and attracted wealthy benefactors. However, in the 1920s and '30s, both homosexuality and prostitution were increasingly considered to be deviant and criminal, resulting in their prohibition and total suppression under Mao.¹²³

Sometimes, male sex workers have been openly homosexual, as is the case in present-day Bolivia where homosexual waiters working at brothels also exchange sex for cash with men.¹²⁴ At other times, they may engage in bisexual or heterosexual encounters, or at least appear to do so because of the social stigma of homosexuality; in present-day China, it is likely that over 90% of male sex workers marry women.¹²⁵ On the other hand, both male prostitutes and clients involved in male-male sexual encounters often report that they do not perceive themselves as being homosexual, as was indicated in the chapter on Istanbul. There, male clients seeking out transgender encounters “prefer individuals who have not undergone gender reassignment surgery, for the reason that they can take active as well as passive roles.”¹²⁶ This again underscores the point that sex workers’ sexual identity does not necessarily overlap with their occupational identity.

Either by offering a particular “niche” service such as in imperial Cairo or late imperial China, or because a given society tries to ignore male prostitution as in the case of Havana today, male and transgender sex workers have thus been able to operate relatively free of social stigma in some periods and regions of the world.¹²⁷ Sometimes, this leads to more uncertainty for female sex workers, as in present-day Mexico City, where transvestites working on the streets are presumably more inclined to have unprotected sex, thus increasing health risks for the female prostitutes competing with them.¹²⁸ Nevertheless, there are also examples indicating that male sex work has been even more stigmatized than sexual services provided by women. Currently in Istanbul, for example, legislation prescribes that all sex workers in licensed houses need to be female by birth or by gender reassignment surgery and hence they have to hold a pink (female) identity card to be able to work in a state-sanctioned brothel. Moreover, the police in Istanbul are particularly active in fining

123 Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai.

124 Absi, this volume, Bolivia.

125 Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai.

126 Wyers, this volume, Istanbul.

127 Cabezas, this volume, Havana.

128 Nuñez and Fuentes, this volume, Mexico City. However, it is not clear from the chapter whether this is a fact or merely rhetoric spun by envious or intolerant prostitutes *vis à vis* transgender sex workers.

transgender sex workers on the streets for vague reasons such as “disturbing the peace”.¹²⁹ And in Bolivia, it is very rare for transvestites to be employed in brothels and they usually have to take up street prostitution.¹³⁰

Sex Workers, Gender and Family

The relationships between sex workers and their families throughout history may have been even more complex than their relations with intermediaries or clients. After all, every prostitute has a family background, which may—as we will see below—have been the reason for entering the business in the first place, and many continued to sell sex because of a need to take care of dependants. Family members may or may not know what their relatives are doing, and if they do, they may reject, tolerate, or accept their involvement in sex work. The chapters in this volume offer many interesting examples of this range of family relations, which have often been highly gendered as, in most societies, the proper place for women is seen as being caregivers in a familial context. So, for instance, in contemporary Brazil, it is socially desirable to be a “family girl” but “What, exactly, is a *moça de família* [i.e. a ‘family girl’] in 2008 is a topic open to much debate. One thing continues to be clear, however: she’s not a prostitute.”¹³¹

Shame and Expulsion

In many cases, the social and/or legal taboos on prostitution have prevented sex workers from telling their families about their work. Quite a few of the chapters stress that young girls often migrate from the countryside to large cities hoping to find work, sometimes knowing beforehand that they would enter into sex work and sometimes taking it up due to a lack of labour market alternatives or because they were enticed by intermediaries. This physical distance from their home towns often has meant that their families have not been informed about their activities, especially in times when communication technologies and infrastructure were still underdeveloped. Most likely, not knowing is better for both parties, as a prostitute and her family can avoid any (public) shame about her work, whereas remittances may help their relatives

129 Wyers, this volume, Istanbul.

130 Absi, this volume, Bolivia.

131 Ana Paula da Silva, as quoted in Blanchette and Schettini, this volume, Rio de Janeiro.

back home. The effects of shame were, and are, often significant, leading to feelings of guilt and lack of worth, as well as psychological problems and even suicidal tendencies.¹³²

While by no means exclusively, the great majority of European prostitutes have throughout history been unmarried women, and only in recent decades has this been changing. The situation was quite different, however, for non-western societies where girls often married much younger. In colonial Lagos, for instance, the records show that sex workers comprised a wide diversity of women who were divorced, separated, and single, but most of them were married women. Among them were large numbers of runaway wives who had fled the countryside seeking to escape marginalization in the household or inadequate spousal support.¹³³ Some of the chapters mention that women have sought refuge in urban red-light districts as a way of escaping from violent relatives, most typically husbands. A considerable number of the sex workers who were interviewed in Calcutta, for instance, reported that they had suffered violence at the hands of a spouse or other family member prior to entering sex work.¹³⁴ In contemporary Turkey, girls marry from as young as 13 years old, often forcibly, and some of them who try to escape an unhappy marriage cannot easily go back home because of the disgrace it would bring to their families. Consequently, they may take up sex work, either voluntarily or by being sold into a brothel. If her family finds out, however, the shame is of course even worse, and “honour killings” may be committed, especially in the southeast of Turkey. Because local tradition prescribes that family honour is very much dependent on women’s (“proper”) sexual conduct, killing a woman is seen as being acceptable if it is thought that she disgraced her family’s honour.¹³⁵

Interestingly, in precolonial Nairobi women who travelled from the countryside to the city were disrespected in general, even if they were married and followed their husbands. With the advent of colonialism and capitalism, however, society and the economy changed, and so did social values. Many women migrated to cities, “becoming receptionists, secretaries, telephone operators, housemaids, nannies, vegetable vendors, sex workers, [and] dressmakers. They were financially independent enough to be able to afford to rent rooms in women’s hostels. So the increasingly segregated definitions of respectability

132 Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai, 18; Hetherington, this volume, St. Petersburg/Moscow.

133 Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria.

134 Dasgupta, this volume, Calcutta.

135 Wyers, this volume, Istanbul.

at this time saw urban black women pitted against each other—the married versus the unmarried.”¹³⁶

Acceptance and Support

As has been mentioned, it is hard to establish whether or not the families of prostitutes migrating to cities or foreign countries have been aware of the women's economic activities. They may have accepted the remittances with gratitude, not knowing or at least not asking any questions about where the money came from. However, as some historians have argued, the continued contacts between most prostitutes and their families must have meant that in many cases, family members back at home must have been informed to some extent.¹³⁷ Women often place more importance on their economic responsibility for their families than on their “respectability”, as they believe it is more respectable to do sex work than to let their families starve. As we have seen above, the alternatives in the labour market available to women in most historical contexts paid less than prostitution, so for some sex work is the most profitable way to provide for their loved ones.¹³⁸ Some of the chapters mention that grandmothers look after the children of single mothers working as prostitutes far away from home. In other cases, such as in present-day Bruges and Istanbul, single mothers have to give up a large part of their income to pay for child care.¹³⁹ Apart from single mothers, there are also examples of married women whose husbands were unable to support their families. In nineteenth-century Cairo, for instance, many prostitutes worked with the knowledge, consent, and even encouragement of their husbands.¹⁴⁰

This brings us to the more active involvement of family members in prostitutes' lives and work. The chapters here give examples of mothers and daughters and/or sisters working together in prostitution.¹⁴¹ In a broader sense, kinship networks can play an important role in facilitating prostitution. Aboriginal women before the nineteenth century mostly acted in family networks before the state authorities started to intervene more intensively, and

136 Chacha, “An Over-view History of Prostitution in Nairobi”.

137 Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai.

138 Absi, this volume, Bolivia.

139 Wyers, this volume, Istanbul.

140 Biancani and Hammad, this volume, Cairo.

141 Take, for example, early modern Bruges, nineteenth-century Sydney/Perth, and nineteenth- and twentieth-century Rio de Janeiro.

they thought that prostitution was sufficient cause for a woman to be as seen as unfit to be a mother, and the children of prostitutes would be kicked out of their homes.¹⁴² In colonial Nigeria, kinship networks also often constituted the social network through which new migrants were able to move to cities. In Lagos, boys from the same ethnic background acted as intermediaries for migrant prostitutes, who usually stayed with family members or people from the same ethnic group.¹⁴³

Family support can also involve offering help so that a woman can get out of the business. Mechant reports the case of Marie Le Boeuf who, in eighteenth-century Bruges, had started working at a brothel on her own initiative. Yet, when after some time she wanted to get out, her only hope was that her father would come to rescue her.¹⁴⁴ However, legislation that criminalizes sold sex has often sabotaged the helpful relationships between prostitutes and their families. With the Contagious Diseases Act, for instance, the colonial authorities made the family members of non-compliant sex workers subject to conviction throughout the British Empire.¹⁴⁵ Similarly, the Australian law enacted in 1908 also criminalized male relatives—even those in paid employment—“for living off the earnings of their mothers, wives, sisters or daughters simply because they shared a house with them or were ‘habitually in their company.’”¹⁴⁶ In India today, legislation still criminalizes living off a sex worker’s earnings, which means that sex workers’ family members can be imprisoned for living on their income.¹⁴⁷

Family Members as Intermediaries

While this may have been an exception, family members throughout history have also been known for getting their relatives involved in sex work. Cristiana Schettini has shown for early twentieth-century South America that procuring by relatives was also an exception in the more general entertainment business, but that there were extreme cases in which daughters were completely dependent on their fathers, who mediated between them and customers.¹⁴⁸ In early

142 Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth.

143 Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria.

144 Mechant, this volume, Bruges.

145 Dasgupta, this volume, Calcutta.

146 Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth.

147 Dasgupta, this volume, Calcutta.

148 Cristiana Schettini, “South American Tours: Work Relations in the Entertainment Market in South America”, *International Review of Social History*, 57 (2012), pp. 129–160, 156.

modern Paris, women were known to have been sold into prostitution by their families.¹⁴⁹ For a long time in Istanbul, it was common that women would be “sold” to a licensed brothel by a husband or male relative. They would often work for years in the brothel to pay off the debt this incurred so they could leave the house.¹⁵⁰ Also, in more contemporary times women are sometimes forced into sex work against their will by close family members.¹⁵¹

Of course, at times this state of affairs has resulted in child prostitution. In China, Gronewold notes, “[t]here were always children in brothels, daughters of prostitutes plus young girls procured to be trained and brought up as entertainers, plus girls doing any manner of work.”¹⁵² The demand for young girls and virgins could and can still be high in certain societies and this has taken a particular twist since the appearance of AIDS because of the belief that young girls are freer of disease. Few of the chapters here provide much information about child prostitution, and this may be related to the fact that it is taboo in many societies, which means that it may exist but is not discussed. In present-day Istanbul, for example, the authorities have acknowledged the existence of child prostitution but no serious measures have been taken so far. Nevertheless, sociological studies have shown that most female sex workers in Istanbul began working before the age of eighteen.¹⁵³

Some of the authors represented in this volume have also called for caution regarding the issue of child prostitution. Blanchette and Schettini’s example from Brazil is a telling, but hopefully extreme, one: “[t]he current wave of sexual panic surrounding foreign men and their sexual and affective relationships with Brazilian women—especially black and brown women—has become so acute that in 2009, a (white) Italian tourist vacationing in Brazil with his (black) Brazilian family was anonymously accused of and imprisoned for the sexual exploitation of children. His crime? He had kissed his daughter in a hotel swimming pool.”¹⁵⁴

149 Conner, this volume, Paris.

150 Wyers, this volume, Istanbul.

151 Dasgupta, this volume, Calcutta.

152 Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai.

153 Wyers, this volume, Istanbul.

154 Blanchette and Schettini, this volume, Rio de Janeiro.

Conclusions

As most of the urban overviews in this volume generally only implicitly refer to gender, I have chosen to construct an analysis of gender relationships on four levels: the labour market, mediation, relations with clients, and relations with family members. Much of the evidence I have presented is anecdotal and only surfaced in some of the papers. Therefore, it is difficult to find consistent trends in the development of gender relationships over time or make comprehensive comparisons between regions. I will nevertheless try to make a few generalizations here, by way of conclusion.

Most of the chapters in this volume stress that prostitution is indeed work, although it was not necessarily seen that way in all historical periods and regions, neither by prostitutes themselves nor by the society in which they lived. In early modern Europe, prostitution was not a profession as such but was equated with other acts which society considered to be deviant sexual behaviour. In other parts of the world, colonialism likewise often led to a blurring of forms of marriage, paid sexual services, and slavery.¹⁵⁵ In different periods and societies, periods of regulation and tolerance have occurred, often leading to some institutionalized acknowledgement of prostitution as “work” (e.g. in the form of paying taxes). Nevertheless, in most of history and even today, society as well as academia tends to have viewed sex work as not “just an ordinary form of work.”¹⁵⁶ However, both historical and contemporary testimonies show that sex work pays well, often better than the alternatives in the labour market. Not coincidentally, most of the authors here included the limited options available to women in the labour market as an explanation for entry into sex work in many periods and societies.

Throughout history, segmentation in the labour market, by gender as well as by ethnicity and religion, thus seems to have influenced the supply of women in sex work, and often those women were from the lower classes, belonged to minority groups, or were migrants. Moreover, with globalization proceeding apace, it is tempting to conclude that the alternatives in the labour market for white, non-migrant women in the northern hemisphere have rapidly expanded, possibly creating an ethnic divide in many migrant-receiving cities. Nevertheless, considering the greater attention paid to migrant prostitutes today, and the continuing presence of non-migrant women in the profession,

155 For more on the issue of gender relations in colonial settings, see the chapter on Colonial Relations in Prostitution in this volume.

156 Jeffreys, “Prostitution, Trafficking and Feminism”, p. 319.

it seems too rigid to speak of a “new international division of labour” in this respect.

While migrant women and non-migrant poor prostitutes throughout history may have had fewer opportunities at their disposal, this comparative overview has shown that they also often operated as conscious agents. All in all, within their constrained context, gender relations did not always work out unfavourably for women sex workers. We can clearly see this in the complex gender relationships that arise between prostitutes and their mediators. On the one hand, male procurers and pimps are known to have exploited female sex workers throughout history, but there have been many kinds of other relationships in which women have had considerable agency or even the upper hand. At the same time, madams ranged from protective, “mother-like” figures to exploitative greedy women whose main concern was to keep their girls dependent on them, for instance by imposing debts on them or getting them hooked on drugs. Almost always, state interventions—even if the goal was to protect women involved in sex work—further complicated the existing gender relations, as the (usually male) police have often been called on to control or protect prostitutes, and in both cases that has not necessarily always been to the advantage of the women involved.

Likewise, client-prostitute relationships again have not always followed the stereotype of male–female power relations. While prostitutes have suffered from male violence and domination throughout space and time, power relations in most societies have been more complex, as there are many examples of female sex workers exerting considerable influence over their clients as well. Furthermore, while male and transvestite/transgender sex workers in some historical contexts occupied an exceptional position compared to their female counterparts, in other contexts they have been particularly subject to social stigmatization and aggression.

Lastly, while female sex workers have generally defied traditional gender roles with regard to family, we can see that many of them throughout history have seen it as their duty to provide for their families back home. Often, their relatives have been unaware of their daughter’s, sister’s, or mother’s activities, especially when she has (temporarily) migrated, or they choose not to know. If they do know, they may opt to expel the woman from the family because of the shame and social stigma associated with prostitution. But there are also many historical examples that show tolerance and even acceptance. In extreme cases, family members—ranging from fathers to husbands—may function as intermediaries or procurers. This has usually been done by force and starting from an early age. But, on the other hand, sex work can also be a way to escape

violent or otherwise suffocating family relationships. Escape often means searching for work in the available segments of the (migrant) labour market, a market that has traditionally been much more restricted for women, migrants, and particular ethnic groups. They might have been enticed by a “loverboy” or madam, or deliberately chose to work on the streets or—as is often the case nowadays—provide their services independently via the internet. Again, this not only neatly shows the complexity and diversity of gender relations as well as the restrictions imposed on women and the freedoms they have enjoyed through space and time, but also how gender relationships at the different levels discussed here interrelate and develop their own dynamics.

The Social Profiles of Prostitutes

Maja Mechant

Fanny Hill, *Tristessa*, *Pretty Woman*, *Lilya 4-ever* ... There is no shortage of media portrayals of prostitutes.¹ Yet the images that inform our opinions regarding sex workers tend to be largely negative,² depicting them as either criminals or as victims. Today, the latter perception prevails: sex workers are stereotypically seen as young, migrant girls with no education and no alternatives. In this chapter, I analyse the social profiles of real prostitutes over the past four hundred years. Prostitutes' origins and racial and ethnic backgrounds are examined, as well as their educational levels, professional experiences, ages, and family circumstances. However, gender has not been taken into consideration here, and male prostitutes are not integrated into the analysis. The main aim of this undertaking is to determine if female prostitutes form a distinct group within society or not. To that end, I analyse whether certain populations are overrepresented in the sex industry and if their profiles can explain why they turned to prostitution, whether voluntarily or otherwise. The emphasis is on the long-term evolution of prostitutes' profiles, and both chronological and geographical comparisons will allow conclusions to be drawn regarding whether there are determinative elements in prostitutes' profiles.

Profiling is not a new approach. The French physician Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet published his social profile of Parisian prostitutes in 1835, and

* I am grateful to the editors of this volume (Magaly Rodriguez Garcia, Lex Heerma van Voss and Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk) for giving me the opportunity to write this chapter. I would also like to thank them and the other participants of the *Sex in the City* project for their comments on the first draft of this paper, which I presented at the conference in Amsterdam. Finally, I am grateful to Thomas Donald Jacobs for reading this chapter and advising me on the use of the English language.

- 1 John Cleland, *Fanny Hill or Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (London, 1748/1749); Jack Kerouac, *Tristessa* (New York, 1960); *Pretty Woman*, Hollywood film written by J.F. Lawton and directed by Garry Marshall, 1990; *Lilya 4-ever*, Swedish-Danish film written and directed by Lukas Moodysson, 2002. For a recent example of a film that breaks through such stereotypes, see the French film *Jeune et jolie*, by François Ozon, 2013.
- 2 Despite the nuanced differences between “prostitute” and “sex worker”, I have used them synonymously in this chapter because of linguistic variations.

there have since been numerous attempts at defining sex workers as a group.³ However, there are two general problems associated with profiling. The first is related to the available data.⁴ There are registration lists, criminal statistics, social inquiries, physicians' reports, contemporary accounts and so on, but not a single source provides a complete overview of all sex workers operating in any given city or area. Registration lists, for instance, only include the names of legal prostitutes, while criminal statistics only contain data on those prosecuted. All sources reflect the attitudes of the socio-political climate in which they originated and are thus unique, yet there are some common characteristics. For example, they are not really representative. The most conspicuous types of prostitutes tend to be overrepresented, while those operating in private have largely been overlooked. In addition to which, the "facts" about the sex workers represented in the sources may not always be entirely correct, as they might have told their interlocutors what they believed would best serve their needs, rather than what was true.

Yet these shortcomings do not make profiling useless. It may not be possible to obtain detailed statistics, but by combining several sources in a critical fashion we may arrive at an approximation of broad evolutions in prostitute populations, at least for Europe from the early modern period to the present day, as well as contemporary developments elsewhere. Nevertheless, lack of data means that not all regions and periods can be discussed in the same detail. Moreover, the research presented here is based on rather basic data such as degrees and places of birth—facts that are less sensitive to distortion than assertions regarding motives. Finally, even if we can only obtain a fairly accurate image of the women working in the most visible portions of the sex industry, this is still a constructive endeavour provided that we bear in mind that our conclusions do not necessarily extend to all sex workers.

The second issue associated with profiling is its relevance. This method has always been employed in determining *why* people turn to prostitution, but is this the right question to ask? Elsewhere in this volume, Thaddeus Blanchette argues that this presupposes moral judgement because we do not ask why people join other occupations: "To claim that certain women are 'vulnerable' to sex work while not seeing them as 'vulnerable' to other forms of women's

3 Parent-Duchâtelet, *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris, considérée sous le rapport de l'hygiène publique, de la morale et de l'administration: ouvrage appuyé de documents statistiques puisés dans les archives de la Préfecture de police*, 2 vols (Paris, 1836). The most recent edition comes at the hand of Alain Corbin (Paris, 2008).

4 Wyers, this volume, Coercion and Voluntarism.

labour is to naturalize prostitution as inferior labour.”⁵ I agree with his critique on the notion of “vulnerability” and acknowledge that we have to deal with our own prejudices before attempting to objectively study prostitutes’ profiles—yet I do think that why women become prostitutes remains a relevant question. There is a vast body of scientific literature dedicated to examining the backgrounds of people engaged in various professions both past and present, and their reasons for doing so.⁶ Prostitution stands out because it is *not* seen as an ordinary profession; in fact, many do not consider it real work even though it provides most of those engaged in it with an income. Furthermore, people working in the sex industry are confronted with an entire range of problems that people in other professions generally are not. Perhaps the most eternal, universal and burdensome of these is social stigma, and the mere fact that many sex workers conceal their profession makes it worth studying why they started in the first place.⁷ Investigating whether people with limited employment possibilities are overrepresented in sex work does not inevitably imply any moral judgement regarding their choices; rather, it gives us an insight into the opportunities for earning a living in various societies. Lastly, the ubiquity of stereotypes regarding sex workers’ profiles and their use in ideological and moral reasoning makes taking a scientific approach worthwhile.⁸

5 Blanchette, this volume, Agency.

6 For an introduction to the influence of background on career choices, see: Monica Kirkpatrick Johnson and Jeylan T. Mortimer, “Career Choice and Development from a Sociological Perspective”, in Duane Brown, *Career Choice and Development*, Fourth edition (San Francisco, 2002), pp. 37–83. For an example of literature in which workers’ backgrounds have been integrated, see the work of Hilde Bras, who studied the social and geographical backgrounds and ages of domestic servants in the Netherlands in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: Hilde Bras, *Zeeuwse meiden. Dienen in de levensloop van vrouwen, ca. 1850–1950* (Amsterdam, 2002), pp. 70–77. For an example pertaining to the present, see Shuqin Long’s work regarding the importance of backgrounds in determining career options in China: Shuqin Long, “Personal Choice or Forced Choice: An Event History Analysis of the Corporative Employees’ Occupational Mobility in Nanjing”, *Chinese Journal of Sociology*, 29 (2009), pp. 39–59.

7 I am referring here to women who are actually concealing their profession and leading a “double life”. There also are many women who do not self-identify as prostitutes even though they meet the basic definition in that they earn money or another form of income by having sexual intercourse. This shows that the boundaries of prostitution are not always clear, and that deciding who is a prostitute and who is not is a thorny issue for researchers.

8 An example of the misuse of data can be found in a recent column in the Belgian newspaper *De Morgen*. The nationally acclaimed author Saskia De Coster wrote a column about prostitution titled “Modern Slavery” and stated that “De naakte—excusez le mot—feiten zijn bekend: 90 à 95 procent van de prostituees hier is slachtoffer van mensenhandel, is verslaafd of zit anderszins kilometers diep in de miserie.” [“The naked—excuse the word—facts are

Migrant and Minority Backgrounds

On a global level, race, ethnicity and religion are not determinative factors in sex workers' profiles. Black or white, Slavic or Andean, Catholic or Muslim, prostitutes can be found everywhere. Within most cities and regions, however, the population of sex workers has changed tremendously, shifting from a local, homogenous labour force to one more international and heterogeneous. Two types of migration have influenced this long-term evolution. The first derives from gradually increasing mobility due to transport developments, globalization and—in some places—eased border controls. In early modern Amsterdam, for example, the proportion of foreign prostitutes was 30 per cent, and now it is over 70 per cent.⁹ At the beginning of the twentieth century, nearly all the prostitutes in Lagos were Nigerian, but since the 1990s an increasing number of sex workers hail from other African countries or Asia.¹⁰ Nevertheless, heterogeneity has not been constantly on the increase because the direction of migration depends upon economic circumstances. For example, the percentage of foreign prostitutes in Amsterdam temporarily increased during the city's "golden" seventeenth century, when Dutch prosperity and job opportunities attracted people from less well-off regions. When the good times ended, however, their numbers decreased before rising once again as the economy picked back up.¹¹

The second type of migration encompasses the organized forced relocations that took place in colonial contexts. As such removals were generally undertaken on a large scale, the impact on the make-up of prostitute populations was far more abrupt. For example, many early modern slaves were captured and sold in order to serve as sex workers, and as a result of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, Latin American saloons, lodging houses, and the like were already filled with black prostitutes in the sixteenth century.¹² While racial heterogeneity marked that region's sex industry from very early on, black prostitutes seem

known: 90 to 95 per cent of the prostitutes here are victims of human trafficking, addicted, or otherwise miles deep in misery."] (Saskia De Coster, "Moderne slavernij", *De Morgen*, 7 October 2013, p. 3). However, De Coster's data is not derived from any known source, and the situation she describes is simply a confirmation of stereotypes and is not in any sense a reflection of Belgian reality.

9 Pluskota, this volume, Amsterdam.

10 Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria.

11 Pluskota, this volume, Amsterdam; Lotte Van de Pol, *Het Amsterdams hoerdom: Prostitutie in de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw* (Amsterdam, 1996), p. 103.

12 Amalia L. Cabezas, this volume, Havana.

to have been rather exceptional in eighteenth-century London,¹³ and racial diversity arrived even later in smaller cities.

While sex workers were not the only people involved in either of these two types of migration, and slaves were not forced into prostitution in all societies, migrants were—and are—overrepresented among prostitute populations. In the United Kingdom of today, the share of migrants among prostitutes is two to three times higher than in the general population: 41 per cent versus 12 per cent throughout the entire country, and 80 per cent as opposed to 42 per cent in London.¹⁴ Proportions may vary, but the correlation has not; migrants have historically been overrepresented among prostitutes. Momentarily setting aside the slave trade, migrants have been especially numerous in the sex industry for two primary reasons. Firstly, prostitution can be the result of migration. Newcomers to an area are more likely to become prostitutes than locals because of economic hardship. They often find themselves at a disadvantage in the labour market because of discrimination, or simply because they lack the right contacts or educational background.¹⁵ Yet while the current situation may appear to be exacerbated in this regard purely as a result of the distances involved, the reality is that the way in which societies perceive insiders vs. outsiders has changed alongside migration patterns. In seventeenth-century Europe, for example, people coming from other towns were considered outsiders even if they had resided in the same country.

Secondly, prostitution can be the cause of migration, as the sex trade has always been characterised by a certain degree of mobility. Sex workers tend to migrate more often than other people for various reasons: to keep making a profit, to explore new and promising markets, to escape from stigma or prosecution, and so on. Since they also seek prosperity, the direction they travel usually does not differ from that of other migrants, although they tend to opt more often for destinations with a male surplus. In particular, two migration flows involving sex workers have attracted the attention of commentators and scholars: the so-called “white slave trade” during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the contemporary movements of sex workers from

13 Tony Henderson, *Disorderly Women in Eighteenth-Century London: Prostitution and Control in the Metropolis, 1730–1830* (London [etc.], 1999), p. 20.

14 General data available at: <http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/briefings/migrants-uk-overview> (census 2011), last accessed 2 August 2017. Data on Sex Workers: Tampep, *Sex Work in Europe: A Mapping of the Prostitution Scene in 25 Countries*, Amsterdam, 2009, p. 16, available at: <http://tampep.eu/documents/TAMPEP%202009%20European%20Mapping%20Report.pdf>; last accessed 2 August 2017.

15 Amir *et al.*, this volume, Tel Aviv/Jaffa; Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai; Absi, this volume, Bolivia.

both ex-colonies and the former Soviet Union. The interest in these particular migrants derives from the alleged involvement of human traffickers and coercion. This topic is discussed elsewhere in this volume, but it should be stated here that organised migration is a complex phenomenon, involving both the coerced and the willing.¹⁶ Furthermore, not all prostitute migration is the result of trafficking. However, the focus of this chapter is the consequence of any type of mobility: increasing heterogeneity among prostitute populations. Having said that, migration is not the only factor at play here.

The descendants of migrants or minorities can face the same difficulties and discrimination that their ancestors did. Indeed, the largest discrepancies between general and prostitute populations can be found in regions characterised by high levels of xenophobia. In Latin America, for example, the Spanish and Portuguese coerced black and indigenous women into prostitution.¹⁷ After slavery was formally abolished, these groups remained overrepresented among sex workers because former slaves had few professional options outside of domestic service or prostitution.¹⁸ Similarly, black people in the United States were excluded from a wide range of professions until the 1960s, and this clearly had repercussions on the prostitute population—at least, in the twentieth century. In the nineteenth century, black women were underrepresented in the North American sex industry because white men, who made up the majority of clients, preferred white women.¹⁹ By 1917, however, 22 per cent of New York's prostitutes were African American, although blacks only made up 3 per cent of the city's total population.²⁰ Much smaller divergences are usually expected when official segregation is absent; yet, whenever minorities face discrimination in the job market or grow up in environments with few social-economic prospects, they still are more likely to turn to prostitution than members of the dominant society. In present-day Chicago, the proportion of black women among arrested prostitutes is 74 per cent, even though black people only constitute 36 per cent of the total population. While this discrepancy *does* reflect a real difference, what it mainly tells us is that black sex workers tend to be streetwalkers, the sector most likely to draw the attention of the authorities.

16 Wyers, this volume, Coercion and Voluntarism; Keusch, this volume, Migration.

17 Cabezas, this volume, Havana.

18 *Ibid.*

19 Lex Heerma van Voss, "The Worst Class of Workers: Migration, Labor Relations and Living Strategies of Prostitutes around 1900", paper presented at the ESSHC, Glasgow, 2012, p. 12.

20 For data on prostitutes, see: Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790–1920* (New York [etc.], 1992), p. 415. For general data, see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographic_history_of_New_York_City.

Meanwhile, Asian women typically work in massage parlours, Latinas in clubs and bars, and Caucasians in escort services—the less visible sides of the sex industry.²¹ This stratification along racial lines only confirms that minorities in the United States still face inequality at all levels of society, despite the election of the country's first black president.

However, such segregation in sex work is not unique to the United States, and examples can be found everywhere, although it isn't always the local population that has the advantage.²² In colonial Hanoi, regulations regarding prostitution made distinctions between various groups. Japanese prostitutes were seen as both more elegant and healthier than their local colleagues and therefore they could charge tenfold what the Vietnamese sex workers made. The most luxurious and expensive, however, were European prostitutes.²³ Such formal hierarchies may have disappeared over the course of the twentieth century, but as the Chicago example demonstrates, informal pecking orders continue to exist. And at present, the position of various ethnic groups largely depends upon the local situation. For example, Rio de Janeiro was once characterized by extreme racial segregation, but prostitutes now describe themselves as blond, brown, or *mulatta* rather than black or white.²⁴ In present-day Moscow, however, Russians usually inhabit the upper echelons of the sex industry, whereas the lowest are mostly comprised of women from other regions of the former Soviet Union. While the former work in hotels, the latter—the *bomzhi*—solicit customers in railway stations and truck stops.²⁵

Before concluding this section on sex workers' backgrounds, it is necessary to emphasise that locals are never entirely absent from the prostitute population. While they may be less numerous, they are always present, especially in smaller, poorer locales. As mentioned above, 41 per cent of the U.K.'s sex workers are foreigners, but this means that 59 per cent—the majority, in fact—are not. However, local women are more likely to work in the more discrete sectors of the trade, while migrants tend to be more visible, strongly reinforcing the belief that all sex workers are foreigners. In turn, this has had a huge impact on public opinion, which incorrectly characterizes prostitution as an "outsider profession" even though local women sell most of the sex. At the same time, however, the overrepresentation of migrants and minorities

21 Linehan, this volume, Chicago.

22 Herzog, this volume, Singapore; Conner, this volume, Paris; Biancani and Hammad, this volume, Cairo.

23 Tracol-Huynh, this volume, Hanoi.

24 Blanchette and Schettini, this volume, Rio de Janeiro.

25 Hetherington, this volume, St. Petersburg/Moscow.

in the industry, as well as its stratification along those lines, do confirm that marginalized groups are more likely to take the lowest-ranked places in any social hierarchy.

Educational Levels

In the past, prostitutes were primarily drawn from the illiterate masses, but their educational levels have evolved. As schooling for girls became more widespread, sex workers became substantially better educated than their predecessors. In short, their range of educational levels came to reflect that of their contemporaries. The question now facing us is whether people with a lower than average level of schooling are overrepresented in sex work. Unfortunately, this is difficult to determine, particularly in relation to the past. For example, in nineteenth-century Havana, prostitutes were illiterate, while few sex workers in Istanbul ever attended school until well into the twentieth century.²⁶ Yet, these findings may not indicate any divergence from the general population; education for girls was limited or sometimes even prohibited in Havana, while in Istanbul, less than 10 per cent of women were literate in 1935.²⁷

In some places, the data suggests that the lowest educated women were overrepresented among prostitutes, at least to a small degree. In nineteenth-century Bruges, for example, 49 per cent of prostitutes were unable to write their own names, while only 41 per cent of the total female population was illiterate, and similar figures are available for Florence.²⁸ Meanwhile, in contemporary western Europe, prostitutes do have lower than average levels of education—at least if the examples of Amsterdam and Flanders are anything to go by.²⁹ However, this has not been the case everywhere. According to Raelene Frances, apart from migrants from regions with little access to education, neither nineteenth-century nor contemporary sex workers in Sydney or Perth are distinct from the general population in terms of their education, which became compulsory during the 1870s.³⁰ Similar circumstances prevail elsewhere. In present-day Bolivia, 32 per cent of sex workers have had at least a few years of primary education, whereas in the cities at least 50 per cent went

26 Cabezas, this volume, Havana; Wyers, this volume, Istanbul.

27 *Ibid.*

28 Mechant, this volume, Bruges; Turno, this volume, Florence.

29 Pluskota, this volume, Amsterdam; Mechant, this volume, Bruges.

30 Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth.

to secondary school—numbers that are no different from those of other females.³¹ The same is true of Cuba, where education is free.³²

Where the possession of a degree is an important factor in finding a decent paying job—like in present-day Flanders and Amsterdam—the majority of sex workers may be people lacking the right skills and qualifications for other employment. In Calcutta, research shows that sex workers do not have enough schooling to find work that pays above the minimum wage.³³ Yet as we have seen, education and opportunity are not always closely connected. In the past, there were very few schooling opportunities for European women in general and so prostitutes were hardly a distinct group in educational terms. Elsewhere, the possession of a degree does not guarantee good employment, such as in Cuba where the populace has greater access to higher education.³⁴ Nigeria is particularly interesting in this respect: in the 1970s most prostitutes were uneducated women, but now they have various educational backgrounds, university schooling included. Education was available in the 1970s, and at that time having an education meant excellent job prospects; however, since the economic crisis of the 1980s, there are fewer opportunities for educated women. High-end sex work appears to be attractive under these circumstances because it opens up new opportunities, such as migration to more economically promising regions of the world, like Europe or the United States.³⁵

Yet despite this general pattern, educated sex workers are not only present in societies with fewer employment prospects for women with schooling. The educational levels of sex workers everywhere reflect the range of schooling available to females, and the prostitute population of every society—past and present—has consisted of women with both high and low levels of education. The famous courtesans of early modern Italy and France, for example, made impressive achievements; they could read, write, converse on varied subjects, and many could also play an instrument.³⁶ Similarly, present-day escorts are highly educated women. As already indicated, the exceptions are more numerous in some societies than in others, but wherever prostitution offers a way to make a living above subsistence level, prostitution by educated women is prevalent. In fact, prostitution can also be a means to obtain an education.

31 Absi, this volume, Bolivia.

32 Cabezas, this volume, Havana.

33 Dasgupta, this volume, Calcutta.

34 Cabezas, this volume, Havana.

35 Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria.

36 Tessa Storey, *Carnal Commerce in Counter-Reformation Rome* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 194–197.

In countries with high tuition fees such as Australia and the United Kingdom, many students engage in sex work in order to finance their education.³⁷

However, while all levels of education may be found among prostitutes, educated women have the advantage in the sector's hierarchy, just as they do in other sectors. Like many minorities, low-educated prostitutes are overrepresented in the most visible parts of the sector, and are therefore the most likely to appear in the sources. Those with more education work at the high-end of the sex industry, as escorts or in clubs. In contemporary Shanghai, where prostitution is extremely stratified, the top three levels consist only of educated women.³⁸ Their schooling is hugely important to these women as their status allows them to charge higher prices, often because they are able to offer their customers more than just sex. However, income is not the only thing that distinguishes high- from low-educated sex workers. The hierarchies within prostitution sectors are complicated webs with many interwoven factors. In Lagos, there is correlation between a prostitute's level of education and the health risks she faces. Women with more education are in a better position to refuse clients or certain demands, such as requests for intercourse without a condom, and therefore run less risk of becoming infected with venereal diseases.³⁹ The underlying difference between both groups, however, is fairly simple: highly educated women more often opt for prostitution to create an income surplus, whereas less educated women are more often engaged in survival prostitution—once again highlighting the importance of the professional alternatives available to sex workers.

Professional Experiences

Migrants, minorities and—in some societies—uneducated women are more likely to become prostitutes, and it has been claimed that this can be explained by a lack of job opportunities. Although it is clear that prostitution rates increase when there is a rise of poverty and unemployment,⁴⁰ the data available do not allow for group-specific analyses of the ease or difficulty in finding or

37 Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth. In the UK, specialised programmes have been set up in several university towns to provide advice concerning sexual health and other subjects relating to sex work. For an example, see the Student Sex Work Project in Swansea, available at: <http://www.thestudentsexworkproject.co.uk/>; last accessed 2 August 2017.

38 Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai.

39 Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria.

40 Tracol-Huynh, this volume, Hanoi.

keeping a job. However, it is possible to study sex workers' former or concurrent professions, which in turn informs us as to their professional options and how they have evolved in general. Particular occupations such as waitressing, entertaining, beer brewing, and domestic service repeatedly turn up in this context, and it is often believed that they either lead to prostitution or lend themselves to it.⁴¹ However, perception is sometimes quite hard to distinguish from reality, as illustrated by the example of domestic servants.

Despite the persistent belief that servants are especially "at risk" of becoming prostitutes because they live far from home, are exposed to the pleasures and dangers of city life, and are vulnerable to sexual advances and abuse by their employers, the available data for early modern Europe shows that they were no more numerous among prostitutes than they were among the general population.⁴² The number of servants amongst prostitutes only decreased around 1900, when the tradition of going into service declined and new professions appeared.⁴³ The reason why contemporaries thought that domestic servants were especially "at risk" is probably because when they did enter the profession, they worked in the more visible branches of the sector. When a servant lost her position she also lost her shelter, and a brothel provided both full-time work and lodging. Women working piece rate in the textile or clothing industries, on the other hand, were more likely to use part-time prostitution as a way of supplementing their meagre earnings.⁴⁴ It may be that similar systems of labour organisation can clarify the emphasis on the "vulnerability" of servants elsewhere. However, the most significant aspect of domestic service is that it is still one of the most important sources of employment for women in patriarchal societies, and where they are overrepresented among prostitutes this reflects their limited opportunities, not their employment as servants.

41 Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria; Babere Kerata Chacha, "An Over-view History of Prostitution in Nairobi: From the Precolonial Period to the Present", unpublished paper collected for the project "Selling Sex in the City", 2013; Biancani and Hammad, this volume, Cairo; Amir *et al.*, this volume, Tel-Aviv/Jaffa.

42 Van de Pol, *Het Amsterdams hoerdom*, p. 104; Mechant, this volume, Bruges. Relative numbers comparing the proportion of servants amongst prostitutes to their share of the general population are available for St. Petersburg at the end of the nineteenth century, and although these figures show that servants were slightly overrepresented amongst prostitutes, this can be explained by the servants' ages. Barbara Alpern Engel, "St. Petersburg Prostitutes in the Late Nineteenth Century: A Personal and Social Profile", *Russian Review*, 48 (1989), pp. 21–44, 28–30.

43 Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*, pp. 290–291.

44 Van de Pol, *Het Amsterdams hoerdom*, p. 104.

With regards to the evolutions and regional variations in sex workers' former and concurrent professions, they can generally be explained by fluctuations and differences in regional labour markets. In colonial Africa, for instance, black women had few options apart from brewing beer and prostitution, and so they often combined both professions.⁴⁵ In early modern and nineteenth-century Europe, prostitutes were textile workers, seamstresses, or domestic servants, just like other women.⁴⁶ A similar employment pattern can be found in many other regions of the same period. In nineteenth-century Mexico, for instance, prostitutes under questioning most often stated that they were seamstresses and servants.⁴⁷ Today, however, sex workers' professional horizons have expanded just as they have for other women. For example, prostitutes in present-day Flanders are employed in beauty parlours, nail and tanning salons, or they are cleaners, nurses, saleswomen, labourers or office workers.⁴⁸ However, in some developing nations and patriarchal societies, employment options for women have remained limited; in Turkey, for example, only 22 per cent of women work outside the home, as opposed to 70 per cent of the men. In such regions, there is not as much variety in sex workers' professional backgrounds. In Calcutta, for instance, prostitutes are offered domestic work or menial labour to "save" them from sex work.⁴⁹

Yet the enormous differences in labour markets make it difficult to compare sex workers' professional alternatives across time and between countries. Many urban studies argue that women choose to become prostitutes because the alternatives are limited and low-paid, and their opportunities are inferior to those of men.⁵⁰ This statement is certainly correct for much of the periods under consideration, and is still true in countries characterised by strongly gendered labour markets. Domestic service, textile work, and street hustling all fit the above job description, and in many societies there are simply no other

45 Ziyad Choonara, "Selling Sex in Johannesburg from 1886 to the Present", unpublished paper collected for the project "Selling Sex in the City", 2013; Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria; Chacha, "An Over-view History of Prostitution in Nairobi".

46 Mechant, this volume, Bruges; Conner, this volume, Paris.

47 Nuñez and Fuentes, this volume, Mexico City.

48 Karolien van Nunen, Charlotte Gryseels and Guido Van Hal, *Effectonderzoek naar preventie bij sekswerkers* (Antwerpen, 2012), p. 136.

49 Wyers, this volume, Istanbul; Dasgupta, this volume, Calcutta, 17.

50 For example, see: Biancani and Hammad, this volume, Cairo; Amir *et al.*, this volume, Tel-Aviv/Jaffa; Dasgupta, this volume, Calcutta; Wyers, this volume, Istanbul; Turno, this volume, Florence; Jürgen Nautz, "Urban Overview: Vienna", unpublished paper collected for the project "Selling Sex in the City", 2013.

options for women. Regarding eighteenth-century England, Vern Bullough stated that “prostitution was one of the few ways a woman could make it on her own”, and this is definitely the case elsewhere and elsewhen too.⁵¹

The situation in present-day Europe seems to be entirely different because women generally have many other options in the labour market, and so prostitutes have varied backgrounds although those lacking opportunities are still overrepresented. General transformations in society and the fact that the majority of people in Europe no longer struggle merely to survive mean that the distinction between them and the majority of prostitutes is growing. In other words, it seems that individual profile characteristics become more important. Yet this does not mean that individual characteristics are utterly unimportant in patriarchal labour markets elsewhere. There probably are differences, but the data allow for little differentiation. For example, general maids are presumably less well paid than kitchen maids and nursemaids, and differences in spinning skills can also determine earnings.

Nevertheless, the underlying reason for engaging in prostitution remains unchanged: it provides an income, and people do it to earn money. The range of other professional options for women is dependent upon both their social profiles and society, but when prostitution offers a higher income than the available alternatives, women enter the profession whether they are confronted with limited options or not. Former slaves in Havana could earn more by selling sex in dark alleys than by working as domestic servants, just like office workers bring in more money by escorting than in their nine to five job. Indeed, the relatively higher earnings to be made via prostitution are mentioned in nearly all urban studies on the subject, and the importance of this factor can hardly be exaggerated.⁵² Several have found that sex work is not just a profession for those experiencing difficulty in surviving, but rather is a way of reaching or maintaining a certain standard of living.⁵³ Simply put, sex workers are opting for a job that generally pays more than the available alternatives, or are using it to supplement their current income, whether part-time or more occasionally.

51 Vern L. Bullough, “Prostitution and Reform in Eighteenth-century England”, *Eighteenth Century Life*, 9 (1984), pp. 61–74, 72.

52 For example, see: Dasgupta, this volume, Calcutta; Tracol-Huynh, this volume, Hanoi; Absi, this volume, Bolivia; Blanchette and Schettini, this volume, Rio de Janeiro; Linehan, this volume, Chicago; Mechant, this volume, Bruges.

53 Absi, this volume, Bolivia; Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai.

In fact, coupling prostitution with another form of labour appears to be quite a common feature of the sector.⁵⁴ In the early modern period, utilizing several income strategies was central to the economic lives of the lower classes in what Olwen Hufton has famously called “the economy of makeshifts”. In the industrial era, however, labour grew more professionalised and combining several occupations became less common. Moreover, there seems to have been a growing demand for the separation of “honest” and “dishonest” trades and people. In nineteenth-century France, registered prostitutes were not allowed to practise a second profession, and in Australia, it became increasingly difficult to hold a “respectable” job alongside prostitution.⁵⁵ Yet, in many other areas, combining sex work with another profession remained common.⁵⁶ Sometimes it depends upon the sector. In present-day Flanders, part-time sex workers are employed in the least visible, high-end part of the industry, namely as escorts, while the more stigmatized window prostitutes mostly work full-time.⁵⁷ In Nigeria, students work part-time as high-end prostitutes, while full-time prostitution is not exceptional in the country’s slums.⁵⁸ High rates of full-time sex work may correspond with high rates of survival prostitution, even today.

Of course, combining sex work with another profession is only possible when it is practical. Early modern, part-time prostitutes were more likely to be streetwalkers than brothel workers because soliciting was easier to do in between other activities.⁵⁹ Need also makes a difference; if prostitution is used to supplement a meagre income in hard times, then the primary job must allow for this. For this reason, domestic servants very rarely work as prostitutes on the side. More typically, prostitution has been combined with home-based textile work, street hustling, laundering, brewing beer in colonial Africa, and working at jobs in the beauty and entertainment industry.⁶⁰ Like domestic service, these jobs are often linked with prostitution, but this time there is some basis for it. On the one hand, the work allows women to associate with potential clients. Laundresses who wash for soldiers, for example, can take advantage of the contact involved, just like waitresses and dancers. On the other hand, these

54 Erica Marie Benabou, *La prostitution et la police des mœurs au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1987), p. 307; Engel, “St. Petersburg Prostitutes in the Late Nineteenth Century”, p. 22; Henderson, *Disorderly Women in Eighteenth-Century London*, p. 16.

55 Conner, this volume, Paris; Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth.

56 Amir *et al.*, this volume, Tel-Aviv/Jaffa; Mechant, this volume, Bruges.

57 van Nunen, Gryseels and Van Hal, *Effectonderzoek naar preventie bij sekswerkers*, p. 137.

58 Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria.

59 Mechant, this volume, Bruges.

60 Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria; van Nunen, Gryseels and Van Hal, *Effectonderzoek naar preventie bij sekswerkers*, p. 136; Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai.

jobs are easy to combine with prostitution and they are low-skilled and not highly esteemed, which means that they are feasible options for migrants, low-educated women, and others from the working classes. Black women in colonial Johannesburg and Lagos, for example, had few options other than beer brewing, a skill they had learned at home, and one that brought in three to four times the amount they could make by washing, ironing, or factory work.⁶¹ Part-time prostitution allowed them to earn even more.

Age

Popular historical accounts of prostitution usually depict the occupation in dreadful terms, with everlasting effects on girls entering the profession no matter how briefly. One eighteenth-century commentator, for example, describes how “a young creature perhaps is debauch’d at fifteen, soon abandoned, quickly common, as quickly diseas’d and as quickly loathsome and detested.”⁶² Little has changed since then. Many people are still convinced that prostitutes are young, and only remain in the sector for a short period. Generally speaking, they are correct. Young adults between the ages of 15 and 35 have always made up the majority of sex workers, and a large proportion of those are between 20 and 25 years of age.⁶³ Obviously, the nature of the profession, which relies on a constant demand for attractive youths, explains this continuity. Yet a more detailed analysis shows that this general picture simplifies complex realities.

In actuality, prostitutes’ ages have considerably risen over time. The long-term data available for Bruges, for example, clearly illustrates this as the mean age of sex workers rose from 24 in the eighteenth century to 26 in the nineteenth, and is now 34.⁶⁴ While this increase appears to have taken place

61 Choonara, “Selling Sex in Johannesburg”.

62 Rhys Glyn Llwyd Williams, “Towards a Social History of London Prostitution”, unpublished paper collected for the project “Selling Sex in the City”, 2013.

63 Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria; Biancani and Hammad, this volume, Cairo; Amir *et al.*, this volume, Tel-Aviv/Jaffa; Cabezas, this volume, Havana; Hetherington, this volume, St. Petersburg/Moscow; Turno, this volume, Florence; Conner, this volume, Paris; Svanström, this volume, Stockholm; Nautz, “Urban Overview: Vienna”.

64 Mechant, this volume, Bruges. Mean ages are also available for other areas, but they do not allow for comparison over time. In seventeenth-century Amsterdam, the mean age of sex workers was 23; in nineteenth-century St. Petersburg it amounted to 22; in Tel Aviv and Jaffa it was 23 at the start of the twentieth century; whereas in Thailand and Bolivia it currently amounts to 22 and 24, respectively. For the data, see: Van de Pol, *Het Amsterdams hoerdom*, p. 102; Absi, this volume, Bolivia; Engel, “St. Petersburg Prostitutes in the

everywhere, it is usually not as great. In developing countries in particular, prostitutes' ages remain substantially lower, and as a consequence of migration large differences can also be noted within European populations. Prostitutes' ages are lowest in places characterised by large immigration levels, simply because foreign sex workers tend to be much younger than their local colleagues. In contemporary London, for instance, the mean age is only 26.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, the increase does appear to be steady, both at entering and leaving the profession. I will first discuss starting ages, with particular attention to child prostitution, before turning to quitting ages and the length of prostitutes' careers.

Exact data showing long-term trends in sex workers' starting ages are rare. For Flanders, we know that the age of entering the profession increased from about 21 in the nineteenth century to about 27 today, but other concrete examples are unavailable.⁶⁶ Still, partial evidence shows that ages also have increased over time elsewhere. Such is the case in Nigeria, although the current starting age is only estimated at between 13 and 15.⁶⁷ This pervasive increase in sex workers' ages can be explained by evolving definitions of childhood and adulthood—as reflected in normative measures—and in economic and demographic changes. In Bolivia, for example, prostitution under the age of 17 was forbidden in 1906, and in New York the age of consent was raised from 10 to 16 in 1889, and to 18 in 1895.⁶⁸ In early modern Europe, there was no official age at which prostitution was allowed, but youngsters were supposed to begin earning a living much earlier than today. Girls were paid as adult labourers starting in their mid-teens, while today working life only starts in their

Late Nineteenth Century", p. 36; Maria J. Wawer *et al.*, "Origins and Working conditions of Female Sex Workers in Urban Thailand: Consequences of Social Context for HIV Transmission", *Social Science & Medicine*, 42 (1996), pp. 453–462, 457.

65 This rather young mean age can be explained by the fact that 80 per cent of London sex workers are not born in the U.K., and the relatively young age of migrant sex workers has been established for both the U.K. and Flanders; Lucy Platt *et al.*, "Risk of Sexually Transmitted Infections and Violence among Indoor-working Female Sex Workers in London: The Effect of Migration from Eastern Europe", *Sexually Transmitted Infections*, 87 (2001), pp. 377–384, 378; van Nunen, Gryseels and Van Hal, *Effectonderzoek naar preventie bij sekswerkers*, p. 132.

66 There was, however, a temporary decrease during the world wars: Mechant, this volume, Bruges.

67 Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria.

68 Absi, this volume, Bolivia; Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*, pp. 62–70.

twenties.⁶⁹ Lastly, the increase in the marriage age in Nigeria also shows that childhood has been extended, and emancipation and activism have also caused an increase in the age of the country's sex workers.⁷⁰

This evolution also puts a different complexion on the notion of "child prostitution". The international child rights community currently defines this as sex work engaged in by those under the age of 18;⁷¹ however, some societies consider people adults before this age, and it is clear that the definition is both modern and Eurocentric.⁷² In other parts of the world, such as the aforementioned Nigeria, underage sex workers remain numerous. Thailand, however, is probably the most notorious country in this respect. In 2007, researchers estimated that underage sex workers constituted 40 per cent of the prostitute population.⁷³ Such extreme proportions can be explained by a ready "supply" of young women with limited educational opportunities and an earlier start to working life. However, a stronger demand for younger girls may also account for it, and indeed, such sexual preferences seem to be culturally determined to a certain extent. In Asia, for example, an inclination for young girls is present in the historical record as well as current practice.⁷⁴ In some countries, this demand has been affected as a result of the widespread belief that sex with virgins is a cure for diseases such as AIDS.⁷⁵ Finally, sex tourists looking to engage in activities that their own societies deem unacceptable help to stimulate this part of the trade.

Nevertheless, the belief that western paedophiles have made child prostitution a booming business is something of an exaggeration. Firstly, there are vast numbers of local customers. Secondly, the majority of sex tourists and locals are not actually looking for "children". Most of the young sex workers are

69 Amy M. Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England* (New York, 2005), p. 9.

70 Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria.

71 Ecpat, *Questions and Answers about the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children*, 2008, p. 3; available at: http://resources.ecpat.net/EI/Publications/About_CSEC/FAQ_ENG_2008.pdf; last accessed 2 August 2017.

72 Julia O'Connell Davidson and Jacqueline Sanchez Taylor, "Child Prostitution and Tourism: Beyond the Stereotypes", in Jane Pilcher and Stephen Wagg (eds), *Thatcher's Children? Politics, Childhood and Society in the 1980s and 1990s* (London, 1996), pp. 206–227, 215.

73 Ecpat, *Global Monitoring Status of Action against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, Country Report of Thailand*, 2011, p. 13; available at: http://resources.ecpat.net/A4A_2005/PDF/EAP/A4A2011_EAP_Thailand_FINAL.pdf; last accessed 2 August 2017.

74 Tracol-Huynh, this volume, Hanoi; Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai.

75 Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai.

between the ages of 13 and 18, which means that they are post-pubescent.⁷⁶ Paedosexuals looking for pre-pubescent children do so outside of the standard prostitution scene, and while abuses do take place, they are the exception, not the rule.⁷⁷ This situation is similar to that of Europe in previous centuries. Despite popular nineteenth-century narratives claiming, among other things, that London was the capital of child prostitution and “five pound virgins”, extremely young sex workers, were rare.⁷⁸ Indeed, there are only a few recorded examples of 10 to 12 year-old prostitutes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the metropolises of Amsterdam, Paris, and London, as well as in Australia, and there is some evidence to suggest they worked in specialised brothels catering to paedophiles.⁷⁹ Furthermore, present-day research into the reasons that men visit child prostitutes shows that the majority of the customers do not have deviant sexual preferences concerning age. Rather, it just so happens that sex workers simply tend to be very young in some places.⁸⁰

Authorities trying to stop such practices currently misdirect their efforts by concentrating on foreigners, and as such, are not successful in shutting down this part of the sex trade. Locals continue to fuel demand, and the sex tourists move on to other countries and other markets with less oversight.⁸¹ A different, more structural approach is required. Attempts at driving back child prostitution should focus on putting an end to child labour in general and extending childhood, thus diminishing both supply and demand. Quite logically, under-age prostitution occurs the least in those societies where working life starts after the age of 18; moreover, a lengthy childhood is linked to strong societal condemnation of child prostitution. Because of this, the occurrence of child prostitution has decreased in western Europe and other countries, although it continues to exist everywhere in greater secrecy.⁸²

76 Julia O’Connell Davidson, *Children in the Global Sex Trade* (Malden, 2005), p. 85.

77 Davidson and Taylor, “Child Prostitution and Tourism”, p. 218.

78 Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 17.

79 Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth; Randolph Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution: Heterosexuality and the Third Gender in Enlightenment London*, (Chicago, 1998), pp. 116–118. Such specialised brothels could of course be found outside of Europe or Australia such as in Lagos, for instance; Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria.

80 Davidson and Taylor, “Child Prostitution and Tourism”, pp. 217–218.

81 Ecpat, *Global Monitoring Status of Action against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, Country report of Thailand*, 2011, p. 11.

82 Absi, this volume, Bolivia; Nuñez and Fuentes, this volume, Mexico City; Wyers, this volume, Istanbul; Linehan, this volume, Chicago.

Cultural differences not only play a part in determining when prostitutes enter the profession, but when they leave it as well. Although exact figures for quitting ages are not available, the proportions of older prostitutes can give us an idea. In early modern Europe, less than one fifth of the prostitutes were above 30, and very few were over 40.⁸³ Today, the situation is completely different: 64 per cent of the sex workers in Flanders are 30 or older, and 25 per cent are 40 or older.⁸⁴ Lack of longitudinal data means that it is difficult to determine whether similar changes have occurred elsewhere; yet, it is clear that there are fewer older sex workers in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. In Buenos Aires, Lagos, Cairo, and Thailand, the percentages of sex workers 30 years or older respectively amounts to 10, 11, 21 and 22 per cent.⁸⁵

Presumably, the stopping age is rising because of increases in life expectancy. People are increasingly ageing, and under much better circumstances. Sex workers are physically capable of remaining in the sector for extended periods, and their clients are able to call on their services for longer. It is probable that the demand for older women has grown because of this, and indeed, some sex workers age along with their regular customers. Youth—or at least the appearance of it—remains an important factor in attracting clients, but better living conditions, medical care, cosmetics, hygiene, and plastic surgery have decreased the effects of ageing. This evolution seems largely restricted to western nations, perhaps because of the differences in living standards, or perhaps for other reasons as yet unexplained. In developing countries such as Bolivia, Mexico, and Brazil, it is nearly impossible to make a living as a sex worker after a certain age, say 35. Prostitutes in these countries usually either quit, or migrate to Europe where they continue working in the sex industry.⁸⁶

Closely connected to the issue of quitting ages is whether prostitution is a life-cycle event or a life-long career. As mentioned earlier, it usually is seen as a temporary profession. William Sanger, a physician who studied the profiles of New York prostitutes in the middle of the nineteenth century, believed

83 Mechant, this volume, Bruges; Benabou, *La prostitution et la police des mœurs au XVIIIe siècle*, pp. 267–268.

84 van Nunen *et al.*, *Effectonderzoek naar preventie bij sekswerkers*, pp. 131–132.

85 Schettini, this volume, Buenos Aires; Biancani and Hammad, this volume, Cairo; Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria; Wawer *et al.*, “Origins and Working Conditions of Female Sex Workers”, p. 457.

86 Thaddeus Blanchette brought up the practice of migrating after a certain age at the Amsterdam conference. However, this link between age and migration is not new, and was found in Cairo during the first half of the twentieth century: Biancani and Hammad, this volume, Cairo.

that prostitutes had a career of about four years and died shortly afterwards.⁸⁷ Sanger was correct about one thing: prostitutes' careers are usually short. Averages and estimates run from two to seven years, yet such figures are not very useful since the length of careers is highly varied.⁸⁸ Some sex workers stop after a few weeks while others continue for many years. Careers are lengthier in places and times where older prostitutes can still make a living, such as present-day Europe; but even so, life-long careers are exceptional. Only 4 per cent of the sex workers in Flanders remain in the profession for over 20 years.⁸⁹ And those rare examples who stay active until retirement tend to attract much attention. When the Brussels sex worker Sonia Verstappen, for example, quit in 2011 at the age of 59 after a career spanning 35 years, it was covered in the national media.⁹⁰ Her working life stands in sharp contrast to those of most of her colleagues. In Bolivia, for example, 40 to 60 per cent of the sex workers in brothels indicate that they have been active in the industry less than one year.⁹¹

Not much is known regarding what prostitutes do after leaving the profession.⁹² Despite Sanger's convictions, few die shortly afterwards, but whether they continue to live on the margins of society or settle in an ordinary life is hard to find out. Tony Henderson and Judith Walkowitz have discussed the possibility that prostitution in eighteenth and nineteenth-century England was a life-course event preceding marriage.⁹³ And for some cities and regions, this has been confirmed. Sex workers who later married have been found in eighteenth-century Bruges, nineteenth-century St. Petersburg and Australia, twentieth-century Hanoi, and present-day Nigeria.⁹⁴ While the likelihood of

87 Marilyn Wood Hill, *Their Sisters' Keepers: Prostitution in New York City, 1830–1870* (Berkeley, 1993), p. 47.

88 van Nunen *et al.*, *Effectonderzoek naar preventie bij sekswerkers*, pp. 142–143; Henderson, *Disorderly Women in Eighteenth-Century London*, pp. 47–48.

89 van Nunen *et al.*, *Effectonderzoek naar preventie bij sekswerkers*, p. 143.

90 Available at: <http://www.brusselnieuws.be/artikel/brussels-bekendste-prostituee-stopt>; last accessed 2 August 2017; <http://deredactie.be/cm/vrtnieuws/regio/brussel/1.973762>; last accessed 2 August 2017.

91 Absi, this volume, Bolivia.

92 The lack of information concerning this topic has also been mentioned in some urban studies: Amir *et al.*, this volume, Tel-Aviv/Jaffa; Tracol-Huynh, this volume, Hanoi.

93 Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, p. 196; Henderson, *Disorderly Women in Eighteenth-Century London*, pp. 47–50.

94 Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria; Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth; Tracol-Huynh, this volume, Hanoi; Engel, "St. Petersburg Prostitutes in the Late Nineteenth Century", pp. 41–43.

marriage cannot be measured statistically, we may presume that the chances of it occurring are related to societal norms regarding prostitution. For example, marriage was common among the Hausa sex workers in colonial Nigeria because prostitution was not considered a criminal activity.⁹⁵

Family Situations

Familial circumstances can play an important part in the decision to become a prostitute. Broadly speaking, two categories of family-related reasons can be delineated: a lack of people to derive support from—perhaps the most stereotypical reason—and the need to provide for other members of the family. The fact that these are, in a certain sense, opposite reasons demonstrates that the motives for entering the profession are both highly diverse and individually determined. Women on their own include those who have to make ends meet alone without a male provider and girls without parents or other family members to take care of them, whether financially and emotionally. Women who are providing for relatives include mothers, married women living in poverty, and daughters and sisters working in what may be labelled a “family economy”. Amongst the latter there are both women who are in control of their business, and women who are dependent upon a family member who acts as an intermediary.⁹⁶ Single mothers are unique in that they combine traits from both groups. They are responsible not only for their own wellbeing, but that of another, and have no other person to fall back on. This classification system is, of course, highly artificial, but it is helpful in understanding the family-related reasons for becoming a prostitute. Both categories of sex workers may be found anywhere and at any time, but societal changes have led to some general evolutions in which some situations predominate.

Sex workers can be found among women who are single, those in relationships, the wed, and the widowed, but lone women have always outnumbered women in relationships. Over time, however, the number of single sex workers has decreased. This evolution appears to be the most distinct in Europe, or at least it is more easily demonstrated in that region. In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, the proportion of unmarried women among prostitutes amounted to between 81 and 91 per cent, and the number of widows

95 Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria.

96 Pluskota, this volume, Labour Relations in Prostitution.

accounted for 2 to 5 per cent.⁹⁷ The situation now is rather different. In Stockholm during the 1970s, 30 per cent of the women working in illegal brothel houses were wed as were 20 per cent of the streetwalkers. In present-day Flanders, 58 per cent of sex workers are in a relationship.⁹⁸ This shift may indicate that prostitution is more socially accepted nowadays, although it is easier to provide support for other reasons, such as the change in the average age of prostitutes. Prior to the twentieth century in western Europe, people tended to marry late, and were in fact too old to make a living as a prostitute.⁹⁹ Widows were rare in the prostitution sector for the same reason. Today, this is no longer the case. People enter into committed relationships earlier on, and sex workers tend to enter the profession later.

A second explanation lies in the breakdown of patriarchy and the introduction of modern social welfare systems throughout Europe—both evolutions that make it easier for women to live on their own. Moreover, the subordinate position of women in the past often made it impossible for married women to work as prostitutes because the profession contradicted marital norms.¹⁰⁰ Of course, sexual fidelity remains an important requisite in most romantic relationships to this day. However, legislation in western Europe no longer seeks to establish an inferior legal position for married women. Furthermore, adultery is no longer subject to punishment, nor is it forbidden for married women to register as sex workers.

In several countries outside of western Europe, the decrease of single prostitutes is less pronounced, perhaps even absent. Although the marriage age has traditionally been lower outside of western Europe, this continuity can primarily be explained via unequal gender-relations. However, the proportions of the different marital groups did change as a new category arose: divorced women. While separations were either impossible to obtain or very rare in earlier times, they now are common in many countries. In present-day Istanbul, for

97 Benabou, *La prostitution et la police des mœurs au XVIIIe siècle*, pp. 270–271; Turno, this volume, Florence; Mechant, this volume, Bruges; Hetherington, this volume, St. Petersburg/Moscow.

98 Svanström, this volume, Stockholm; van Nunen *et al.*, *Effectonderzoek naar preventie bij sekswerkers*, p. 134.

99 Mechant, this volume, Bruges.

100 Where prostitution has been regulated, such as in nineteenth-century Florence and present-day Istanbul, registration is often impossible for married sex workers; see: Turno, this volume, Florence; Wyers, this volume, Istanbul. At the same time, in areas where prostitution was prosecuted, adultery was often counted a worse offence; see: Turno, this volume, Florence; Mechant, this volume, Bruges.

example, 66 per cent of sex workers are single and 26 per cent are divorced.¹⁰¹ Patriarchal traditions still play an important part in Turkish society. As mentioned previously, women lack employment opportunities, but marital practises also highlight their subordinate position. Even now, many teenage girls are forced into marriages from which it is difficult to escape. If they should leave their husband, they cannot return to their parents because they have disgraced their family. Many of these women turn to prostitution, either voluntarily or because they are sold into it. Indeed, women in this situation account for 70 per cent of Istanbul's formerly wed prostitutes.¹⁰²

The Turkish example not only demonstrates the awkward economic position of many single women, but it also shows that sex workers are sometimes women fleeing bad relationships and facing a lack of familial support. Both characteristics can be found among the prostitutes covered in many of the urban studies.¹⁰³ Although it is impossible to quantify how important such factors are, several authors argue that broken homes are more important in explaining why women opt for prostitution than either ethnicity or class.¹⁰⁴ In historical studies, such interpretations usually pertain to runaways, pregnant girls thrown out of their homes and, in particular, orphans who lost one or both parents.¹⁰⁵ In the nineteenth century, more than half of the prostitutes who lived in the New York House of Refuge, a youth detention centre, had parents who were either deceased or who had left home, and similar figures are available for London.¹⁰⁶ The most disquieting numbers for this era can be seen in the figures for St. Petersburg, where less than 4 per cent of prostitutes' parents were both alive.¹⁰⁷

However, the figures are less ominous elsewhere.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, because life expectancy was low, it was not extraordinary to lose a parent at a young age. While this may help explain why *some* women became prostitutes, it does not appear to be a particularly determinative factor. Moreover, now that life

101 Wyers, this volume, Istanbul.

102 *Ibid.*

103 Pluskota, this volume, Amsterdam; Absi, this volume, Bolivia; Linehan, this volume, Chicago; Laite, this volume, London.

104 Linehan, this volume, Chicago; Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*, pp. 65–66.

105 Laite, this volume, London; Conner, this volume, Paris.

106 Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*, pp. 65–66, Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, pp. 16–19.

107 Hetherington, this volume, St. Petersburg/Moscow.

108 An Huitzing, *Betaalde liefde: Prostituees in Nederland, 1850–1900* (Bergen, 1983), pp. 79–83; Maja Mechant, "Geboren en getogen in kwetsbaarheid? De familiale achtergronden van prostituees werkzaam in Brugge tijdens de 18de eeuw", in Isabelle Devos and Bart Van de Putte (eds), *WOG Jaarboek* (2014), pp. 52–55.

expectancy has increased, it has even less explanatory power. Other disruptions in the family unit, however, are very influential. Domestic violence, parental abandonment, drug abuse, alcoholism, and sexual abuse are recurring factors in the lives of sex workers, and in some places, like Chicago, they seem to be decisive.¹⁰⁹ All the same, these elements are not common among all prostitutes. In her research on Amsterdam, Marion Pluskota points out that the family backgrounds of indigenous and migrant sex workers are quite diverse, stating that Dutch women tend to come from homes marred by violence and abuse and see prostitution as a “last resort”, whereas newcomers are more often driven by economic opportunity.¹¹⁰

Indeed, while the lack of a loving family is certainly important in some cases, it is not possible to generalise on this issue. There are numerous examples of sex workers who are in close contact with their families. Many mothers, for instance, leave their children with their parents while earning money as a prostitute.¹¹¹ So it is not the case that all sex workers suffer from a lack of supportive familial ties. In fact, many women—as stated at the beginning of this section—opt for prostitution solely to help maintain their family, and not all of them are single mothers having difficulty in providing for their children.¹¹² In colonial Cairo, for example, it was not unusual for a married woman to work as a prostitute if her husband did not earn enough money.¹¹³ Similarly, in present-day Australia, Asian sex workers send a portion of their income to their family back home.¹¹⁴ In these cases, weak family ties are not the deciding factor, rather economic circumstances are. Although families who live far away do not always know how their daughters are earning this money, others certainly do. Indeed, prostitution is sometimes part of the family’s subsistence strategy. Aboriginal women in Australia who worked in the sex industry were part of extensive familial networks, and they contributed to the survival of an entire group.¹¹⁵ Of course, much depends on the society’s views regarding prostitution. While families in early modern Europe often imprisoned their prostitute daughters for “immoral behaviour”, families in Asia and Africa helped them to organise their business. In present-day Shanghai, women often enter the

109 Linehan, this volume, Chicago.

110 Pluskota, this volume, Amsterdam.

111 Absi, this volume, Bolivia; Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria.

112 Wyers, this volume, Istanbul; Jan MacKell, “Frontier Prostitution in the United States”, unpublished paper collected for the project “Selling Sex in the City”, 2013.

113 Biancani and Hammad, this volume, Cairo.

114 Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth.

115 *Ibid.*

profession in order to provide a living for their families, husbands, and children.¹¹⁶ In the nineteenth century, poor white Australian families employed the same strategy, but attitudes changed and the authorities increasingly began combating this from the end of the century onwards.¹¹⁷

Conclusion

The social profiles of sex workers have changed considerably over the course of the last four hundred years. While some stereotypical groups *have* been over-represented among prostitute populations across all eras and areas, there have been changes with regard to the importance of various factors. Prostitute populations have become more heterogeneous in terms of their origin, race, age, family situation, educational level, and professional background—albeit at different paces. However, all such developments can be linked to general evolutions in societies, which means that prostitutes' profiles have changed very little in a relative sense. Indeed, continuity is far more important than rapid change when explaining shifts over time. For example, migrants did not suddenly appear in the western European sex trade after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Rather, they were always present, and always overrepresented in the prostitute population. What actually changed over time are the distances covered. Similarly, prostitutes' ages have altered in tandem with developments in society at large, most notably lengthier childhoods and a later start to working life.

The central factor in explaining why women turn to prostitution is what, if any, other professional alternatives are available to them, and this in turn is dependent upon other factors. People may face poor job prospects because of certain aspects of their profiles. Migrants, minorities, people lacking educational qualifications—factors that are often related with one another—are more likely to experience difficulties in finding employment. At the same time, an individual's desire or need to participate in the labour market is dependent upon their age and family circumstances. In theory, people are only supposed to start working when they reach adulthood and it is desirable or necessary. The importance of either set of factors is dependent on the society in question. In patriarchal countries with few employment possibilities for women in general, a lone woman has fewer opportunities than a single woman living in a society characterised by greater gender equality and economic prosperity. Women who turn to prostitution in the latter are more likely to belong to a

116 Gronewold, this volume, Shanghai.

117 Frances, this volume, Sydney/Perth.

distinct group for whom the opportunities are limited because of their minority status or inadequate education. However, having said this it is important to emphasise that sex workers' profiles are varied in every society, regardless of type.

While it is definitely true that certain people have limited options for survival, the high degree of diversity among sex workers clearly shows that prostitution cannot be reduced to a profession of the destitute, or one which people passively end up in. In fact, people who are not members of so-called "vulnerable" groups might be more numerous in the sector than anticipated because of their invisibility. As discussed here, the sex industry is highly stratified, and individuals with better prospects take the places at the top of the hierarchy more often than those with limited possibilities. These women have chosen to use their bodies to create a financial surplus, and they are thought to face fewer dangers than the prostitutes working at the lower end of the market. It seems easier for people to accept that these women actively chose their profession, and harder to view them as passive victims. However, their underlying reasons are not necessarily different from the masses employed at the industry's margins. Although some women are forced into prostitution against their will one way or another, this is certainly not the case for all sex workers, let alone the majority. Most prostitutes are driven by opportunity, and the fact that most have fewer opportunities than their contemporaries does not change that. Simply put, prostitution can be emancipatory. It can be a positive choice, rather than just a negative one. Profile characteristics do not explain why people use their bodies to earn an income, but they do explain why certain people end up in the most visible and least rewarding sectors of the profession. This is interesting in its own right, given that the sex industry's high level of stratification forces researchers to avoid generalisations. Instead of relying upon simple stereotypes, we must instead continue to explore the large degree of diversity among prostitutes.

PART 3

Conclusion



Sex Sold in World Cities, 1600s–2000s: Some Conclusions to the Project

*Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk, Magaly Rodríguez García and
Lex Heerma van Voss*

Introduction

In the general introduction to this volume, we justified our approach to analysing the global history of prostitution within a framework of a history of work and labour relations. In doing so, we are following the broad conception of work recently put forward by, among others, Marcel van der Linden.¹ Global labour history aims to describe developments in labour relations over space and time, as well as to find explanations for the patterns that emerge. A comprehensive geographical and temporal perspective on the history of sex work is important because it can be placed in comparison with other forms of work that are, perhaps, more traditionally viewed as determining labour history, such as transport or factory labour.² Therefore, this project was directed at asking the urban overviews' authors about the historical labour relations and working conditions of prostitutes, or sex workers, and how these changed over time. In this concluding chapter we would like to highlight what we think this approach has brought us and how it may help further the historiography of prostitution and the field of global labour history more generally. This will be done by emphasizing specific themes we outlined in our introduction, themes that formed the guiding principles of both the urban overviews and the comparative thematic papers in this volume.

When drawing general conclusions, it is of course impossible to do justice to all the rich and varied historical material that this volume has to offer. The aim

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- 1 Marcel van der Linden, *Workers of the World. Essays toward a Global Labor History* (Leiden, 2008); Jan Lucassen (ed.), *Global Labour History: A State of the Art* (Bern [etc.], 2008); Andrea Komlosy, *Arbeit: Eine globalhistorische Perspektive. 13. bis 21. Jahrhundert* (Vienna, 2014).
 - 2 Sam Davies et al. (eds), *Dock Workers: International Explorations in Comparative Labour History, 1790–1970*, 2 vols (Aldershot, 2000); Lex Heerma van Voss, Els Hiemstra-Kuperus and Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk (eds), *The Ashgate Companion to the History of Textile Workers, 1650–2000* (Farnham, 2010).

of the project has been to gather local data in the urban overviews with the aim of comparing what has been brought to light through the thematic chapters that show the connections among them. It is our hope that others will use this collection for future comparisons as well. This final chapter focuses on several themes that in our opinion stand out from the contributions in this volume. Our goal is to systematically bring together some of these strands and sketch the patterns that appear over time.

First of all, this chapter relates the history of prostitution and prostitutes' experiences in terms of several broader developments in world history. Secondly, we stress the specifics of supply and demand in the labour market over space and time in relation to the history of prostitution. Thirdly, we think that the various ways societies and authorities have responded to prostitution and prostitutes constitute another important feature of how labour relations have developed in this type of work. Many of the thematic overviews in this volume indeed point to the strong relationship between various determinants of sex work such as legislation, labour relations, and working conditions. We aim to systematize these varying experiences in world cities over time, and we draw some general conclusions about the periodization of developments in the history of prostitution as we try to explain these patterns. Lastly, we briefly elaborate on how we think that the history of sex workers can enhance the study of global labour history.

Prostitution and Structural Change

Over the past four centuries, major socioeconomic changes have occurred. In this section we aim to analyse five of these changes that are closely related to each other: urbanization, industrialization, migration, colonization, and globalization. Although urbanization and migration existed before 1600, these processes became all the more salient in the period investigated in this volume. While prostitution has historically occurred in the countryside, both the historiography and the chapters in this volume are in agreement that cities have usually been the nodal points of the sex trade due to their concentration of people and services. This is related to both the supply and demand of sex workers. On the supply side, cities in general offered more job opportunities, money, and other material benefits than the countryside, attracting many (often single) male and female migrants.³ As indicated in the chapters here,

3 See Hilde Greefs and Anne Winter, "Alone and Far from Home: Gender and Migration Trajectories of Single Foreign Newcomers to Antwerp, 1850–1880", *Journal of Urban History*, 42 (2016), pp. 61–80.

a portion of the latter ended up in prostitution although they had not meant to do so when they migrated to the city, whereas other women intentionally sought the anonymity and grandeur of the urban environment to practise sex work. This is why, especially in the earlier period, most of the women who migrated to towns and became sex workers came from the (surrounding) countryside. Moreover, on the demand side, urban centres often provided a large clientele of single men such as sailors, soldiers, or migrant workers, as well as visiting businessmen and other short-term town dwellers, whether single or married, who were looking for sexual pleasure during their stay. Since the late nineteenth century, cheaper transport and the rise of mass tourism have provided both sex workers and clients with the means to have sexual encounters in cities far away from their places of origin.⁴

Not coincidentally, in many colonized societies encounters with European colonizers brought about the inhabitants' first experiences with urbanization as well as with prostitution in the form that was known in the "west" as well as with "western" forms of sexual-affective exchange.⁵ In the world outside of Europe, a vast, diverse set of sexual arrangements existed, many of which involved the exchange of money or material goods for sex. As the European colonial system invaded and/or co-opted these, sexual exchanges became reclassified according to European moral schemata. This transformation was also shot through with increasingly influential ideologies of blood purity and race, literally denigrating (in the sense proposed by Frantz Fanon) sexual-affective unions between Europeans and "natives".⁶ In first instance, mainly white men—either temporarily or permanently—migrated to the overseas territories from the metropolis, and many of them had paid (monetary or otherwise) sexual encounters with indigenous women. The foot soldiers of the colonial armies were often non-white men from other parts of the colonial empires, and the same held true for them. In the course of the nineteenth century, with the increasing settlement of European men and later women in the colonies, interracial sexual relationships increasingly became a great concern for colonial states. Symbolically, one of the means of dealing with this "problem" was related to the urban environment. As Liat Kozma notes, colonial authorities deliberately started to design the urban spaces of newly established colonial towns with the aim of segregating their inhabitants along the lines of

4 Keusch, this volume, Migration.

5 See Raelene Frances, "Prostitution: The Age of Empires", in Chiara Beccalossi and Ivan Crozier (eds), *A Cultural History of Sexuality in the Age of Empire* (Oxford [etc.], 2011), pp. 145–170.

6 Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris, 2001). We owe this suggestion to Thad Blanchette.

race, class, and “respectability”.⁷ The contributions to this volume make it quite clear that processes of urbanization, migration, and colonialism generally contributed to the rise and expansion of prostitution.

Another very important development that accelerated from the eighteenth century onwards was industrialization. Although scholars in the past have pointed to the relationship between industrialization and the occurrence of prostitution,⁸ we believe that this relationship is far from clear-cut.⁹ For one thing, both pre-industrial and early industrializing European and newly emerging colonial towns can, overall, hardly be called centres of booming industrialization. Much of the first industrialization in Europe took place in (semi)rural areas, and presumably colonialism even led to de-industrialization at least into the late 1900s.¹⁰ Large cities had historically been centres of commerce and services that were complemented with small-scale artisanal production. As mentioned already, the service-oriented and recreational aspects of towns attracted both migrant women looking for work and clients looking for pleasure rather than mere industrial activities (and this continues up to the present day). Admittedly, from early on towns enjoyed a relatively high amount of monetary circulation and wages were higher than in the countryside, but this had already been the case long before industrialization.¹¹ More indirectly, perhaps, industrialization may have contributed to the rise of sex work as it stimulated monetization, urbanization, migration, and population growth in general. But in our view, the process of industrialization cannot be considered to be one of the main driving forces behind increases of prostitution.

Lastly, the process of globalization is worthy of attention. Recent years have witnessed animated debates about globalization and these have centred on the following questions: When did it begin? How should we define it? And,

7 Kozma, this volume, *Colonial Relations*.

8 See Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900–1918* (Baltimore [etc.], 1982), pp. 3–4; Victoria Harris, *Selling Sex in the Reich. Prostitutes in German Society, 1914–1945* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 46–55; Lex Heerma van Voss, “The Worst Class of Workers: Migration, Labor Relations and Living Strategies of Prostitutes around 1900”, in Marcel van der Linden and Leo Lucassen (eds), *Working on Labor: Essays in Honor of Jan Lucassen* (Leiden, 2012), pp. 153–170, 159.

9 Magaly Rodríguez García, “Ideas and Practices of Prostitution around the World”, in Paul Knepper and Anja Johansen (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Crime and Criminal Justice* (New York, 2016), pp. 132–154.

10 Jeffrey G. Williamson, *Trade and Poverty. When the Third World Fell Behind* (Cambridge, MA [etc.], 2013).

11 Robert Allen, *The British Industrial Revolution in Global Perspective* (Cambridge, 2009).

how can we measure it?¹² Regardless of whether we decide to adhere to the broader definition of globalization, including the worldwide cultural, economic, and even ecological convergences that have taken place since the “Columbian Exchange”, or hold to a stricter, more economy-based definition that references low transport costs and market integration, it is clear that in both cases globalization has historically had a tremendous influence on sex workers. As, for instance, the many contributions to this volume on Latin America show, the first encounters with the Spanish and Portuguese conquerors around the year 1600 dramatically changed indigenous societies, leading to previously unknown forms of sexual exchange and inscribing known ones with a European moral matrix.

Later waves of globalization dramatically lowered transport costs, leading to long-distance migration which prompted women to move greater distances, while at the same time raising completely new concerns related to sex work such as “white slavery” and human trafficking. While the percentage of migrants seems to be over-represented in the (past and present) population of sex workers in comparison to the share of migrants in the population as a whole, clearly globalization has significantly increased the proportion of migrants.¹³ In fact, it can be argued that patterns of female migration across national borders, as noted by Nicole Keusch in this volume, at least from the nineteenth century onwards fit the chronology of “waves of globalization” (expansion from ca. 1850–1914, contraction between 1914 and ca. 1950, and again expansion since the 1960s) rather well. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this especially concerned European women travelling to other parts of the world, Chinese women travelling to the US, and Japanese women going to other parts of Asia. The more recent wave of globalization conversely shows a trend of women from the “Global South” travelling to the “Global North”.¹⁴

Both strands of migration seem to have run parallel with preoccupations of a moral, ethical, and racial nature, and more generally with concerns about

12 See Jeffrey G. Williamson and Kevin O'Rourke, “When Did Globalisation Begin?” *European Review of Economic History*, 6 (2002) pp. 23–50; Dennis O. Flynn and Arturo Giraldez, “Path Dependence, Time Lags, and the Birth of Globalization: A Critique of O'Rourke and Williamson”, *European Review of Economic History*, 8 (2004), pp. 81–108; Jan de Vries, “The Limits of Globalization in the Early Modern World”, *Economic History Review*, 63 (2010), pp. 710–733.

13 Nevertheless, although migrants are and have always been over-represented in the population of prostitutes compared to the total population, we should also remember that the majority of sex workers generally have been non-migrants or rural–urban migrants. Mechant, this volume, Social Profiles.

14 Keusch, this volume, Migration.

public safety and organized crime. As more women migrated alone and across long distances, which removed them from their families' sexual-economic control and protection, it was to be expected that this would lead to charges of sexual immorality as well as cases of abuse. It is possible that during the first wave (1850–1914) these concerns were more likely expressed by stressing the alleged victimhood of white women and by scapegoating Jewish people,¹⁵ while in the second wave (since 1960), concerns have more often been connected to issues of unwanted non-western immigration and the stereotyping of eastern European and non-European women (as victims) and men (as perpetrators). Furthermore, globalization has also brought about new forms of communication, such as the telephone and the internet. These technical developments have enlarged the scope and capabilities of sex workers worldwide and considerably changed the features of the trade, as many of the chapters in this volume emphasize.¹⁶

Labour Relations and Labour Market Dynamics

As mentioned above, we do not believe that it was industrialization per se but rather urbanization and the (monetary) labour opportunities towns offered that stimulated the engagement of women in sex work. While monetization and wage dependence are not necessarily linked to prostitution—as many other forms of sexual exchange existed and still exist, such as bartering or sex in return for certain privileges—it is clear that an increasing dependency on money/wage labour has influenced the history of labour relations in prostitution. For instance, while a whole spectrum of labour relations, ranging from slavery and reciprocal labour to independent remunerated labour, has existed throughout history, those prostitutes working for someone in return for wages, or for their “own wages” (e.g. self-employed), have generally been better off than prostitutes in any other form of labour relation. Moreover, in recent decades, self-proclaimed sex workers have staked the claim that they are selling a service for a wage (their own), allowing them to more collectively organize and demand workers' rights and entitlements such as written contracts, health

15 Magaly Rodríguez García, “The League of Nations and the Moral Recruitment of Women”, *International Review of Social History*, 57 (2012), pp. 97–128; Paul Knepper, “British Jews and the Racialisation of Crime in the Age of Empire”, *The British Journal of Criminology*, 47 (2007), pp. 61–79.

16 See Ekpootu, this volume, Nigeria; Frances, this volume, Working Conditions; Keusch, this volume, Migration.

and social benefits, and protection from violence at the hands of the state and abusive employers or clients.¹⁷ Nevertheless, as demonstrated in most of the urban as well as thematic overviews in this volume, prostitution has almost never been considered to be “normal” work, not by the authorities, not by society, and perhaps not by many prostitutes themselves.

A recurrent theme in many of the papers is the role of segmentation in the labour market. In most of the periods and regions analysed in this volume, both gender and ethnicity have significantly influenced labour market opportunities for women in general and for migrant women in particular. Historically, gender discrimination against women has been almost omnipresent, and this was not in the last place expressed in terms of unequal labour relations and restrictions for women in the labour market.¹⁸ The limited prospects women have faced in the labour market throughout most of history have led some of them to deliberately choose sex work in order to make a living during at least part of their lives. Less fortunate women may have been directed towards prostitution out of sheer poverty and lack of alternatives, and/or by force. Many of the chapters in this volume show that throughout most of history, women have been crowded into a small number of poorly remunerated and often precarious jobs, such as domestic service, textile work, and small-scale retailing. In contrast, as Raelene Frances notes in her overview on working conditions, across space and time many prostitutes were able to earn significantly more than women could in most other jobs. Although it is difficult to generalize because the circumstances in which women worked have varied substantially, for one sexual exchange they could often obtain the same amount of money that unskilled male labourers earned in a day.¹⁹ So, even if some women initially did not become sex workers of their own free will, many of them may have decided to stay in the business because of a lack of equally rewarding options and because in most cases they had already suffered shame and been branded for doing something illegal or “immoral”. Moreover, many prostitutes seem to have preferred prostitution to other occupations which were not only badly paid but also exhausting and often dangerous. “Ordinary” work outside the sex trade often also involved rendering sexual services, as sexual harassment was (and still is) fairly common in domestic and factory work, as well as in the retail sector and the entertainment industry.²⁰

17 Pluskota, this volume, Labour Relations.

18 Van Nederveen Meerkerk, this volume, Gender.

19 Frances, this volume, Working and Living Conditions.

20 Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, pp. 152–154. See also Dasgupta, this volume, Calcutta.

It is difficult to pinpoint patterns of labour relations in the history of prostitution. As Pluskota notes, all kinds of labour relations have existed and still exist in the business. While past and present concerns about trafficking certainly have carried harsh political and moral connotations,²¹ it is undeniable that various women have been, and are, experiencing forms of sex slavery. More subtle forms of coerced and unfree labour relations occur when family members drive their wives or daughters into sex work.²² Yet even in situations which fit the definition of “forced prostitution” or “trafficking”, some women do not seem to have resisted being pawned off or even sold, as working on behalf of their families can be construed to be a form of filial piety.²³

Most prostitutes do not seem to have been enslaved. Rather, they seem to have worked either with a mediator or independently, receiving part of or all of their clients’ payments. There are at least three frequent combinations that seem to have occurred in most of the societies we have scrutinized in this volume, some of them in the early modern period and others only occurring in later periods, for instance in the process of colonization and its accompanying urbanization. These include streetwalking with a pimp, streetwalking or working from home without a pimp, and small-scale brothels run by a madam.²⁴ In cases when prostitutes worked for pimps or madams, they would generally have to give a rather large share of their earnings, usually ranging from one- to two-thirds, to the person for whom they worked. Although this did often lead to exploitation—as in the case of labour relations resembling debt bondage, or if a pimp or madam tried to keep prostitutes addicted to drugs or alcohol—working in a brothel or for a pimp could also mean real protection and even involve affective relationships.²⁵

The labour relations and working conditions associated with prostitution have been closely related to the ways in which society, and especially the authorities, have responded to sex work. As Pluskota shows, working in a tolerated or regulated brothel can provide a certain amount of security for sex workers. From the nineteenth century onwards, regulation also brought about a situation in which formerly independent prostitutes lost much of their leeway and bargaining power because they were confined to particular urban spaces; in addition, they were forced to register and were monitored in

21 See Rodríguez García, “The League of Nations”; Blanchette, this volume, Agency.

22 Pluskota, this volume, Labour Relations.

23 Heerma van Voss, “The Worst Class of Workers”, pp. 164, 168.

24 “Streetwalking” can also involve soliciting at public establishments like cafés, restaurants, and theatres.

25 Van Nederveen Meerkerk, this volume, Gender.

numerous aggressive ways.²⁶ But as Pascale Absi and Raelene Frances argue in their contributions to this volume, while it is true that most women scorned the mandatory health controls and medical treatment common in the regulated brothels of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many also seem to have used their contacts with doctors and social workers for their own personal ends (e.g. to receive treatment for medical issues aside from venereal diseases or to exit the milieu of prostitution). Also, the heightened awareness about venereal diseases that accompanied the regulation system probably benefited many women involved in prostitution.²⁷ Nonetheless, this system was largely perceived as being draconian. Therefore, many prostitutes in regulationist cities opted for clandestine prostitution, even if this meant an increased danger of prosecution and even violence at the hands of the police.

Generally, we can conclude that the (positive or negative) effects of regulation or tolerance on the labour relations and working conditions in the sex trade have varied according to the way prostitution has been perceived by the authorities across time and space. When prostitution was understood to be a “necessary evil”, policies and working conditions seemed to have been fairly relaxed; if prostitution was defined in terms of deviancy and harmful or dangerous behaviour, harsh measures were the rule, labour relations deteriorated, and (exploitative) intermediaries started to play a more prominent role; and when prostitution came to be treated as a form of work, policies have become far less repressive and have granted more benefits to sex workers. In several cities, a mixed reading of prostitution seems to have existed (and still exists), resulting in equally mixed policies and working conditions. The emphasis on the importance of authorities’ dealings with prostitution leads us to the final important category of analysis in this conclusion: state and non-state actors’ responses to sex work.

Responses to Prostitution

With some exceptions, most forms of prostitution have been morally and/or legally condemned in the time periods and regions under study here. In most early modern European towns, it was not prostitution as such that was considered to be a vice but, more broadly, extra-marital sexual relationships that were often referred to as “adultery” or “fornication”. While in some settings, such as pre-industrial China, high-echelon prostitutes may to a great extent have been

26 Pluskota, this volume, Labour Relations.

27 Absi, this volume, Bolivia; Frances, this volume, Working Conditions.

accepted and even gained considerable social status, more frequently prostitution was seen as “evil”, albeit perhaps often a necessary evil. Prostitution was tolerated or even regulated in many cities until around the sixteenth century because prostitutes supposedly served as outlets for men’s sexual drives and protected “honest” women from rape. Cultural, politico-military, and socio-economic changes from the late fifteenth century onward altered perceptions of prostitution and, above all, government responses to it. Parallel to the religious revival of the time, an increased number of unregulated prostitutes became visible. As the early modern state and its large military apparatus developed, independent prostitutes started following the armies. This new situation led to a spread of venereal diseases and the authorities reacted with the adoption of ordinances prohibiting prostitution and confining women in hospitals or prisons. Religious societies also became increasingly involved in campaigns against prostitution and in rehabilitation programmes for “fallen women”.²⁸ Hence in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries prostitution was likely to be either criminalized and intensively persecuted by both civic and religious authorities, or tolerated but only to a certain extent. Regulation was rare until the late eighteenth century, as seen in graph 33.1. In north-western European towns such as Amsterdam and London, which attracted large numbers of sailors and other migrants, tolerance was the most natural response, even though prostitutes could easily be arrested if they were suspected of improper or subversive behaviour.²⁹ In most other European towns, however, procuring, brothel-keeping, and/or prostitution were against the law and sometimes dealt with in a harsh manner. Interestingly, many non-European pre-industrial towns, particularly in North Africa and Asia, seem to have been relatively more tolerant regarding sexual services up until the nineteenth century, with the notable exception of Hanoi.

Graph 33.1 systematizes the patterns of authorities’ dealings with prostitution and prostitution-related activities over time in the cities included in this project.³⁰ There is immense complexity in the transitions from one kind of response to another, and these do not seem to have been quite synchronous for any of the towns and cities in our sample. On the other hand, if we look at specific periods in history, we can indeed discern distinctive similar responses

28 Rodríguez García, “Ideas and Practices of Prostitution around the World”.

29 See Lotte van de Pol, *The Burgher and the Whore: Prostitution in Early Modern Amsterdam* (Oxford, 2011). See also Pluskota, this volume, Amsterdam. Pluskota attributes the relative ease with which prostitutes were arrested in early modern Amsterdam to the town’s distinct Calvinist culture.

30 For a discussion of the graph see the appendix.

GRAPH 33.1 *Trends in legislation, 1600–2000*

SOURCE: BASED ON TABLE 33.1 (APPENDIX)

to prostitution on a global scale, and the overall picture is rather simple. These responses link up to the specific contextual developments mentioned earlier in this chapter which steered urban or national authorities towards a particular reaction to prostitution. Before the second half of the nineteenth century, the two most common approaches were prohibition/criminalization or tolerance. Quite often, prostitution was formally forbidden in either case, and the difference was whether the authorities made an effort to stamp out the practice or thought it better to supervise and therefore tolerate it at least under certain circumstances (only in special neighbourhoods or via certain ways of advertising the business and soliciting clients). In the course of the nineteenth century, the combination of the emergence of the nation-state and processes of globalization and colonialism led to increased awareness and anxiety concerning uncontrolled sexuality, and this in turn led to an increase in regulation. Regulation had started in (post)revolutionary France and it was to a large extent concerned with the formation of a nation-state in which information about the population was meticulously kept and the goal was to increase the health of its citizens. Consequently, a system of regulation came into being which, not coincidentally, elsewhere was often referred to as the “French System”.

While many towns in Europe and the Americas adopted the regulated system during the second half of the nineteenth century, the regulations forced upon colonial settings by imperial powers were particularly harsh. In the 1860s, the British introduced the Contagious Diseases Acts in garrison towns and abroad. The measures were specifically intended to secure the imperial project and combat the consequences of prostitution to protect British troops. The system never extended to the metropolis as a combination of informal regulation and repression continued to be practised in London throughout the

nineteenth century.³¹ In the colonies, the regulation of prostitution served a dual goal: on the one hand, protecting colonial soldiers and settlers from venereal diseases, and on the other hand, controlling interracial sexual encounters, which were of increasing concern to many imperial rulers.³² As Kozma argues, while in Europe regulation came under increasing criticism at the end of the nineteenth century, in the colonies it was deemed to be unavoidable.³³

Whereas in earlier periods the image of the prostitute as a deviant or “fallen woman” had prevailed, towards the end of the nineteenth century the idea of (especially white) women as victims of procurers and traffickers emerged. The abolitionist movement may have gotten started in Great Britain but over time it was increasingly supported worldwide by the emerging feminist movement. Around the turn of the century, the International Bureau for the Suppression of Traffic in Women and Children was established, and it condoned state-regulated prostitution but strove to repress the international “white slave traffic”. In the early twentieth century the first conventions against trafficking were adopted, but it appeared that they were often not observed, so the League of Nations in the early 1920s assembled a committee to investigate and discuss the international traffic of women which came to be linked to the regulation system.³⁴ As Table 33.1 in the appendix shows, these international activities inspired many countries to draw up abolitionist legislation, even if it sometimes took decades for those laws to be implemented. The authorities in many towns only enforced legislation against activities that facilitate prostitution (pimping, soliciting, brothel keeping and so on) in the two decades after the Second World War, although prostitution itself was not criminalized.

For many decolonizing countries, the abolition of the regulation system may not have followed so much from concerns about international campaigns against trafficking but rather constituted a reaction to the old colonial relations that were felt to have introduced despised western morals to overseas territories, and those relations were then targeted for eradication. Another important development in this respect was of course the rise of communist regimes that viewed prostitution as a detrimental result of the capitalist system which, it was argued, had to be eliminated either by re-education or repression. The Soviet Union for instance explicitly decriminalized prostitution in 1918, removing any reference to it from their first Criminal Code. All through

31 Laite, this volume, London; Kozma, this volume, *Colonial Relations*.

32 Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, 2009), esp. Chapter 3, pp. 57–104.

33 Kozma, this volume, *Colonial Relations*.

34 Rodríguez García, “The League of Nations”, pp. 101–104.

the 1920s the official line (pursued by the central ministries against recalcitrant local governments) was that prostitution was not a crime but pimping was. This never changed. However, at the same time the police (or NKVD) arrested prostitutes as “socially harmful elements” and for “hooliganism”. In the table, we have classified as criminalization this practice of de facto persecuting what was not de jure illegal for Moscow, St. Petersburg, Shanghai, and Havana after their respective transitions to the communist system. In the non-communist world, the only country that opted for the outright prohibition of prostitution was the United States, which launched its prohibitionist policies in 1919. As in other prohibitionist areas, the criminalization of prostitution in US cities (except for the state of Nevada) led to harsh measures against sex workers and drove the sex trade underground.

These broad categories also make it possible for us to look at the four regional blocks in which we have organized the urban overviews in this volume. These are commonly used geographical units: Europe, Africa and the Middle East, the Americas, and Asia-Pacific. In Table 33.1 in the appendix we compare nine European towns, six towns in Africa and the Middle East, six towns in the Americas and six Asian-Pacific towns.³⁵ As some of the overviews do not treat the earlier period, over time the total number of observations grows from fifteen in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to twenty-eight in the twentieth century. Can we distinguish different patterns for these four large areas? As we noted before, the dominant responses to prostitution in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries on a global scale were tolerance and prohibition. But in Europe prohibition was fairly common, while Latin America and Asia—and to a lesser extent Africa—showed strong traditions of tolerance. Regulation in these two centuries was limited to a small number of towns (Florence, Paris and Cairo). However, from the mid-nineteenth century onward it became the trend in Europe, followed, with a time lag of only a few decades, by the rest of the world. Regulation remained the dominant system globally from the 1850s until the 1930s. The rest of the twentieth century saw formal abolition and tolerance or de facto regulation on the rise, followed from the 1970s by a few areas of emancipation. This movement was carried on by Latin America reverting to its tradition of tolerance and Europe becoming dominantly tolerant of prostitution for the first time in the modern period. The areas of emancipation are found in Australia and Europe. In terms of continents, Europe often stands out: first by a relative preference for prohibition (shared by

35 The total differs from the number of chapters as some chapters deal with more than one town and not all cities for which information was collected in the project are included in the publication.

the Middle East), then by a strong preference for regulation spread around the world through European colonialism and more recently by legalization or various shades of abolitionism (ranging from tolerance to the criminalization of clients).

Globalization and decolonization in the past few decades have stimulated the migration of women from the Global South to the Global North, and a number of those women have engaged in prostitution. Likewise, the fall of the Soviet Union stimulated the migration of eastern European sex workers to destinations all over the world.³⁶ These changes, together with a more general tendency to liberate women's sexuality (at least in the western world following the second feminist wave), have since the 1970s led to a shift from abolition to at least forms of tolerance or, in a few instances, to the legalization of sex work. We can clearly see this illustrated in table 33.1 for towns in Europe such as Amsterdam and Florence and for towns in Latin America, Africa, and Australia. In places where prostitution is now legal and regulated, the working conditions for sex workers seem to have improved (although the stigma remains), as they are entitled to the same benefits as other citizens in the labour market.³⁷ Yet parallel to the growth of the sex workers' movement is the re-emergence of the abolitionist/prohibitionist discourse and the strengthening of networks and campaigns against human trafficking and so-called modern slavery. The idea of prostitutes as victims has been emphasized and has led to alternative legislative ways to repress prostitution. At the end of the 1990s, Sweden became the first country to criminalize the purchasing of sex. Throughout the first decades of the twenty-first century, several countries have followed the Swedish example. In 2014, the European Parliament approved a non-binding resolution which recommends that EU countries re-evaluate their sex work policies so they can reduce demand for prostitution and trafficking by punishing clients.

In all these patterns of dealing with prostitution, labour relations in the business have been very much influenced by the way state or urban authorities set the legal framework. Some examples were already given in the previous section. Being a self-employed prostitute does not necessarily mean that one is better off because a woman may need the protection of a pimp or madam.

36 Keusch, this volume, Migration.

37 Alexis A. Aronowitz, "To Punish or Not to Punish: What Works in the Regulation of the Prostitution Market", in Nina Peršak and Geert Vermeulen (eds), *Reframing Prostitution: From Discourse to Description, from Moralisation to Normalisation?* (Antwerp, 2014), pp. 223–251, 242.

Especially if prostitution is illegal, self-employed sex workers—particularly streetwalkers—face harassment not only by clients but also by the police. On the other hand, when prostitutes work under wage-dependent, debt bondage, or coerced labour relations in the contexts of abolition or prohibition, they are even more at the mercy of their pimp or madam because of their illegal status. This also goes for present-day illegal migrant women who may be drawn into criminal networks because of their vulnerable position. In cities where sex workers operate in a legal environment, illegal prostitution has not entirely disappeared. Illegal migrants still experience the detrimental effects of clandestine prostitution. It is, however, clear that the position of prostitutes on the whole is most favourable when prostitution is legal and when individuals are (relatively) free to enter or leave any occupation they prefer.³⁸

Sex Work and Global Labour History

In this volume we have studied the history of prostitution in world cities within the scope of work. Even if, as some feminist scholars and activists have fiercely argued, all forms of prostitution should be seen as sexual slavery—a view we do not endorse—it deserves to be studied from a labour history perspective because the broad definition of work includes all forms of labour, also slavery.³⁹ In this final section, we wish to establish what such a long-term and worldwide analysis of sex work adds to our knowledge of labour relations more generally and how it may enrich the perspective of global labour history.

Throughout history, prostitutes have offered a service that many may have considered to be aberrant or even “evil” but for which there has been demand in all regions of the world in the entire period studied here. Sex workers have received compensation for these services, be it monetary or non-monetary. In recent decades, they have started organizing as workers and correspondingly demanded workers’ rights, entitlements and—perhaps just as importantly—recognition by society and the state. Nevertheless, prostitution up until today has never been considered to be “normal” work, even in those few places where it has been legalized.⁴⁰ Moreover, prostitution, or facilitating it, has often been

38 Barbara Sullivan, “Rape, Prostitution and Consent”, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 40 (2007), pp. 127–142.

39 Van der Linden, *Workers of the World*.

40 Aronowitz, “To Punish or not to Punish”, pp. 223–256.

criminalized, thus giving it a connotation of crime rather than of work. This distinguishes it from a range of other occupations and sectors that have been scrutinized by labour historians over the past few decades.

What sets prostitution apart from many other forms of labour is that it is highly sexualized and highly gendered.⁴¹ As some authors in this volume have argued, sexual services have often been considered to be a “natural duty” that women should perform for men, and some prostitutes themselves have at times even compared being married to fulfilling unpaid sexual services.⁴² In this respect, sex workers can perhaps most adequately be compared to domestic workers who, for a very long time, have also been largely ignored as true workers by society, the state, and much of labour historiography.⁴³ Domestic work has also often been seen as the natural calling of women, particularly wives, and has accordingly been undervalued and under-represented in the labour movement and historiography.

However, what distinguishes prostitution from domestic work is that it has in many instances been one of the few occupations in which women, at least for a certain phase in their life cycle, could earn a relatively reasonable to decent living, sometimes even exceeding the income of men in many occupations. In fact, if one looks at the alternatives women had in the labour market in most of history, prostitution was often the only viable way to make a living for women, either because they were excluded from many occupations as females (and migrants) or because the alternatives they had just did not yield sufficient incomes. A broader lesson to be learned from this is that labour historians, when exploring the global history of work, should be careful not to isolate a particular occupation or sector in their analysis of labour relations and they should always take into account the wider labour market dynamics pushing some groups of women, and also men, into particular forms of work which may seem unreasonably dangerous or unattractive.⁴⁴

Apart from the (often local) conditions in the labour market, it is clear that more universal developments in history have also had a major impact on

41 Of course, throughout history there have always been male prostitutes, but they were and still are generally a minority.

42 See Wyers, this volume, Istanbul; Dasgupta, this volume, Calcutta; Van Nederveen Meerkerk, this volume, Gender.

43 See Dirk Hoerder, Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk and Silke Neunsinger (eds), *Towards a Global History of Domestic and Care Workers* (Leiden, 2015).

44 One can think of the health risks involved in mining or some professional sports which are well known to the workers concerned and still many people worldwide are drawn to those professions.

labour relations in prostitution. Here, we have identified three larger processes in particular: urbanization, globalization, and colonization. These three developments were highly interrelated and also link up to the fact that a considerable proportion of sex workers (though usually not the majority) have been migrant women. Together with the processes of urbanization and globalization, migration has tended to become more important and be performed over longer distances. The (lack of) opportunities that migrants, especially migrant women, have had in the receiving labour market and more generally their relatively vulnerable positions in the society they arrived in have determined to a large extent the labour relations and conditions in which they worked.

However, as most of the chapters in this volume show, it would be a major error, even a distortion of history, to view migrant sex workers solely as passive victims. In the case of migration, many women have known, or at least suspected, what they were getting into, and even if it was because of lack of alternatives, many of them seem to have weighed the advantages against the disadvantages of prostitution and deliberately chosen to become sex workers. After all, not all (migrant) women end up in prostitution, even if they too live under similar miserable economic conditions and have limited choices in the labour market. Moreover, whereas some women have indeed been forced or lured into prostitution, this does not mean that they could not exert any control over their own lives after they found themselves in an unfavourable position. The contributions in this volume show that many prostitutes have had a considerable—although varying—degree of agency in deciding about their working lives. This leads us to the final point we would like to make with this global history of sex workers: labour historians should try to move away from simple dichotomies between “coercion” and “voluntarism” and instead focus on the degrees of freedom that workers have had in the past and present.⁴⁵ This holds true for many other occupations aside from prostitution.

45 Robert J. Steinfeld and Stanley L. Engerman, “Labor—Free or Coerced? A Historical Reassessment of Differences and Similarities”, in Tom Brass and Marcel van der Linden (eds), *Free and Unfree Labour: The Debate Continues* (Bern, 1997), pp. 107–126. For a conceptual overview of the boundaries of “free” and “coerced” labour in international law, see Magaly Rodríguez García, “On the Legal Boundaries of Coerced Labor”, in Marcel van der Linden and Magaly Rodríguez García (eds), *On Coerced Labor: Work and Compulsion after Chattel Slavery* (Leiden, 2016), pp. 11–29.

Appendix: Data for Graph 33.1

TABLE 33.1 *Trends in legislation, 1600–2000*

	17th century	18th century	1780s–1800s	1810s–1840s
Tolerance	Amsterdam	Paris	Sydney	Chicago
	Cairo		Johannesburg	Florence
	Calcutta			Moscow
	Havana			Rio de Janeiro ^b
	Bruges			Jaffa
	London			
	Mexico			
	Shanghai			
Prohibition/ criminal- ization/ abolition	Hanoi	Moscow	<i>Amsterdam</i> ^a	Cairo
	Istanbul	St. Petersburg	Florence	Havana
	<i>Moscow</i> ^a	<i>Stockholm</i> ^a	Bruges	
	Paris			
	Vienna			
	Stockholm			
Regulation	Florence		Cairo	
			Paris	

Emancipation

Note: City names in italics designate attitudes to procuring, brothel keeping etc., not to prostitution per se.

a = procuring; b = procuring by men; c = brothel keeping; d = radical; e = independent sex work; f = restricted areas; g = clients; h = formally tolerated but subjected to much police harassment based on other legislation

SOURCE: CHAPTERS IN THIS VOLUME.

1850s–1870s	1880s–1900s	1910s–1930s	1940s–1960s	1970s–2000
Havana		Stockholm	Amsterdam	Bruges
Perth			Paris	Florence
			Tel Aviv	Johannesburg
	<i>Rio de Janeiro</i> ^e	<i>Rio de Janeiro</i> ^f		La Paz
		Moscow ^h	Buenos Aires	Mexico city
		St. Petersburg ^h		Perth
	Amsterdam	Chicago	Cairo	Paris
	<i>Chicago</i> ^a	Calcutta	Casablanca	<i>Stockholm</i> ^g
	<i>Rio de Janeiro</i> ^c	<i>Johannesburg</i> ^d	Hanoi	<i>Vienna</i> ^a
	Vienna	Moscow ^h	Havana	
	<i>Sydney</i> ^b	St. Petersburg ^h	London	
		Singapore	<i>Mexico City</i> ^c	
			Shanghai	
			<i>Tel Aviv</i> ^a	
Calcutta	Buenos Aires	Casablanca	Singapore	
Florence	Cairo	Lagos		
Mexico City	Hanoi	Perth		
Stockholm	Istanbul			
Vienna	Johannesburg			
Singapore	La Paz			
Moscow	Shanghai			
St. Petersburg	Tel Aviv			
Bruges				Amsterdam
				Sydney
				Vienna

Comments on the Table

For each town and period for which information is given in the urban overviews, we have classified the position of the authorities towards prostitution into one of four categories: tolerance, prohibition/criminalization/abolition, regulation or emancipation. It is not so easy to define precise borders for these categories, but there are clear cores which can be defined. Under tolerance, prostitution is accepted as an inevitable phenomenon. This can either take the form of the absence of any regulation of prostitution, informal or de-facto regulation, or a political debate the outcome of which is that prostitution is not to be interfered with by the authorities. Historically the word “tolerance” has also been associated with the regulation (“French”) system. This is not the way the term is used here.

Under regulation, there are written laws that regulate how prostitution is to be organized in the whole of a jurisdiction.

Under prohibition, the authorities make an effort to stamp out prostitution by criminalizing prostitutes, pimps, madams and/or brothels. When prostitution had been regulated, often the term abolition was used for its prohibition, even if technically the abolition movement might just have demanded that the state stop regulating the sex business, not prohibition (Conner, this volume, Paris).

Emancipation is the attempt not just to tolerate prostitution as a necessary evil, but to organize it as a viable career for women, and to stamp out forms of oppression often associated with prostitution.

Apart from emancipation, the other policies can be applied in a mix as different authorities deal with prostitution. While the official policy of a state may be that prostitution or activities related to it are unlawful and must be abolished, local police authorities may think it a preferable policy to tolerate prostitution in certain establishments or neighbourhoods as a better means of containing and supervising it, or profiting from bribes.

The periods for which the data are listed in the table were chosen based on changes in policy as suggested by the urban overviews. They have been retained in the graph.

Index

Some terms occur so frequently throughout the book that listing them in the index does not provide useful information. The terms brothel, prostitute and prostitution are found on average more than once on every page, and we have also excluded words which on average turn up more often than on every fourth page (either the words themselves or an equivalent that would have to be covered under the same index term). For that reason the terms brothel(s), commercial sex, family, health, migration, pimp(s)/souteneurs, police, prostitute(s), prostitution, sex, sex industry, sex work, sex worker(s), soldier(s)/military and trafficking/smuggling have not been included in the index, nor have we included geographical locations, personal names or laws and other measures concerning prostitution.

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