THE DEVIL'S CHAIN

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PROSTITUTION AND SOCIAL CONTROL IN PARTITIONED POLAND

KEELY STAUTER-HALSTED

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Even as the book was researched via collegial connections the world over and its results have been presented in public arenas, the writing itself has mainly been accomplished in isolation. In my case, the splendid isolation was the cozy nest of our family home. Though a large part of the manuscript was written in various coffee shops around Ann Arbor (including the first chapter, which was started the morning our son, now graduated from college, took his SAT exam), my fondest memories will always be composing yet another new draft chapter in my cozy Chicago study, surrounded by a gaggle of high school girls (and increasing numbers of adolescent boys), our son home from college, and my husband busy with some new project in the next room. Though I am sure they have all long since tired of me waxing on at school functions about my research on ladies of the night, my family has remained incredibly patient and supportive throughout. No one could ever be more encouraging or more adept at solving problems—both logistical and interpretive—than my husband, Dave Halsted. Without him, this book's contribution to larger historical questions would have been comparatively meager. His willingness to read multiple drafts, his problem-solving skills, his generosity in encouraging my research trips during periods when most "normal" families would be attending family reunions or celebrating holidays, and his bravery in being left alone with small children even during dance recitals and school plays is a debt I can probably never repay. So thanks to my son Chris (especially for his final close edit of the manuscript), to my daughter Caroline for her charm and good cheer, and most of all to Dave, to whom this book is appropriately dedicated.

THE DEVIL'S CHAIN

Introduction
Reforming the National Body

> I cannot imagine in all of Europe a town as unrestrained as Warsaw. . . . Such female figures as one sees in the darkness of Warsaw, such legions, such impudence in accosting passersby, these things do not exist anywhere else. A country is its customs!
>
> —Bolesław Prus, "Nim słońce wejdzie" (Before the sun rises)

In January 1883 an angry exchange of letters in Warsaw's popular press drew attention to the epidemic of streetwalkers polluting public spaces in the former capital. Residents complained that every other house had become a brothel and that the cacophony of singing, dancing, and brawling was disrupting their otherwise orderly lives.[1] Anxiety about open sexuality on city streets soon spilled over into fears of innocence violated as high-profile trafficking trials called attention to the mass kidnapping of innocent virgins.[2] By the early years of the twentieth century, gang-related sexual violence burst onto the public stage with the bloody Alfonse Pogrom of 1905 that left dozens of casualties in a ruined Warsaw vice district.[3] Even during the waning days of World War I, when the empires occupying Polish territory lay in ruins and the nation's fortunes were finally on the ascent, concern about a spike in prostitution and climbing rates of venereal infection gripped the population with renewed force. Experts warned that Poland was

1. See, for example, the exchanges in *Kurier Poranny,* January 9, 1883, 2; and *Kurier Warszawski*, no. 345 (1883): 3.

2. "Z tajemnic społeczeństwa: Handlarz dziewcząt," *Gazeta Narodowa,* July 9, 1892, 2; "Handlarze dziewcząt," *Gazeta Narodowa,* October 19, 1892, 2.

3. "Kilka słów w kwestyi prostytucyi z powodu ostatnich pogromów," *Nowe Słowo* 4 (October 15, 1905): 391–95; "Krwawy dramat," *Słowo*, May 25, 1905, 3; "Precz prostytucją i nierządem," *Czystość* 1 (June 20, 1905): 5–6.

"on the verge of a new and dangerous calamity" at the very moment of her political rebirth. Syphilis raged through city and country alike, felling huge portions of the population and sapping the strength of future generations.[4] In all, the forty years between the 1880s and the founding years of the Polish Second Republic witnessed an unprecedented outpouring of public concern around the problem of prostitution. Again and again, contemporaries pointed to commercial sex as a grave danger to the Polish nation. Long a fixture of urban life, prostitution took on new meaning in these years as the focus of reforming zeal and the key to national self-preservation.

What accounted for the sudden interest in venal sex across the lands of partitioned Poland? How can we understand the panic about sexuality, disease, and intimate violence among Polish-speaking observers? What elements did this panic and the response to it share across the political boundaries of Austrian, Prussian, and Russian Poland, with their very different legal and regulatory structures and distinct approaches to issues of gender, migration, health care, and social control? *The Devil's Chain* explores the life world of prostitution in the Polish provinces as a prism through which to assess Poland's difficult transition to modernity in the context of its struggling movement for political independence. Beginning with the moment of public alarm in the 1880s when journalists and civil servants set out to address the burgeoning sex industry, the narrative encompasses the crest of anxiety about prostitution following the 1905 Revolution and traces the course of the white slavery scare that extended through the early years of the twentieth century. The incidence of paid sex peaked during the long years of total war from 1914 to 1921, when widows and abandoned women resorted to sex work to survive foreign occupation and military conflict. Prostitution reform was again in the air during the interwar Second Republic, but two decades of economic crisis and political chaos ushered in only limited adjustments to the system of police regulation inherited from previous administrations.

Looking at prostitution in the Polish lands highlights broad patterns of multiclass contact under conditions of imperial subjugation. As such, this study is intentionally situated at the crux of a cross-border dialogue encompassing all three portions of the divided Polish state. It seeks to trace an increasingly urgent conversation about a problem plaguing "Polish" society as a whole. I argue that an emerging national elite consisting of educated writers, journalists, social workers, university lecturers, students, scientists,

4. Emil Wyrobek, *Choroby weneryczne: Ich skutki i znaczenie w życiu jednostki i społeczeństwa, tudzież osoby leczenia i zapogiegania* (Cracow, 1916), 64–65. Please note that all translations from foreign documents are my own unless otherwise indicated.

legal experts, and medical professionals engaged in an ongoing discussion about the causes and consequences of commercial sex. The premise of this debate, conducted everywhere from daily newspapers to specialized medical journals, lecture halls, and associational meetings, was that the incidence of public sex in the Polish lands had reached near crisis proportions and that the solution to the burgeoning rates of prostitution lay at the heart of Polish hopes for national renewal. Variable censorship laws across the three partitions combined with permeable borders and relatively rapid train communications to facilitate a conversation that spanned the Polish-speaking territories from Poznań to Lublin. We hear from muckraking journalists in Lwów, welfare activists in Cracow, feminists in Warsaw, venereal experts in Łódź, and legal specialists in Poznań, in conversation with one another, each publishing in professional journals and daily presses across imperial boundaries. Stricter censorship laws in the Polish-speaking provinces of the German Empire kept the prostitution debate out of the daily press there, but physicians and legal experts nonetheless managed to take part in cross-border debates by publishing in the more permissive intellectual environment of Austrian Galicia or post-1905 Warsaw.

For the most part, the interlocutors who appear in this book conducted their discussions in Polish, though they clearly had access to literature on prostitution reform, scientific developments, and social-work innovations in Western languages and in Russian. The community they referenced—the population they sought to improve—was "Poland," by which they meant the people of the former Polish Commonwealth [*Rzeczpospolita*] before its late eighteenth-century dismemberment. Many of the women they discussed were native Polish speakers, but a substantial minority functioned primarily in Yiddish. Still others were recorded on police registries as Ruthenian speakers (usually noted as Greek Catholics or Russian Orthodox by rite), or as Germans, Lithuanians, Czechs, Hungarians, Roma, or any number of other minorities inhabiting the towns and cities of former Polish territory. The focus of reformers' efforts was not always ethnically defined. Agendas and programs were instead addressed at resolving a problem besetting the nation or the *naród*, attacking "*Polska*," or even the "*lud*," or folk. Distinctions became clearer when reformers turned to their occasional characterization of prostitution and especially of international trafficking as a "Jewish problem," an epithet that did not go unchallenged in contemporary debates.

The pages that follow explore the broader meanings behind the prostitution debate in the half century leading up to Poland's renewed political independence. I argue that discussion of prostitution and its attendant disorders—sexual deviancy, alcoholism, child abuse, vagrancy, venereal disease, and other

related problems—provided a perfect backdrop for mapping out alternative visions of the nation's future. Public discussion of the flourishing sex industry helped shape larger negotiations about modernizing the Polish national body in preparation for political independence. By charting solutions to the prostitution dilemma Polish actors allowed commercial sex to stand in for a whole host of calamities the country had suffered since the late eighteenth-century collapse of the Republic. Prostitution became a symbol of the malevolent rule of three occupying powers and of the crushing need to reform nearly every aspect of Polish social practices. Beginning in the 1880s and continuing into the founding years of the Second Polish Republic, residents of the Polish territories struggled to ameliorate the conditions of the local and international sex trade and to reduce the incidence of young women turning to paid sex. *The Devil's Chain* traces a new conversation about sexuality, gender propriety, and social class that was conducted through the idiom of prostitution. This book is about how Polish commentators introduced gender and sexuality into the national conversation and how that changed the configuration of modern Poland.

The book begins with an exploration of the drama that unfolded over the problem of paid sex during the last decades of imperial rule in the Polish lands. Prostitution lay at the juncture of mass and elite culture.[5] The sale of sex permeated visits to the opera and the symphony, colored the atmosphere at local restaurants and pubs, and crept into the bourgeois home by way of underpaid housekeepers who moonlighted as registered prostitutes. City life brought rural migrants and working girls into contact with elite students, officials, and garrisoned soldiers, transforming urban centers into the sites of conflicting social codes. Prostitution in all its permutations was practiced at the interstices of this social upheaval, bringing together sharply divergent social classes in what had long been a radically stratified society. Since rhetoric about the vanquished nation coursed through nearly every public discussion of social ills or future promise, reforming actors were explicitly preoccupied with their country's political independence while implicitly navigating the landmines of sexual modernity.

At the heart of the reform discussion was a debate about the women who practiced paid sex, a social group that existed at the very margins of fin de

5. As Timothy Gilfoyle has observed, "commercial sex" is a particularly useful category of analysis for the historian because it "functioned at the nexus of social relations in community life." Timothy J. Gilfoyle, "Prostitutes in the Archives: Problems and Possibilities in Documenting the History of Sexuality," *American Archivist* 57, no. 3 (1994): 514–27.

siècle Polish society. *The Devil's Chain* explores the lives of the impoverished women who turned to the streets and the social milieu that shaped their limited choices, mapping the contingent circumstances that drove them to the practice. Prostitution lay at the center of vital concerns plaguing Poland's lower classes, including issues of morality, gender roles, family and reproductive life, and the ways poor women understood and manipulated the administrative systems within which prostitutes were legally bound. Viewed as an unfortunate and often dangerous option, prostitution nonetheless served as an important temporary expedient for a certain subset of needy women. Understanding sex work as a tool for survival allows us to highlight the ways in which Poland's wider social classes experienced the heightened sexual tensions of the late nineteenth century.[6] The women who served as the mainstay of garrisoned solders and who facilitated the sexual induction of gymnasium and university students also had very real lives. They made difficult decisions about their own fates and experienced a variety of outcomes as a result of their participation in the sex trade. The focus here, then, is on prostitution as an economic "weapon of the weak," a potential escape route from inherited poverty for women whose voices are rarely found in the historical record.[7]

Women who turn to commercial sex—or to any of a number of other seemingly unsavory practices—often appear in the historical record as passive victims of their own fate. Historians and other scholars present them as "duped" or forced into particular behaviors. They are subjected to the will of powerful, wealthy, or cunning handlers. Moreover, even the most liberal-minded and generous contemporary social commentators frequently perceived poor and uneducated girls as being easily led astray. The social distance that remained from Poland's feudal past continued to inform their judgment about sexual impropriety. Yet, as we will see, sometimes it was elite power brokers who were duped by clever lower-class women, many of whom changed jobs to avoid unwanted sexual advances or migrated to new communities seeking a fresh start. This book argues that many poor women found ways to exercise limited agency in times of personal hardship, material shortage, or family crisis. Selling sex was but one among a range of difficult options available to them.

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6. On the historiography of broader sexuality studies in the east-central European context, see Matti Bunzl, "Desiderata for a History of Austrian Sexualities," *Austrian History Yearbook* 38 (2007): 48–57.

7. On strategies of opposition among relatively powerless, politically subordinate population groups, see James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT, 2008).

To a great extent, legal and medical authorities imposed the "prostitute" label onto lower-class women. As a category, it was not always embraced among practitioners of paid sex. A high proportion of the young women inscribed onto police registries in urban centers across east-central Europe did not self-identify as professional prostitutes. Instead, many turned to public sex during periods of unemployment or in order to supplement substandard wages. Selling sex temporarily or part time was not necessarily considered a major step among working women. Nonetheless, social activists, vice squads, and elite public opinion often wrongly branded such strategic sexual behavior as comprising a permanent moral downfall from which its actor could not recover. This book is explicitly focused on these lower-class streetwalkers and brothel residents rather than the elite courtesans who served as companions to local military officers or wealthy aristocrats. This latter type of sexual encounter was less ubiquitous in the impoverished Polish lands than in Western Europe and, in any case, represents a social cohort distinct from the milieu addressed in this book. I mean to examine here the category of inexpensive public women of lowly social background who were unskilled and only minimally educated. It is these women—defined both by what they did and by their social origin—who represent a rising class of ambitious individuals intent on constructing their own future in a modernizing Polish society.

The Devil's Chain also explores the figures at the edges of the sex trade, who formed a vital component of Poland's modernizing processes. Often driven to their roles as sexual mediators by economic structures that allowed little room for maneuver, the pimps, procurers, madams, and traffickers who inhabited this liminal terrain typically traded in other wares besides women. Those who helped guide women into the local sex trade also functioned as smugglers, migration agents, or employment recruiters. Some of them worked as night watchmen in tenement apartment houses; others were "knife men" who belonged to urban gangs. Regardless, it was relatively easy for a homeless or needy young woman to find her way to a place of prostitution through contact with one of these urban mediators. A disproportionate number of the madams, procurers, and long-distance traffickers who facilitated the transition into professional sex work were Jews, a fact that fed notions of anti-Semitism and assumptions about Jewish victimization of Christian girls. In particular, international migration agents who assisted single, young women in gaining passage abroad were often characterized as traffickers in human goods, an accusation that detracted from the personal agency of the women who frequently elected voluntarily to leave their homes. Viewing migration agents and local procurers in their own social

context helps deconstruct the difficult but important relationship between procurer and prostitute, showing the limits on individual agency afforded Poland's marginal classes.

Finally, and perhaps most centrally, the narrative turns to the fin de siècle social activists who took on the prostitution problem as part of their larger agenda. Educated Poles sought to apply social control and reform to nearly every aspect of the nation's life in the late nineteenth century. Part of a larger emphasis on working at the base of society, programs to improve the country's economic and cultural conditions after a century of failed uprisings encompassed a wide range of efforts to assist impoverished young women. A broad range of actors, including journalists, women's rights activists, charity workers, physicians, and religious figures, focused their disciplining energies on everything from education and agriculture to industrial development and urban planning. Prostitution also came under their critical lens. Social activists wondered publicly how morally challenged young women, variously depicted as dirty, diseased, psychologically unstable, genetically flawed, or physically degenerate, could be integrated into a nation that was beginning the process of democratizing and expanding its political suffrage. The new multiclass Polish nation would need to integrate and elevate individuals from the dregs of society if it was to fulfill the hope of a democratic future. Two generations after peasant emancipation, the young women turning tricks on city streets were invariably migrants from the impoverished countryside or daughters of the urban poor. Only recently considered part of the political nation, the peasantry had yet to gain equal footing with their former lords. It would be several generations before those of peasant background would find common cause with their social betters. For all of these reasons, the study of commercial sex in this period gives us insight into the shifting status of the public woman from reviled outsider to pitied insider, from the focus of efforts to castigate and isolate her to the object of the reformers' gaze.

Concern about commercial sex brought activists and reformers together to fashion a "shadow state" of public actors operating largely outside imperial institutions. The prostitution debate reveals a detailed and complex record of social visions about how to remedy the existence of an impoverished, sexually debauched female subculture within Polish society. Those involved in these discussions constructed their agendas according to varying prescriptions for how a "modern" society such as Poland should respond to and treat social ills. Competing institutions of social control—moral, religious, medical, administrative, legal, pedagogical, and others—asserted themselves in the absence of and at times as a substitute for centralizing state apparatuses. This

"shadow state" operated behind the scenes and away from the gaze of imperial overlords, providing an opportunity for Poles to experiment with social transformation agendas even before taking active roles in official administrative hierarchies.

In particular, physicians throughout Europe and North America became newly aware of the dangers of contagious diseases and especially of venereal contaminations during the nineteenth century. They also became increasingly professionalized and tasked with the responsibility for public health dangers. By the end of the century, progressive doctors had become preoccupied with the overall degeneration of the "species" and many viewed inherited ailments as a direct danger to the national corpus, a sentiment that helped drive the growth of an active eugenics movement on Polish territory. Relying on images of the female body, references to unrestrained sexuality and metaphors of disease, medical commentators manipulated the direction of national reform, shaping it into a scientific, rational model of social organization. The preoccupation with the strength of the national body led some reformers to pursue a eugenic solution to the prostitution danger, a scientific trajectory that distorted efforts to direct the debate toward more economic, pragmatic programs for helping potential sex workers. As eugenics initiatives turned to discussion of inherited sexual deviance, prostitution reform took on a more fatalistic, deterministic aspect. This distortion in the Poles' efforts to rationalize national sexuality would stymie the success of reform legislation during the early years of Polish statehood.

Prostitution was a grave concern to residents of the Polish lands at the turn of the century. It was a favorite theme of the novelist and newspaper columnist Bolesław Prus (born Aleksander Głowacki), who filled Warsaw's daily press with commentary on the hardships suffered by working-class women. It preoccupied the young Janusz Korczak (born Henryk Goldszmit), pediatrician and children's author, who penned tirades about child labor and the sexual abuse of minors. Prostitution appeared in the work of Aleksander Świętochowski, the philosopher best known for his advocacy of the program of scientific modernity known as Warsaw Positivism, and in addition was a persistent focus for feminist advocates such a Eliza Orzeszkowa, Maria Turzyma, Izabela Moszczeńska, and Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit, all of whom railed against a social practice that made lower-class women the playthings of bourgeois males and led to the contamination of innocent wives and children. Finally, of course, commercial sex was a research interest for a whole generation of physicians who lambasted the imperial governments for failing to control venereal infections.

Prostitution as a public policy was less of a direct concern to the thousands of women who appeared for their twice-weekly checkups at police stations across the Polish lands. These women were more concerned with making their way in a hostile urban environment. Nonetheless, they too expressed their complaints about arbitrary police roundups, harsh medical exams, and the volatility of employment for unskilled workers. Each of these actors saw the regulation apparatus as a broken system that no longer served its intended function. All were hostile to a process that had been introduced by the ruling empires and that was blamed for much of what was wrong in Polish society. In a political context where open criticism of the ruling powers was nearly impossible, activists turned to debate about prostitution reform as a foil for discussing any number of other problems—including the limitations of public education, relations between the sexes, female emancipation, migration, rural poverty, and the dangers of the great city.

The Polish Case in International Context

The system of police-regulated prostitution, introduced across Europe in the early nineteenth century, was never subjected to such searing social criticism as in the years leading up to the Great War. Everywhere in Europe and the Americas, social activists, politicians, religious leaders, and the medical community portrayed commercial sex as the bogeyman responsible for a whole host of social ills. Swelling urban centers with their overcrowded working-class neighborhoods brought commercial sex and other forms of sexual "deviance" to the public's attention.[8] European metropolises featured unabashed sex workers lining city streets, filling venereal wards of local hospitals, and staffing the cafés and watering holes in otherwise upstanding urban neighborhoods. Thousands of public women were inscribed on police registries from Paris to Berlin, Hamburg to Budapest; others operated clandestinely, away from the prying eye of state authorities. The Jack the Ripper murders of the late 1880s and the sex trafficking cases that followed helped rivet Europe's collective imagination on commercial sex and its dangerous milieu.[9] Meanwhile, pundits filled newspaper columns with sensational

8. On the preoccupation with sexual deviance in Vienna, see Harry Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature: Krafft-Ebing, Psychiatry, and the Making of Sexual Identity* (Chicago, 2000).

9. On the 1888 Jack the Ripper case, see Judith K. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago, 1992). Richard J. Evans highlights the sensational murder trial of the Berlin pimp Heinze and his wife that helped bring commercial sex to the attention of the German imperial public, in "Prostitution, State, and Society in Imperial Germany," *Past and Present* 70 (February 1976): 119 ff. Edward J. Bristow surveyed the panic among the Jewish community over white slavery in *Prostitution and Prejudice: The Jewish Fight against White Slavery, 1870–1939* (Oxford, 1983).

reports and scholars researched the causes, implications, and cures for rampant public sex, releasing an unprecedented array of studies on the ubiquitous sex workers haunting Europe's urban centers.[10]

Everywhere the problem of paid sex was understood in the context of wider social problems and existing paradigms of progress.[11] Recent historiography has reflected many of these perspectives, addressing varying aspects of the world the prostitute inhabited. Much of this scholarship has been shaped by available documentation and by the priorities of reformers and other contemporary social actors. North American scholars, for example, have tended to focus on the abolitionists who set out to eliminate commercial sex in much the same way (and often led by the same crusading individuals) as they worked to abolish the enslavement of Africans.[12] In Britain, charitable societies struggled to "save" fallen women, few of whom were interested in rescue. Historians have captured this philanthropic crusade in their work.[13] Concerns about prostitution in the newly unified states of Italy and Germany have led researchers to focus on the

10. An early such report was "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon," a series of newspaper articles on child prostitution and kidnapping that appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in July 1885. Written by the crusading editor W. T. Stead, the sensational reports were widely translated and became a model for journalists of boulevard presses across Europe. See Deborah Gorham, "The 'Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon' Re-examined: Child Prostitution and the Idea of Childhood in Late Victorian England," *Victorian Studies* 21, no. 3 (1978): 353–79. Among the encyclopedic studies conducted at the turn of the century are Abraham Flexner, *The Regulation of Prostitution in Europe* (New York, 1914); Josef Schrank, *Die Prostitution in Wien in historischer, administrativer und hygieniescher Beziehung*, 2 vols. (Vienna, 1886); Schrank, *Der Mädchenhandel und seine Bekämpfung* (Vienna, 1904); and Iwan Bloch, *Die Prostitution* (Berlin, 1912).

11. The French historian Alain Corbin, author of perhaps the most influential study of nineteenth-century prostitution, observed that the "nature of the sources created by the social system [in each country] has its effect on the historian's view" of prostitution, a situation that helps explain why British and American scholars study the antiprostitution abolition movement whereas French scholars examine the machinery of the police regulation system itself. Alain Corbin, *Women for Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850,* trans. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, MA, 1990), ix.

12. Mark Connelly, *The Response to Prostitution in the Progressive Era* (Chapel Hill, 1980); David Pivar, *Purity Crusade: Sexual Morality and Social Control, 1868–1900* (Westport, CT, 1973); and Roland Wagner, "Virtue against Vice: A Study of Moral Reformers and Prostitutes in the Progressive Era" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 1971). Timothy J. Gilfoyle's *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790–1920* (New York, 1992) takes a slightly different tack, showing the colorful history of prostitution as a central component of New York City's economic life before the reformers forced the trade underground.

13. Frances Finnegan, *Poverty and Prostitution: A Study of Victorian Prostitutes in York* (Cambridge, 1979); and Linda Mahood, *The Magdalenes: Prostitution in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1990).

role of the state, national unity, the modernization of the police system, and the strength of the military in these settings.[14] The Russian imperial bureaucracy set out to categorize and control its emerging female subclass in the aftermath of peasant emancipation, providing documentation for scholars to trace the evolution of the liberal state through reform efforts.[15] Meanwhile, social activists in Latin America concerned themselves with the position of the family, with questions of honor, and with damage to the nation engendered by rampant indulgence in commercialized sex, encouraging a nationalist focus on prostitution studies in the region.[16] Finally, historians of European colonies in Africa and Asia have approached the battle with prostitution through the prism of colonial relations, nationalism, race, and class tensions.[17] In each of these settings, the historical record reflects the interests of the actors who guided the reform efforts and who often shaped the movement in their own particular interests. Historians who take on the prostitution question typically leaven their narratives with local concerns and priorities. This book, preoccupied as it is with questions of national subjectivity, modernization, social tensions, and imperialism, is no exception.

Sources for Accessing the World of Paid Sex

Research on the history of prostitution is hampered by an unusual dearth of documentation, particularly in the East European space. Scholars of modern Poland have faced challenges with access to sources, especially those distributed among the capitals of the imperial states that administered Polish

14. Mary Gibson, *Prostitution and the State in Italy, 1860–1915* (Columbus, OH, 1999); and Evans, "Prostitution, State, and Society in Imperial Germany." German activists also conducted morality crusades along the pattern of their American sisters. See Marion Kaplan, "Prostitution, Morality Crusades, and Feminism: German-Jewish Feminists and the Campaign against White Slavery," *Women's Studies International Forum* 5, no. 6 (1982): 619–27.

15. See Laurie Bernstein, *Sonia's Daughters: Prostitutes and Their Regulation in Imperial Russia* (Berkeley, CA, 1995); and Laura Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle Russia* (Ithaca, NY, 1992).

16. Donna J. Guy, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family, and Nation in Argentina* (Lincoln, NB, 1991); and L. C. Soares, *Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Rio de Janeiro* (London, 1988).

17. Phillippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race, and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (New York, 2003); 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 (April 1984): 170–97; Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth-Century Shanghai* (Berkeley, CA, 1997); and Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago, 1990). Ann Laura Stoler looks at race and class relations among concubines in settler families within a colonial context in *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley, CA, 2002).

territory. Apart from Jolanta Sikorska-Kulesza's *Zło tolerowane,* which examines the mechanics of regulated prostitution in the Russian Congress Kingdom of Poland, little of a comprehensive nature exists. For the interwar Polish Second Republic, Marzena Lipska-Toumi has accomplished an effective legal history of changes in the regulation system.[18] For the most part, however, practitioners of commercial sex were mostly unlettered; they did not leave written exposés testifying to their motivations or experiences. Their voices can be heard only through mediated testimonials like court transcripts, reports of investigative journalists, comments on police blotters, or reflections of social workers. Interviews with women returning from being "trafficked" abroad or who corresponded with diplomatic officials about their plight provide one perspective on the international trade, but even these documents tend to follow a formulaic script as migrants sought to gain the sympathies of consular personnel and aid workers. Nonetheless, Austrian archives—especially the Central Police Headquarters in Vienna—contain a rich diplomatic correspondence touching on the missing women from across the imperial landscape, many suspected of having been trafficked abroad. Detailed depictions of accused traffickers and their travels between Eastern Europe and Latin America or the Middle East are also housed in Austrian police archives.

Police registries and medical reports are foundational for re-creating the contours of the lives of inscribed women. Most major towns in Polish territory have retained lists of registered women, which include detailed demographic data on their social origins, educational level, marital status, religion, native language, birthplace, and the profession of their fathers. Registries also record medical updates and hospital stays for regulated women, changes of address, and any legal penalties imposed on them. Reports from the directors of rescue shelters offer surprisingly frank insights, characterizing the "wild and uncivilized" behavior of the women who came to their doors and recounting their recidivist behavior. Documents from Polish charitable societies devoted to rescuing vulnerable women are limited to annual reports and transcriptions of meetings, although the Austrian Society for the Protection of Women, founded in 1906, conducted some fruitful interviews with women returning from abroad. Reports from international congresses devoted to trafficking offer valuable material about shifting governmental policies on the sex trade.

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18. Jolanta Sikorska-Kulesza, *Zło tolerowane: Prostytucja w Królestwie Polskim w XIX wieku* (Warsaw, 2004); and Marszena Lipska-Toumi, *Prawo polskie wobec zjawiska prostytucji w latach 1918–1939* (Lublin, 2014).

Beyond this, the research of contemporary experts in the new fields of psychiatry, criminology, medical anthropology, sexology, and syphilology helps chart perceptions about the causes of sexual deviance and biological degeneracy and reflects efforts to pinpoint a cure for venereal diseases. Several classic studies of the prostitution problem circulated throughout the European medical community in the late nineteenth century and were standard fare among Polish specialists. Scientific discoveries related to prostitution and its attendant diseases also appeared in the professional organs of the influential Warsaw Medical Society, *Pamiętnik Towarzystwa Lekarskiego Warszawskiego* (Proceedings of the Warsaw Medical Society) and *Kronika Lekarska* (Medical Chronical), as well as the more scientific *Medycyna.* In the provincial capital of Lwów, *Przegląd Hygieniczny* (Hygienic Review) focused on the increasing anxiety about public hygiene in urban centers across Europe, including the epidemic-like spread of sexual ailments. Warsaw's long-running *Gazeta Lekarska* (Medical Gazette) (1866–1921) and *Tygodnik Lekarski* (Medical Weekly) in Lwów also aired debates on the treatment of venereal disorders and discussions of the mechanics of regulated prostitution.[19]

Regular newspaper reports on prostitution, white slavery, and sexual violence published in all three Polish partitions serve as a guide to the level of public interest in the topic and reflect the degree to which the reigning powers were willing to permit open coverage. The latter years of the nineteenth century saw the growth of several reform-minded publications in the Polish space read mainly by urban professional classes and intelligentsia. Warsaw's *Przegląd Tygodniowy* (Weekly Review) appealed to educated Poles to "work at the base of society" through its critique of social issues. It was here that writers such as Aleksander Świętochowski and Bolesław Prus addressed the women's question and examined issues of public hygiene and education among the poor. Several other weeklies joined *Przegląd* at the turn of the century, including *Prawda* (The Truth), *Ogniwo* (The Link), and *Glos* (The Voice). These were among the first publications to take a close look at the gritty side of city life reflected in the growing rates of homeless children, bloody knife fights, and open prostitution. The readership of these weeklies never grew beyond a few thousand subscribers, yet their combined audience comprised some of the most influential social actors in the Polish Kingdom (the portion of Polish territory allotted to Russian at the 1815 Congress

19. These publications printed lectures and research reports from well-known physicians both in the Polish lands and abroad, helping medical specialists stay informed about the exciting developments in their fields. Zenon Kmiecik, *Prasa warszawska w latach 1886–1904* (Wrocław, 1989), 196; and Jerzy Jarowiecki, *Dzieje prasy polskiej we Lwowie do 1945 roku* (Cracow, 2008), 126.

of Vienna), including Warsaw city administrators, school teachers, lawyers, members of the medical community, writers, and university students. Discussions about the problem of commercial sex radiated out from these papers and helped shape public opinion across the kingdom and beyond. Each of these papers printed correspondence and reports from journalists in other sections of divided Poland, helping to promote a cross-partition debate about matters of broader Polish interest. Although most of these leading journals were published in Warsaw, copies regularly found their way to Galicia and Poznań.[20]

Spinoffs of these reform-minded periodicals, among them journals focused on women's issues, soon gained audiences throughout the Polish lands. In 1895, Paulina Reinschmidt-Kuczalska founded the fortnightly *Ster* (The Helm) in Lwów. The paper folded after only two years, but the same subject matter was addressed in Maria Turzyma-Wiśniewska's more widely circulated Cracow-based *Nowe Słowo* (The New Word, 1902–1907) and the Warsaw monthly *Ster*, published from 1907 to1914. These papers were intended mainly for activists in the budding Polish equal rights movement. As such, they helped foster a wider social agenda among protofeminists focused on the needs of impoverished lower-class women, especially the desperate rural women flooding to Poland's urban centers. In addition to polemics about civic equality, they aired concerns about alcoholism and venereal diseases, the paucity of jobs for unskilled women, and the dangers of white slavery. The women writing for these nascent feminist periodicals were often hard-hitting in their representation of the conditions of life and employment restrictions for poor women, demonstrating in a series of grueling articles the virtual impossibility of single women working in unskilled jobs to support themselves. *Nowe Słowo* was particularly aggressive in its discussion of social problems touching poor women, among them the turn to prostitution. Finally, periodicals intended for housekeepers, such as the Lublin-based Catholic *Pracownica Polska* (The Polish Female Worker) and

20. *Przegląd Tygodniowy* reached 2,500 subscribers in 1896, mainly in the city of Warsaw. *Prawda*, which peaked at 1,400 weekly issues, was careful to include reports from correspondents in Lwów, Cracow, and Poznań and to reprint articles from liberal Galician journals like Cracow's *Nowa Reforma* and Poznań's *Dziennik Poznański*. *Głos* reached a peak of 1,850 weekly issues in 1904 and collapsed in severe deficit the following year. *Ogniwo*'s radical socialist content was popular among readers in Lithuania, Podola, and Kiev, as well as factory towns across the Polish Kingdom; a certain number of copies made their way to readers in Galicia and Poznań. The paper's subscriptions peaked at 2,300 in 1904. Kmiecik, *Prasa warszawska*, 8–9, 47, 56–58, 89–91; and Jerzy Łojek, ed., *Prasa polska w latach 1864–1918* (Warsaw, 1976), 111–12.

Przyjaciel Sług (The Servant's Friend), which served as the organ of the Galician Housekeepers Society, are a particularly rich source of material on the white slavery panic and related migration anxiety.[21]

The cusp of the twentieth century also saw the proliferation of daily papers intended for an increasingly broad readership, many of which supplied colorful reporting on issues of prostitution as a way of capturing audience share.[22] Despite the challenge of gaining publishing permission from tsarist authorities, several commercially successful ventures began appealing to urban workers, craftsmen, and impoverished intellectuals in Warsaw during this period. Newspapers like *Kurier Warszawski* (Warsaw Courier), *Kurier Codzienny* (The Daily Courier), and later *Kurier Poranny* (Morning Courier) circulated vivid depictions of daily life in the former capital city along with letters from local residents angry at the moral decline of city streets. Warsaw's first morning paper, *Kurier Poranny*, increased its circulation dramatically by capitalizing on local scandals and trafficking trials, often telegraphed from other parts of Europe. Wide publication of Bolesław Prus's socially satirical column in these presses helped boost their popularity. All told, the three main Warsaw dailies sold over fifty thousand copies each day in the early years of the twentieth century through postal subscriptions, urban kiosks, and hundreds of newspaper boys hawking them on city streets. The tradition of shared readership within households and neighborhoods and the distribution of papers within cafés and coffeehouses meant that as many as five separate readers had access to each individual issue, giving the majority of adult readers in this town of 750,000 access to a daily paper.[23]

But it was in the much smaller city of Cracow that the boulevard press reached its zenith in the Polish lands. Here papers such as *Nowiny dla Wszystkich* (The News for All) and *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny* (Illustrated Daily Courier) achieved record circulation rates in the years preceding World War I. These publications attracted readers from the lowest social levels by keeping their prices well below that of the mainstream dailies, while featuring colorful reporting, scandal mongering, and captivating illustrations. *Nowiny* reached daily circulation levels of forty thousand papers on weekdays and sixty thousand on Sundays within two years of its 1910 inauguration, clearly

21. Łojek, *Prasa polska*, 74, 84, 142; and Jerzy Myśliński, *Studia nad polską prasą społeczno-polityczną w zachodniej Galicji, 1905–1914* (Łódź, 1970), 206–7.

22. As the largest metropolitan area in the Polish lands, Warsaw was also home to a vibrant and thriving periodical press. Whereas only 18 periodicals circulated in the former capital in 1864, by 1904 some 111 weekly, monthly, and daily publications were circulating. Kmiecik, *Prasa warszawska*, 10.

23. The most successful of these were *Kurier Warszawski* with a circulation of 33,000 in 1909 and *Kurier Poranny* with 24,000. Kmiecik, *Prasa warszawska*, 8–42; and Łojek, *Prasa polska*, 111–12.

reaching beyond the social elite in this town of barely 140,000 people. Both papers covered stories of child prostitution, infanticide, sex trafficking, and other sensational issues.[24]

The post-1905 reduction of censorship in both Russian Poland and Habsburg Galicia marked a period of openness in the discussion of sex scandals, public women, and sexual deviance. In particular, two new journals were launched during these heady days, both focused on commercial sex and its implications. *Czystość* (Purity), initially released as a supplement to Cracow's *Nowe Słowo*, addressed the nationalist implications of declining public morality. *Świat Płciowy* (Sexual World), produced in Lwów's bawdier social atmosphere, was a muckraking journal focused on the varied dimensions of the early twentieth-century revolutionary in sexual mores, though it was able to stay afloat for only two years, from 1905 to 1907.

Original trial proceedings for white slavery cases are unavailable, but court transcripts were republished in the daily press, especially Cracow's *Nowa Reforma* (New Reform) and Lwów's *Gazeta Narodowa* (National Gazette), both of which remained the journals of record for Galician liberal democrats despite relatively low circulation rates of around two thousand a day. In addition, reports of charitable societies such as the League for the Defense of Women and the Society for Combatting Traffic in Women offer information about members, transcripts of meetings, and speeches articulating organizational goals. Buried on the inside pages of such bulletins one finds a tally of the limited successes such societies had in placing needy women in shelters, educational facilities, or convents. Finally, pamphlets and polemical monographs promoting reform solutions for transforming or eliminating regulated prostitution are useful sources for understanding contemporary attitudes.

Chapter Outline

The Devil's Chain examines the genesis of the panic that erupted in all three partitions of the divided Polish territories. It analyses prostitution as a lower-class weapon of the weak. Finally, it assesses social responses to the "problem" of regulated prostitution, exploring the wide range of solutions proposed by community activists—doctors, philanthropists, feminist leaders, Roman

24. Myśliński, *Studia nad polską prasą*, 96–103. On Cracow's turn-of-the-century boulevard press, see also Nathaniel D. Wood, "Becoming a 'Great City': Metropolitan Imaginations and Apprehensions in Cracow's Popular Press, 1900–1914," *Austrian History Yearbook* 33 (2002): 105–29; "Sex Scandals, Sexual Violence, and the Word on the Street: The Kolasówna Lustmord in Cracow's Popular Press, 1905–1906," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 20, no. 2 (2011): 243–69; and *Becoming Metropolitan: Urban Selfhood and the Making of Modern Cracow* (DeKalb, IL, 2010).

Catholic and Jewish aid organizers, socialist sympathizers, and journalists. Each of these associations and individuals emphasized the preoccupations of their constituents, yet each was also at some level concerned with the status of the Polish *naród* and the social flaws that public sex exposed in the Polish nation. The narrative begins in chapter 1 with the explosion of popular interest in prostitution across the Polish lands during the waning years of the nineteenth century. Fundamental shifts in town life brought commercial sex to the attention of the wider public. The closing of bordellos released enterprising prostitutes onto city streets, while the expansion of military garrisons and institutions of higher education led to an influx of prospective clients to city centers, increasing the gender imbalance in most Polish towns.

Chapter 2 grapples with the role paid sex played in the lives of its practitioners. Here we contrast literary images of passive "fallen women" tricked or coerced into a life of prostitution with more practical understandings of the uses to which working-class women put their sexual labor. The chapter emphasizes the permeable boundary separating the world of "honest" female employment and the practice of prostitution, addressing the socioeconomic context of the turn to paid sex. Lacking support networks, regular incomes, or nearby family, young women on their own slipped into and out of sex work during times of need, giving prostitution a greater significance at all levels of Polish society than has previously been acknowledged. Nowhere was the presence of prostitutes more troubling to middle- and upper-class Poles than in the intimate space of their homes, the subject of chapter 3. Here I explore the myriad ways urban residents interacted with the world of prostitution. Commercial sex was woven into the fabric of everyday life in fin de siècle Poland as poor females supplemented their wages with part-time sex work and lower-class families hired out their wives and daughters. Women flowed on and off police registries in times of financial stress, a situation that prompted police across Polish territory to expand the categories of women they were legally permitted to register as sex workers. Broadening legal definitions of commercial sex, I argue, helped link poverty with immorality in the popular consciousness and worked to permanently brand a whole class of female workers.

Even more frightening to the Polish public than intimate interactions with prostitutes in their homes was the prospect of international traffickers whisking away their innocent daughters. Chapters 4 through 6 analyze the white slavery panic that coursed through Europe and the Americas at the cusp of the twentieth century, looking closely at the way the panic played out in the Polish context. Chapter 4 explores the uses to which Polish reformers put scenarios of innocent Christian girls abducted by Jewish traffickers. White

slavery offered local activists and private charities the ammunition to fight tolerated domestic prostitution, on the one hand, and to intervene in the lives of migrating women, on the other. Chapter 5 reads the popular understanding of trafficking against a backdrop of migration scandals that played out in all three empires. By portraying migrating young women as passive "victims" of traffickers, advocates effectively ignored the very real economic problems driving them to leave their homes. The rhetoric surrounding the white slavery scare camouflaged the agenda of a whole cohort of ambitious young women who left Polish shores in search of better fortunes.

Chapter 6 considers migration facilitators in the context of East European Jewish cultural practices, including the tradition of ritual marriage. The Polish narrative of white slavery, the chapter proposes, made it possible to attribute primary causality to Jewish ringleaders. Anxiety about white slavery was manifested in an anti-Semitism that was ultimately tied to tropes of hygiene in women's bodies and purity in the Polish nation. This chapter also emphasizes that perceptions of a "devil's chain" of traffickers, procurers, madams, and pimps, leading ultimately to the imperial state itself, informed the way many contemporaries approached the prostitution conundrum. More than just a series of individual decisions or personal tragedies, prostitution comprised a system of connected links, beginning with the imperial state that ostensibly relied on houses of assignation to cultivate a tranquil subject population and ending with the much maligned prostitute herself. When reformers proposed solutions to this vexing social problem, they invariably addressed a whole host of moral, economic, and political issues they saw as needing correction. The "devil's chain" of the prostitution business had to be broken for Poland and the Poles to modernize and reemerge as a sovereign state.

The Warsaw pimp riots of May 1905 brought the problem of paid sex out into the open as never before. The burst of organizational energy that followed the so-called Alfonse Pogrom forms the focus of chapter 7. Here the narrative shifts away from a direct examination of the world of paid sex and turns to social reactions to it. Part of the much more widespread Revolution of 1905 in the Russian Empire, the events in Warsaw sent shockwaves through Polish society. Commentators from across the Polish lands viewed the attacks on old-town brothels as a call to arms, an invitation to impose reforming zeal on a practice that had grown out of control and that threatened to jeopardize Poland's national reputation. The chapter thus traces the rising power of private charity in imperial Poland during this period. Aid agencies stepped in to offer assistance to marginalized women and to serve as a partial substitute for the social welfare work of the absent Polish state. These societies also provided space for bourgeois women to operate

publically in the name of assisting their less fortunate sisters. Finally, I argue that the failure of the philanthropic efforts to "solve" the prostitution problem and the intransigence of many of its practitioners helped fuel a renewed cynicism about the permanence of the sex trade and prompted activists to turn to other, more militant solutions for the problems of sexual immorality and disease.

Chapters 8 through 10 address the evolution of this more hardened scientific reform direction during the years preceding the outbreak of the Great War. In a trajectory similar to that of charity workers, physicians initially approached the prostitution problem with an air of optimism. Over time, however, the seemingly limitless supply of women suspected of selling sex and an awareness of the dangerous diseases they communicated prompted a rising tide of cynicism. In addressing these new medical needs, physicians in the Polish lands effectively leveraged the panic over prostitution to expand their powers in unprecedented ways, carving out a new status for themselves as the moral conscience of a damaged nation. The heightened power of medicine in engaging with social problems like prostitution meant a new scientific basis for morality campaigns in the period leading up to the rebirth of the Polish state. As patriotic despair was inscribed onto medical frustration, a peculiar form of eugenics evolved that emphasized social pathologies rather than ethnic or racial purity. Chapter 9 traces the rise of the eugenics initiative and its unique focus, stressing the links with West European eugenics ideas and the efforts to script a new national body through the image of the prostitute.

Concerns about biological inheritance and national degeneration prompted discussions about the future of the independent Polish state, the subject of chapter 10. Here we examine attempts to reform the system of tolerated prostitution in the new Polish state. The changing perception of prostitution as an economic technique rather than a moral failing transformed the discussion about regulation into a debate about the future of the Polish nation and its people. Prostitution reform in the 1920s and 1930s became one of many means for engaging broader social issues in the new Polish Republic. Yet despite energetic action by physicians, social activists, feminists, socialists, and others, the political chaos of interwar Poland prevented significant reform prior to the country's collapse in 1939. In the end, through a half century of discussion and negotiation on the subject of prostitution reform, the image of the prostitute was leveraged by a variety of organizations and agencies often in ways that furthered their broader agendas and enhanced the associations through which they acted. In this sense, depictions of sex workers in the Polish space—from unredeemable sinner to fallen angel, desperate

waif, or transmitter of disease—tell us as much about early twentieth-century social activism as they do about the shifting status of the prostitute herself. Prostitution became normalized in the 1920s as an economically driven choice that was regulated primarily by the medical community rather than via law enforcement organs. Yet even here, discussions of the "problem" of paid sex continued to be marshaled behind any number of larger reform projects. Once lower-class women were integrated conceptually into the body of the Polish nation, they became a constant focus of efforts to shape and mold them in the image of elite reformers. By the early years of the Second Republic, women selling sex on Polish streets were "merely" poor, desperate, and possibly diseased. They were no longer permanently cast out of the moral universe of the larger nation, but rather represented a potential part of the national project as a whole.

Chapter 1

Out of the Shadows

> Let prostitution flourish so long as it does not show itself on the streets.
>
> —Karol Radek, "Z badań nad prostytucyą"

A quiet panic unfolded on the streets of central Warsaw. The winter of 1883 brought a tangible new threat as residents of the historic Old Town (*starówka*) neighborhood faced a plague of aggressive, morally abrasive harlots invading their peaceful terrain. Locals wrote frantic letters to city papers complaining of the "evening wanderings of women of ill repute . . . contaminating principal streets, and reaching quarters that until now have been the quietest and most peaceful." They recounted the public scandals streetwalkers created by "shamelessly accosting male pedestrians and subjecting decent women to unpleasant . . . scenes."[1] No matter how strenuously readers objected to the prostitutes' activities, "nothing seemed to change" and residents' "voices cried out in vain" for a remedy. The epidemic of visible public women created an "utter hell" for those living amidst them. As one older gentleman described it, the string of brothels emitted "a cacophony of out-of-tune pianos, accompanying clarinets, bass, violins, . . . and guests drinking, dancing, shouting, and singing in hoarse voices." Worse yet, he complained, "quarrels break out" regularly, spilling over onto city streets. The nightly disturbances kept the neighborhood awake until the wee hours

1. Letter signed by "Residents of Żurawia, Krucza, and Wspólna Streets," "W sprawie przyzwoitości publicznej," *Kurier Poranny*, January 9, 1883, 2.

of the morning, making residents increasingly anxious and sleep deprived.[2] Warsaw's urban elite was convinced that it was losing control to the forces of crime, immorality, and sexual impropriety.

Nor was the problem limited to residential districts. By the early 1880s, Warsaw's elegant Saxon Park also enjoyed an "infamous reputation" as a "great Warsaw salon of love" and a site for women of "ruined morals" to conduct their scandalous business, a place "orderly women did not go" lest they be mistaken for prostitutes. Brothels and streetwalkers made their appearance in the suburbs as well, along Marszałkowska Street and Jerożolimska Boulevard.[3] The daily newspaper, *Niwa Polska*, confided to its readers in 1898 that "barely a day goes by when we do not receive some sort of letter from a distressed parent with grown daughters at home complaining bitterly about the worsening situation" in these residential neighborhoods. Sexual debauchery was on display, the paper noted, "even in the very stately buildings where honest families live[d]."[4] By the turn of the new century, journalists and readers alike agreed that "open demoralization on the streets of Warsaw [had] reached a frightening scope."[5] As *Kurier Codzienny* portrayed it, "Barely does dusk descend than these open, shameless ones appear on the streets, not embarrassed by anything or anyone. It is enough to look at what is happening on such busy places as Krakowskie Przedmieście [a key shopping street] . . . near the hotel Europejski, or on Nowy Świat near the intersection of Aleje Jerożolimska . . . to confirm the public decline that is presented here in all of its abomination, bringing with it unlimited moral harm."[6] Journalistic exposés elicited a stream of letters from impassioned Warsaw residents, who reported that the "evening moths reigned freely and openly practiced their public scandal not only on the streets we named [in our report] but in all parts of town as well." The situation, they averred, was causing "enormous grief" and had reached "drastic" proportions.[7]

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2. This self-proclaimed "nervous retiree" described the nineteen new houses of prostitution recently established in the streets surrounding ulica Freta in the center of Warsaw's Old Town. "Jeszcze z ulicy Freta," *Kurier Warszawski,* no. 345 (1883): 3. See also "Przeciw nietoperzom nocnym," *Kurier Poranny,* January 14, 1883, 4.

3. *Przegląd Tygodniowy* 40 (1900), cited in Stanisław Milewski, *Ciemne sprawy dawnych warszawiaków* (Warsaw, 1982), 110–12.

4. Milewski, *Ciemne sprawy*, 111.

5. "Z chwili," *Kurier Codzienny,* September 27, 1901, 2.

6. Ibid.

7. "Z chwili," *Kurier Codzienny,* October 1, 1901, 2.

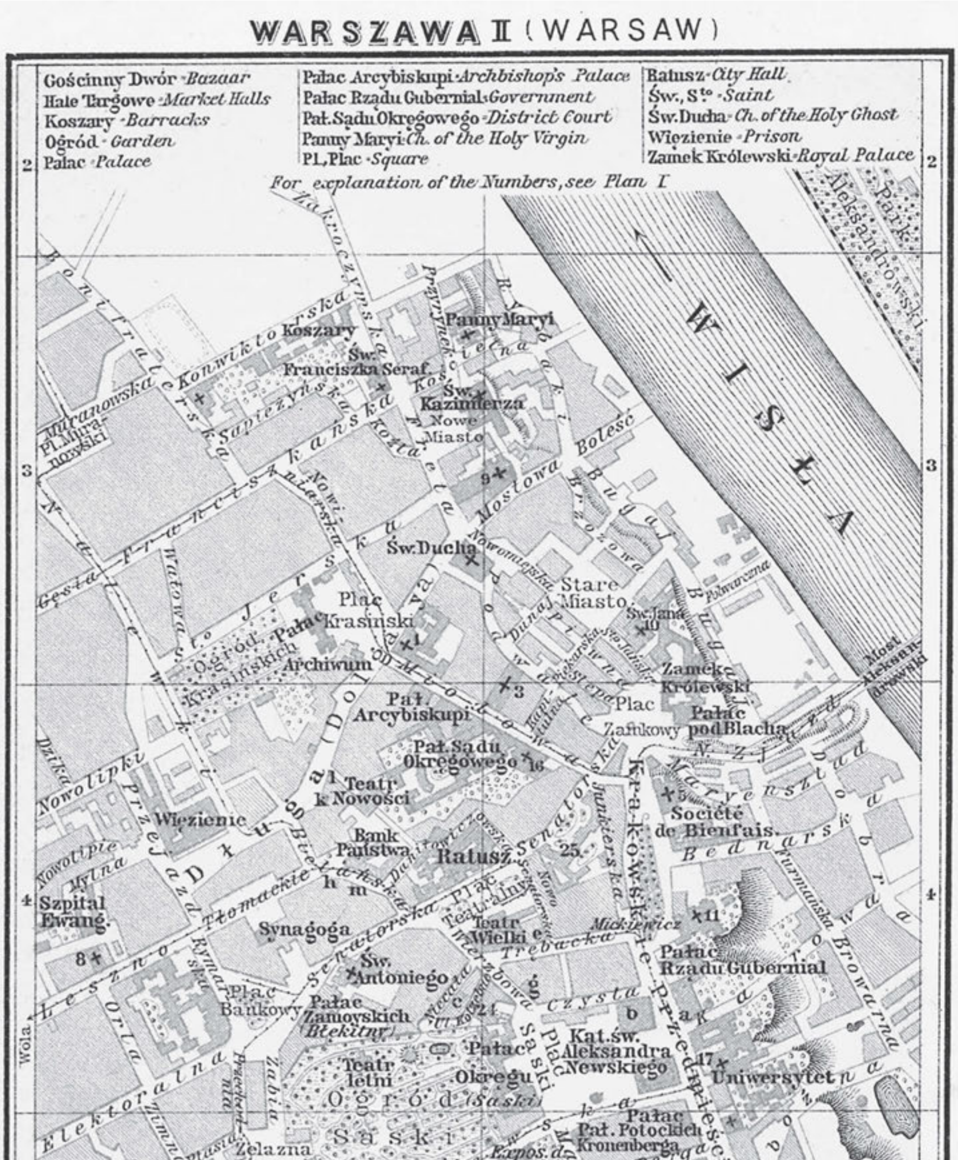

FIGURE 1.1 Warsaw City Center Map, 1914.

Courtesy of discusmedia.com. Areas frequented by prostitutes included the Ogród Saski (Saxon Park), Stare Miasto (Old Town), and the main shopping street of Krakowskie Przedmieście.

A Moral Panic

And yet what was really so new about the situation these observers described? Had commercial sex not been a part of the urban landscape across Europe for centuries? Did "moral" city residents not always decry the sins of their less virtuous neighbors, even while living cheek by jowl among them? In short, was the "panic" of middle-class Varsovians a reflection of changed conditions in the urban sex trade or merely a novel way of expressing the discomfort onlookers experienced when faced with moral improprieties? This chapter addresses the explosion of information about and reactions to open prostitution in Poland's city centers between the early 1880s and the first years of the new century. It considers some of the shifts in town life that brought commercial sex to the attention of journalists and their urban readership. Finally, it suggests the ways commentators may have used prostitution as a foil for discussing issues at the center of shifts in gender and class alignments in Polish society.

Certainly, the sale of sex by poor women to their social betters was a long-standing phenomenon in nearly every society. In modern Europe, the practice was driven partially by late marriage among middle- and upper-class males. The Victorian-era sexual double standard mandating chaste brides and sexually experienced grooms combined with the limited range of economic opportunities available to females made prostitution an integral part of European society. The socioeconomic transformation wrought by nineteenth-century industrialization and the dramatic growth of cities brought new conditions for the sale of sex. By the late nineteenth century, an expanding bourgeoisie took possession of large city centers across the Continent. Town walls came down. Wide arterial roads and broad, open parks replaced them. More important, the centers of larger urban enclaves now featured fashionable shops, cafés, restaurants, and businesses. Soon thousands of female migrants from smaller towns and surrounding villages flooded into this vibrant, bustling atmosphere, attracted by economic opportunity and the glamour of the great city. It was in this context, as Alain Corbin has observed, that "the prostitute emerged from the shadows." In earlier times, her activities were hidden within brothels and military garrisons on the outskirts of town. By the last quarter of the century, she "sought the light . . . she dared to show herself; she circulated tirelessly." The prostitute was "on show" along the wide boulevards frequented by bourgeois males. She had become "woman as spectacle."[8]

8. Corbin notes that the transfer of prostitutes away from ghettos and brothels outside of town and toward the city center "appears to have been a general phenomenon in the larger cities" during France's Second Empire from 1852 to 1870. Alain Corbin, *Women for Hire*, 204–6.

These newspaper correspondents were reacting partially to the new openness that characterized prostitution in the large towns of east-central Europe. As municipalities across Polish territory—from Warsaw and Łódź in the Russian Kingdom, to Cracow and Lwów in Galicia, and Poznań in Germany—grew in size they featured an increasingly visible sex trade. By the turn of the twentieth century, Warsaw had swelled to three-quarters of a million inhabitants and Cracow had doubled from 1870 to 1910, partially by incorporating surrounding suburban communities. Łódź experienced a population explosion as the textile industry took off, doubling every ten years throughout the nineteenth century. In 1806, the town had only 767 residents; by 1905 it boasted 344,000 mostly industrial laborers.[9] The demographics of many Polish cities help account for an increased demand for prostitution. Both Warsaw and Cracow were garrison towns where thousands of conscripts were separated from their families.[10]

Despite the relatively slow pace of industrial development, young men and women flocked to large population centers throughout the Polish lands in search of seasonal jobs, high culture, education, and entertainment.[11] An expanded rail network brought easy access to urban centers from nearby provincial towns during the latter half of the nineteenth century.[12] Peasant emancipation followed by massive migration out of the countryside and a dearth of employment opportunities for unskilled women created a dramatic upsurge in lower-class reliance on prostitution as a means of subsistence.[13]

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9. By 1910, Vienna reached a population of 2,031,000, Budapest 880,000, Warsaw 771,000, Prague 640,000, and Cracow 150,000. See Paul Robert Magocsi, *Historical Atlas of Central Europe* (Toronto, 2002), 93, 96; and Nathaniel Wood, "Urban Self-Identification in East Central Europe before the Great War: The Case of Cracow," *East Central Europe* 33, nos. 1–2 (2006): 12–13.

10. Over thirty thousand soldiers were permanently stationed in Warsaw in the 1880s. Cracow was home to over six thousand soldiers in 1900. Jolanta Sikorska-Kulesza, "Prostitution in Congress Poland," *Acta Poloniae Historica* 83 (2001): 128–29; and Kazimierz Kumaniecki, *Tymczasowe wyniki spisu ludności w Krakowie z 31 grudnia 1910 roku* (Cracow, 1912), 28, 31.

11. Tomasz Gąsowski has demonstrated that the dramatic growth of large cities (with populations over ten thousand) in Galicia during the last half century of the partitioned period was due largely to migration from small and medium-sized towns, which correspondingly shrunk in size. Contrary to contemporary assumptions, only about one-third of the in-migration to Galician cities came directly from the countryside. "Urbanizacja Galicji w dobie autonomicznej," *Studia historyczne* 28, no. 2 (1985): 223–43.

12. Prostitutes registered in Cracow during the period 1879–1911 mainly originated in villages and small towns in Galicia that were served by railway lines. Some 65 percent of registered prostitutes fell into this category, whereas the remainder were longtime residents of Cracow itself (8 percent) or its suburbs (3 percent), or migrated from elsewhere in the Habsburg Monarchy (21 percent) or abroad (4 percent). Michał Baczkowski, "Prostytucja w Krakowie na przełomie XIX i XX w." *Studia Historyczne* 43, no. 4 (2000): 595–97.

13. Polish-speaking peasants in the Habsburg Monarchy were released from serfdom in 1848. Those in the Romanov Empire were emancipated in 1861. Peasants in Prussian Poland achieved their personal freedom gradually beginning in 1806. See Stefan Kieniewicz, *The Emancipation of the Polish Peasantry* (Chicago, 1969).

As Łódź and other textile producing centers exploded in size, economic crises brought on by low-paying factory work and seasonal unemployment forced new waves of women into prostitution. At the same time, Warsaw's population of single males and institutions of higher education offered abundant opportunity for open and aggressive prostitutes to ply their trade.[14] The growing professional class in Cracow offered similarly willing clients for desperate women flocking in from surrounding towns and villages. Lwów's emergence as the capital of a burgeoning Galician provincial government after 1867 and its position as a trading crossroads guaranteed a lively brothel scene. Cracow and Lwów drew the sons of gentry along with ambitious peasants to their vernacular-language high schools and universities. Each of these settings offered a steady clientele for commercial sex workers. In many respects, then, the anxiety surrounding the incidence of prostitution in Polish cities had its roots in very real socioeconomic causes.

Certainly, conditions in late nineteenth-century Polish towns created a situation favorable for the expanding sex trade, as did the growth of large cities elsewhere in Europe. Yet it was not the increased numbers alone that troubled our interlocutors. Rather, the "moral panic" reflected in the columns of Poland's popular newspapers stemmed from a sense of unease about the changed *meanings* of prostitution. Long discretely hidden behind the walls of noble estates, in remote army garrisons or brothels in darkened alleyways, the prostitute's physical emergence from the shadows allowed her to be inspected and analyzed by those with whom she came into contact. Journalists and physicians, academics and jurists, could shine a light on her every detail, interrogating her behavior and scrutinizing her demeanor. She could be used as a foil for discussing any number of social problems her presence touch on.

The prostitute became, in late nineteenth-century Poland, a sort of "folk devil" in Stanley Cohen's reckoning, a scapegoat that could be substituted for the real problems and conditions causing social turmoil.[15] According to Cohen, "societies appear subject every now and then to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become identified as threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in

14. Jolanta Sikorska-Kulesza notes that some fifty-nine thousand single males above the age of fifteen resided in Warsaw in 1882, along with thirty thousand garisoned soldiers stationed within Warsaw and an aditional seventy-nine thousand in a garison outside of town. "Miasto--przestrzeń niebezpieczna dla kobiet (Prostytucja w Królestwie Polskim w drugiej połowie XIX wieku)," *Polskie Towarzystwo Historyczne Przełomy w Historii. XVI Powszechny Zjazd Historyków Polskich: Pamiętniki* 3, no. 4 (1999): 341–49.

15. Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (London, 1972), 9.

a stylized stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops and politicians." Moral panics, according to Jeffrey Weeks, have the effect of "crystalliz[ing] widespread fears and anxieties." It is not uncommon, Weeks points out, for "sexuality [to have] a peculiar centrality in such panics." For this reason, he emphasizes, "sexual 'deviants' [such as prostitutes] have been omnipresent scapegoats."[16] Prostitutes, defined by medical and juridical experts elsewhere in Europe during this same historical moment as "sexual deviants" and "born criminals," became a way to discuss publicly issues of female sexuality, changing gender roles, cross-class liaisons, and other socially sensitive issues. Venting about the prostitution menace became a way for Poland's intellectual elite along with its middle-class readers to navigate the newly visible underclass of poor women moving into bourgeois public spaces. The "moral panic" in late nineteenth-century Polish cities may tell us less about the practice of selling sex itself than it does about the anxieties among those who observed it.

Expressions of unease about illicit sexual behavior such as those in the pages of Polish papers highlight the extent to which analyses of sexual proclivities spilled over from the pages of professional journals during the last quarter of the nineteenth century into everyday conversations among broader social strata. It was via panicked letters and sensational reportage in this period that scientific discourses on sexuality came into contact with popular understandings. Outbreaks of moral panic like the one reflected in the Warsaw press, as Scott Specter has argued, "brought the public to an awareness of the new 'type of person' defined by medical, juridical, and criminological discourses."[17] Whereas physicians and criminologists had circulated research on prostitution in specialized publications for much of the century, it was not until later that the general public in east-central Europe began to have access to information about the world of commercial sex. In the period around the turn of the century, newspaper editors also "discovered" sexual themes as a way to increase readership and sell papers.[18] Readers of the popular press and nonspecialist reporters alike developed their own

16. Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics, and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800* (London 1981), 14–15.

17. Scott Spector, "Where Personal Fate Turns to Public Affair: Homosexual Scandal and Social Order in Vienna, 1900–1910," *Austrian History Yearbook* 38 (2007): 17.

18. See, for example, the work of Nathaniel Wood on sex scandals, prostitution, and Jack the Ripper themes in the early twentieth-century Cracovian boulevard press. "Urban Self-Identification," esp. 23–24; "Becoming a 'Great City,'" 105–29; and "Becoming Metropolitan: Cracow's Popular Press and the Representation of Modern Urban Life, 1900–1915" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2004), esp. 172.

understandings of the causality behind phenomena such as commercial sex and suggested remedies for alleviating the "problem" of rampant prostitution. As shifts in the prostitution dynamic brought the sex trade closer to mainstream Polish society, observers of all kinds increasingly employed the image of the prostitute both metaphorically and literally in order to position themselves on a wide range of issues.

The Peculiar Institution of Tolerated Prostitution

The system of police-regulated prostitution that bore the brunt of social criticism in this period had been in place for nearly a century, yet it was satisfactory to almost no one. Prior to the late eighteenth-century partitions of the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth, commercial sex had been tolerated within closed brothels but only minimally regulated. Dozens of public houses thrived in relative peace on the outskirts of central Warsaw beginning with its establishment as the national capital in the sixteenth century, as they did in other chief Polish cities and market towns.[19] Most cities in the Commonwealth levied taxes on prostitutes and brothel keepers alike. Morals police began conducting sanitary inspections in public houses and hospitalizing women with signs of infection in the fifteenth century.[20] The first hospital devoted entirely to the treatment of venereal diseases, St. Sebastian's, was founded in Cracow in 1528, and in 1591 the court preacher, Piotr Skarga, helped sponsor a similar hospital, St. Lazarus, in Warsaw.[21] Polish army garrisons staffed their own brothels beginning in the eighteenth century.

After the Commonwealth was partitioned, most of the divided state adopted a version of "tolerated" or police-regulated prostitution modeled on Napoleon's reforms.[22] The system established commercial sex in a legal twilight zone, neither officially sanctioned nor prohibited, but "tolerated" by the authorities so long as women selling sex registered with the police and

19. For an overview of regulated prostitution in the Polish Republic, see Sikorska-Kulesza, *Zło tolerowane*, 9–10.

20. Zaleski, *Z dziejów prostytucji w Warszawie*, 3–11.

21. Several reasonably reliable surveys of prostitution in the Polish lands were written in the interwar period, among them Józef Macko, *Prostytucja* (Warsaw, 1927); Wacław Zaleski, *Z dziejów prostytucji w Warszawie* (Warsaw, 1923); and Rząśnicki, *Prostytucja a proletarjat* (Warsaw, 1920). These texts tend to be critical of foreign powers for introducing prostitution and venereal diseases during periods of army occupation.

22. On the system of police regulation in the Congress Kingdom, see Sikorska-Kulesza, *Zło tolerowane*; "Prostitution in Congress Poland"; and "Miasto-przestrzeń niebezpieczna dla kobiet," 341–49. Michał Baczkowski provides insights into the police-run system in Austrian Galicia in "Prostytucja w Krakowie," 593–607.