

POLICING THE BORDERS OF BELONGING: GENDER, SEXUALITY AND THE POLISH NATION*

KEELY STAUTER-HALSTED

I can't 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, such things do not exist anywhere else. A country is its customs!¹

Historians have recently turned to gender analysis and the study of sexuality as prisms for understanding national belonging. The varying influences of war, rape, family, kinship networks, and the gendered nature of citizenship on shifting notions of ethnic attachment have given us a new understanding of the relationship between gender and nation². For Polish history, research on gender and nationalism has focused mainly on bourgeois women and female intellectuals in public life, particularly in the context of emancipation movements³. This

* I would like to thank Dobrochna Kałwa for encouraging me to write this piece, and Dietlind Huchtner and Małgorzata Karpińska for their thoughtful and insightful suggestions on an earlier draft.

¹ B. Prus, *Nim słońce wejdzie*, „Kurier Codzienny”, January 11, 1883.

² *Vide* for example N. Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*, London 1997; *The Politics of Belonging: Intersectional Contestations*, London 2011. On rape as an instrument of war and militant nationalism *vide: Mass Rape: The War against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, ed. A. Stiglmeier, Lincoln 1994. On citizenship *vide* for example M. Feinberg, *Elusive Equality: Gender, Citizenship and the Limits of Democracy in Czechoslovakia, 1918–1950*, Pittsburgh 2006. For a general overview of gender history in East Central Europe *vide: M. Bucur, An Archipelago of Stories: Gender History in Eastern Europe*, „American Historical Review”, December 2008, p. 1375–1389.

³ In the Polish space, early women's rights activists were typically from an intellectual

essay expands the scope of nationalist inquiry to include the role of socially marginalized women in shaping the concept of a Polish nation. I argue that changes in the perception of female outsiders can help illuminate the processes by which national movements redefine themselves. Moreover, the construction of internal “others” based on moral rather than ethnic criteria is crucial to establishing the parameters of national communities. In the Polish context, critiques of women on the margins, including criminals, vagrants, sexual “deviants,” and the poor, helped sharpen patriotic commitment and communicate prescribed patterns of behavior to nationalist activists as the country drew closer to political independence.

Most nations create gendered markers, often designed to reinforce boundaries between ethnic groups. In addition, the idealization of particular tropes of womanhood was hardly unique to nineteenth-century Polish actors⁴. Yet, in the Polish case, the increasing openness of national aspirations at the close of the nineteenth century combined with Victorian era expectations of female comportment fueled a moral crisis focused on lower class femininity⁵. Polish professional experts voiced increasing unease at the behavior of impoverished, single, females in Poland’s urban centers. How could national standards be maintained when working class women resorted to survival strategies that challenged the Polish moral code of womanhood? In what follows, I suggest some implications that emerge from the treatment of marginal females in the Polish setting, focusing especially on the professional prostitute as a classic boundary violator. My conclusions have been drawn from research for my forthcoming monograph, *The Devil’s Chain: Prostitution and Social Control in Partitioned Poland*.

or bourgeois background, and lower class women are not typically considered in discourse on nation forming. For access to the literature on women’s emancipation in Poland *vide*: R. Blobaum, *The ‘Woman Question’ in Russian Poland, 1900–1914*, „Journal of Social History”, 2002, vol. 35, no. 4, p. 799–824; S. Walczewska, *Damy, ryccerze i feministki. Kobiety dyskursu emancyjnego w Polsce*, Kraków 1999; N. Stegmann, *Die Tochter der geschlagenen Helden: ‘Frauenfrage,’ Feminismus und Frauenbewegung in Polen, 1863–1919*, Wiesbaden 2000.

⁴ S. Ranchod-Nilsson, M.A. Teatreault, *Gender and Nationalism: Moving beyond Fragmented Conversations*, [in:] *Women, States, and Nationalism: At Home in the Nation*, ed. eidem, Routledge 2004.

⁵ On “moral panics” in the Polish Second Republic *vide*: E. Plach, *The Clash of Moral Nations: Cultural Politics in Piłsudski’s Poland, 1926–1935*, Athens, Ohio 2006.

REVISITING THE *MATKA POLKA*

The image of Polish womanhood encapsulated in the *Matka Polka* or the Mother Pole iconography helps to highlight some of the commonly held attitudes about acceptable female comportment during the partitioned period. The *Matka Polka* was the longsuffering patriotic Polish mother who protected and preserved Polish culture at home while maintaining a demure presence in public life. Even during the late nineteenth century social and economic transformations that brought bourgeois women into public life, the way that females were mobilized into political movements was tied to the questions of their appropriate role within the nation itself⁶. As Brian Porter-Szucs reminds us in his study of Poland's Catholic "modernism," the Mother Pole was key to cultivating Polish identity in the private sphere during centuries of political subjugation. The patriotic woman in Poland, as Porter describes her, was someone who "played a vital role in the life of the nation, but... remained entirely within the domestic realm. The Matka-Polka stayed behind while her husband and sons went off to fight for Poland, but she... helped to preserve the nation by educating the young in a patriotic spirit and by sustaining home and hearth for the fatherland's warrior. She was characterized by a limitless ability to endure suffering, as she gave up her own pleasures and dreams so that the nation might survive... [In many respects] it was only because of her that the nation endured"⁷. Self-sacrificing and humble, domestic and pure, the *Matka Polka* achieved most of her status from her position within the family. She was the wife, the sister, the mother, and sometimes the faithful lover. She rarely acted independently, outside the prescribed boundaries of faith and family, and did not prioritize her own personal goals or aspirations. The private sphere was her realm and her accomplishments there were the basis on which she was judged. The position of the woman patriot was enhanced during the partitioned period when many Polish households lost their male members to exile, arrest, or military service. Mothers increasingly bore the burden of managing the patriotic upbringing of children and encouraging their sons to take part in national uprisings, reaffirming stereotypical images of female commitment⁸.

⁶ R. Blobaum, op.cit., p. 799.

⁷ B. Porter-Szucs, *Faith and Fatherland: Catholicism, Modernity and Poland*, Oxford 2011, p. 377.

⁸ A. Winiarz, *Polskie rodziny arystokratyczne i szlacheckie w XVIII i XIX wieku jako środowiska wychowawcze*, [in:] *Wychowanie w rodzinie od starożytności po wiek XX*, ed. J. Jundziłł, Bydgoszcz 1994, p. 249–252.

The notion of a private, contingent, pure, and self-sacrificing model of Polish womanhood co-existed in nineteenth century representation with the growing presence of females in public life. By the turn of the twentieth century, women were functioning in nearly every vocational capacity, from schoolteacher and political activist to shopkeeper and factory worker⁹. Many of these professions could be portrayed as extensions of “typical” female functions carried out in the private realm and thus did not directly challenge the paradigm of female patriotic activity based on maternal sensibilities. Professional schoolteachers, charity workers, and nurses, for example, could replicate the nurturing tasks performed in the domestic space, a function that permitted practitioners to remain within prescribed gender boundaries¹⁰. However, other female economic actors like female factory workers or shopkeepers labored in realms that arguably did little to move the patriotic agenda forward. It was these women – the poorly clothed, desperate, often less obsequious females, to whom Prus referred in his 1883 comment – who stood accused of violating the patriotic code of femininity.

As Porter-Szucs himself acknowledges, scholars have begun to challenge the centrality of this image of the feminine national idea. The self-sacrificing mother fighting behind the scenes for national survival has been joined by other examples of Polish womanhood, some of them much less savory. Still, assumptions about women’s participation in Polish national life present a particular challenge when researching females on the margins of society, and especially those deemed in some way morally unfit. For women whose private behavior was the subject of censure or whose public actions detracted from the perceived need to maintain high moral standards, the ideal of Polish womanhood often did not apply. Nonetheless, as we shall see, this cohort of female actors often played an integral role in Polish society’s socio-economic transformation, and consequently affected the nation’s fortunes in non-political ways.

⁹ The collections edited by Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarz help to document the range of capacities in which women functioned during the late partitioned period. *Vide* especially: *Kobieta i społeczeństwo na ziemiach polskich w XIX w.*, Warsaw 1990; *Kobieta i edukacja na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX w.*, 2 vols, Warsaw 1992; *Kobieta i świat polityka. Polska na tle porównawczym w XIX i początkach XX wieku*, Warsaw 1994 and *Kobieta i kultura. Kobiety wśród twórców kultury intelektualnej i artystycznej w dobie rozbiorów i w niepodległym państwie polskim*, Warsaw 1996.

¹⁰ On social work as a profession explicitly devoted to strengthening the Polish nation *vide*: M. Deller Brainerd, *Halina Radlinska: Expanding Conceptualizations of Social Work Practice from Poland’s Past*, „International Social Work”, 2001, no. 44.1, p. 19–30; J. Kras, *Wyzsze kursy dla kobiet im. A. Baranieckiego w Krakowie 1868–1924*, Cracow 1972.

WOMEN AT THE MARGINS

Historically, women who fall into certain social categories, who perform particular functions, or who behave in unconventional ways have been virtually absent from the national narrative. To some extent, of course, the omission of such women from historical representation is the result of the paucity of records pertaining to lower class, mostly illiterate actors who do not leave behind a clear transcript of their thoughts and actions. We know more about male industrial workers and peasants than we do about females, for example, partly because men were more likely to join professional or political associations whose written records have been preserved. Even when studied by outsiders, however, the lives of “deviant” women are often presented as a challenge to standards of civility, femininity, and patriotic duty. Such a judgment is based less on a shortage of information about these women’s lives than on an assessment that their behavior was not suitable for a nation aspiring to political independence. In the Polish lands, women whose lives were spent primarily in the public domain were often subjected to harsh judgment. Nurses and social workers represented an exception to this social critique since their activities represented a clear extension of the female caregiving role within the family¹¹. Yet Jewish women in Polish society were sometimes attacked because of the very public role they held within their family economies, managing shops and businesses while also caring for their own children. Galician residents who wanted to express suspicion of local Jews for their ostensible participation in unlawful activities, for example, emphasized the intimate role wives, mothers, sisters and fiancées played in alleged criminal schemes, highlighting the “unnatural” degree of female involvement in these practices, including the sale of their own children into prostitution¹². And, of

¹¹ On social work as an “acceptable” outlet for professional female activity *vide*: K Dąbrowska, M. Tajak, *Od działacza społecznego do profesjonalisty. Przyczynek do historii zawodu pracownika socjalnego*, „Praca Socjalna”, 1996, no. 2; I. Lepalczyk, E. Marynowicz-Hetka, *Tradycja i sytuacja aktualna w kształceniu pracowników socjalnych w Polsce*, „Praca Socjalna”, 1990, no. 1–2. On female charity work as an outgrowth of established gender roles in Germany and in Russia *vide*: J.H. Guataert, *Staging Philanthropy: Patriotic Women and the National Imagination in Dynastic Germany, 1813–1916*, Michigan 2001; A. Lindenmeyr, *Poverty is not a Vice: Charity, Society, and the State in Imperial Russia*, Princeton 1996.

¹² See the files in the Vienna Bundespolizeidirektion, including BPdWa, „Prostitution und Mädchenhandel”, 1906/II, Blochsberg file; Letter from Senor Hellich Sterling, Buenos Aires, June 25, 1912 to Central Police Direction, Vienna. BPdWA, „Prostitution und Mädchenhandel”, 1912. The popular press published similar reports of Jewish mothers selling their daughters. *Vide*: *Z moralności wielkiego miasta*, „Ilustrowany Kurjer Codzienny”, July 27, 1913, p. 2–3.

course, public women – those who exchanged sex for money – comprised the definitive category of the “unwomanly woman”. Prostitutes were typically unmarried, financially independent, and sexually aggressive. They cast about for clients on the public square and engaged in what can only be regarded as public (as opposed to private, familial) sex with multiple clients.

Women who failed to marry or who did not have families of their own were also subject to censure. Single, childless women such as the midwife are treated with suspicion in the historical record in the Polish lands and elsewhere¹³. Those without a husband or a father lived in legal limbo. They could generally neither own land nor inherit property. They could not make employment decisions on their own; they were vulnerable when travelling alone and suspect when in the company of men to whom they were not related. The 1852 Austrian Civil Code permitted the arrest of any woman seen in a public place in the company of a man to whom she was not related. Moreover, a single woman could not remove her own name from the municipal prostitution registry; only a male family member or employer could release her. Social conventions reflected similar popular assumptions about women in public areas. Young women spotted travelling alone on trains were subject to intimidation by male passengers, who saw fit to treat them like prostitutes¹⁴.

Females who did not form their own families defied the state’s notions of social order and challenged established hierarchies everywhere in the nineteenth century¹⁵. Among Polish writers, threats to the nuclear family were often manifested in anxiety about national fortunes. This unease is particularly pronounced in discussions of female migration, whether from the countryside to the city or out of the Polish lands across the sea. Females who left their village homes and relocated to the city typically did so on their own rather than with a husband. They sought jobs in factories, shops, and restaurants – all positions situated outside of the “safe” environment of the private sphere¹⁶. Such women lacked

¹³ On suspicions surrounding midwives in Polish culture *vide*: M. Kurkowska, *Birth Control in the Industrial Age. Cracow 1878–1939*, „Polish Population Review”, 1997, no. 10, p. 161–184.

¹⁴ B. Prus, *Kroniki tygodniowe*, „Kurier Codzienny”, January 24, 1897, reprinted in *Kroniki*, vol. 15, Warsaw 1953, p. 22–25.

¹⁵ On the state’s pre-occupation with protecting and preserving nuclear families in the late nineteenth century *vide*: *Family Life in the Long Nineteenth Century, 1789–1913*, ed. D.I. Kertzer, M. Barbagli, Yale 2002; L.A. Haney, L. Pollard, *Families of a New World: Gender, Politics and State Development in a Global Context*, New York 2003.

¹⁶ On the migration of young single women from the Polish countryside to the burgeoning cities *vide*: M. Nietyksza, *Ludność Warszawy na przełomie XIX i XX wieku*, Warsaw 1971. The vast majority of female factory workers and domestic servants in this period were single. M. Sikorska-Kowalska, *Wizerunek kobiety łódzkiej na przełomie XIX i XX Wieku*, Łódź 2001.

the protection and support of their local network and they were less constrained by the moral oversight of village life¹⁷. Women who migrated to the city are often perceived in the historical literature as less moral, less pure, and somehow less “Polish” than the farmwives and village maidens they left behind. The simple act of stepping outside their domestic hearth and relying on their own agency led them to appear more compromised than those around them. Contemporary Polish observers stressed the particular vulnerabilities of young women migrating to urban centers on their own, emphasizing the sexual dangers that awaited them in their new homes¹⁸. Newly arrived women in the cities often turned to vagrancy, petty theft, or prostitution as a result of hunger and joblessness. They dressed in shabby clothes, suffered from incurable diseases, and spent time in seedy brothels, municipal jails and police hospitals. These socially marginalized characters were anything but colorful and uniquely “Polish,” as their rural counterparts were often viewed.

Anxiety about country maidens corrupted by the decadent big city peaked in the Polish context in the aftermath of World War I and the founding of an independent state. The dramatic increase in open debauchery was a deep concern for those pre-occupied with the image the young nation would project. The view of country girls wandering alone on Cracow’s city streets prompted Jagiellonian University medical professor, Emil Wyrobek, for example, to lament the loss of female virtue. “Naïve village girls” caught up in sex work represented for him a visible sign of the decline of Polish morality. The recent war, Wyrobek reported, had brought increased rates of alcoholism, nervous disorders, orphaned children, and prostitution. These “once beautiful village daughters” who had lost their “honor [and] their health,” were but one poignant symptom of the social malaise Poland faced at the end of the war¹⁹. Far from acting national in the demure way of the Matka Polka, such women did not fit the stereotypical image of the female patriot.

Even more seriously, women who migrated independently abroad were treated with derision and even hostility by the press, social aid agencies, and the police. Most literature on migration indicates that women historically migrated either with their families or to follow a husband²⁰. Rarely did they travel alone. In fact,

¹⁷ The majority of prostitutes in Poland’s urban centers during the late nineteenth century hailed from small towns or nearby villages. M. Baczkowski, *Prostytucja w Krakowie na przełomie XIX i XX w.*, „Studia Historyczne”, 2000, vol. 43, no. 4(171), p. 593–607.

¹⁸ *Handlarze dziewcząt*, „Niwa”, October 26, 1896, p. 729–730.

¹⁹ E. Wyrobek, *W pętach rozpusty i pijaństwa: obrazy z codziennego życia*, Cracow 1920, p. 3–5.

²⁰ L.M. Agustin, *Sex at the Margins: Migration, Labour Markets and the Rescue Industry*, London – New York 2007, p. 2–7.

at most ports of call unaccompanied women were not even permitted to board ship²¹. When young females did travel abroad on their own, they were typically accompanied by so-called “migration agents”. The thousands of Polish women who emigrated in the care of these nefarious “agents” during the heyday of Polish emigration in the pre-World War I era were often assumed to be brothel workers relocating to bordellos abroad and their companions were taken to be pimps or procurers, an image that did not always hold up upon arrest and interrogation²². The migration facilitators with whom they travelled were often Jewish, a status that helped make them more threatening in the public mind²³. Recent studies on the gendered aspects of migration demonstrate that women travelling alone are frequently mischaracterized as prostitutes because of the contemporary unease with independent female agency²⁴. In the Polish case, hostility toward migrating women was compounded by patriotic anxiety²⁵. Females who left native Polish soil were likely to marry foreigners and raise families abroad. They might teach their children other languages and deprive the nation of their cultural contributions. Again, the Matka Polka figure informed judgments about everyday behavior.

In many respects, however, such figures could be counted among those who built modern Poland. The very women who embraced modernity by serving as migrants to the city, as independent wage earners, as resourceful individuals willing to strike out on their own were those who helped build the cities, staff the factories and even sent money back to their impoverished rural homes. Contemporaries noted that an “army of women” arrived in Polish cities every day from surrounding communities. This “epidemic” of independent female job

²¹ T. Brinkmann, *Travelling with Ballin: The Impact of American Immigration Policies on Jewish Transmigration within Central Europe, 1880–1914*, „International Review of Social History”, 2008, vol. 53, part 3, p. 459–484.

²² On the public frenzy surrounding sex trafficking trials *vide*: K. Stauter-Halsted, “A Generation of Monsters:” *Jews, Prostitution, and Racial Purity in the 1892 L’viv White Slavery Trial*, „Austrian History Yearbook”, 2007, vol. 38, p. 25–35.

²³ E.J. Bristow, *Prostitution and Prejudice: The Jewish Fight Against White Slavery, 1870–1939*, New York 1982.

²⁴ L. Agustin, *The Disappearing of a Migration Category: Migrants Who Sell Sex*, „Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies”, vol. 32, no. 1, January 2006, p. 29–47; M.J. Alpes, *The Traffic in Voices: Reconciling Experiences of Migrant Women in Prostitution with Paradigms of “Human Trafficking”*. Paper for conference: *Gender and Irregular Migration in a Global and Historical Perspective*, Leiden University, 18–19 January 2007.

²⁵ On Polish attitudes toward migration to Brazil in the 1890s and Argentina in the early years of the twentieth century *vide*: L. Caro, *Emigracya i polityka emigracyjna*, Poznań 1914; B.P. Murdzek, *Emigration in Polish Social-Political Thought, 1870–1914*, Boulder „East European Quarterly”, 1977, p. 61–69, 103–107.

seekers sought positions in factories and warehouses, shops and cafes, at the epicenter of growing urban centers. They did piece work in poorly ventilated workshops for pay that barely afforded them the comfort of a corner in someone else's apartment²⁶. Migrants were particularly attracted to the promise of jobs in factories, especially the thriving textile industry in Łódź and elsewhere. The majority of these recent migrants to Polish cities were women and of these, large numbers of them were young, unattached, and below the age of twenty²⁷. These were women who were socially excluded in their own time through a range of legal, moral, and cultural devices. The experience of one particular boundary violator – that of the prostitute – will help represent the ways marginal women became a lightning rod for negative stereotyping and the focus of criticism for acting “non-national”.

THE PROSTITUTE AS TRANSGRESSOR OF NATIONAL BOUNDARIES

Prostitutes transgressed nearly every pattern of behavior that defined the model Polish woman²⁸. Not only were they unmarried, independent wage earners who were not devoted to a single man, but they also often behaved aggressively, in a masculine way, in order to attract clients²⁹. Professional prostitutes lived on their own or in groups of women rather than in a patriarchal family setting³⁰. They travelled from town to town and often left the Polish lands in pursuit of

²⁶ *Kronika. Z Warszawy*, „Nowe Słowo”, January 1, 1903, p. 13–14.

²⁷ The total number of industrial workers grew steadily in the Polish Kingdom from 130,000 in 1885 to 300,000 in 1905. Much of this new industrial development was in Łódź, where over half the workers were female, and some 60 percent of these were under the age of twenty. M. Sikorska-Kowalska, op.cit., p. 39.

²⁸ The most complete account of regulated prostitution in the Polish Kingdom is J. Sikorska-Kulecza, *Zło tolerowane: Prostyucja w Królestwie Polskim w XIX wieku*, Warsaw 2004.

²⁹ Warsaw residents expressed shock and outrage at the aggression of local streetwalkers in a series of 1901 letters to the press. One mother complained that her fifteen-year old son was cornered regularly by prostitutes desperately searching for clients. *Z chwili*, „Kuryer Codzienny”, October 1, 1901, p. 2.

³⁰ By the early twentieth century, authorities in major Galician towns sought to close brothels and eliminate red light districts in favor of allowing prostitutes to reside in private residences of two to four women. *Vide* for example correspondence of L'viv Police Chief Łepkowski to the C.K. Ministerstwo Wewnętrzne, August 21 and September 19, 1912. AGAD, CKMSW, sygn. 213. Here, Łepkowski notes that “following the massive growth of the city with its new buildings, public institutions, educational facilities and schools, the Imperial Central Police Directory has repeatedly... sought to eradicate several brothels”.

a livelihood, making them appear uprooted and unattached to native soil³¹. Their dissolute lifestyle was far from a model for building and preserving Polish national culture. They appeared to lack piety, humility, and the ability to sacrifice for a larger cause. Indeed, by most accounts, prostitutes were selfish, amoral, materialistic, and dangerous to the larger social order. More concretely, professional prostitutes often suffered from disfiguring diseases by the end of their lives and regularly indulged in alcohol and petty crime. Polish medical specialists pointed to professional prostitutes as evidence of the need for eugenics intervention in order to prevent the spread of syphilis and its impact on congenital deformities³². Prostitutes were also among the chief proponents of birth control and abortion; some abandoned their unwanted infants at foundling homes that became known as “angel factories”³³. None of these were actions characteristics of the prototypical “Polish Mother”.

As a “public” person, whose services were shared by many males, the prostitute was the focus of society’s utmost derision. In the Poland lands, this moral decline was linked directly to a concern for the national interest³⁴. Warsaw residents worried that foreign visitors to the former capital would be put off by its level of degeneracy and that this impression would affect the martyred nation’s international standing. “For those who are looking for the first time at the streets of Warsaw,” such as visiting West Europeans, noted a correspondent in 1901, “it will appear to be a great nest of immorality and nothing more”³⁵.

³¹ Police registries for major Polish cities, including Warsaw, Cracow, Łódź, and Lwów, reveal a cosmopolitan array of licensed prostitutes from across the Habsburg lands, the Russian Empire, the German Reich, and beyond. Prostitutes often remained on the registry for only a matter of days or weeks before moving on or simply “disappearing” from the public record.

³² *Vide* for example Dr. A. Wróblewski’s lecture at Zgromadzenie Ludowe, Jagiellonian University, Cracow (October 27, 1907), reprinted as *O prostytucji i handlu kobietami*, Warsaw 1909, p. 31. Elsewhere, syphilis was labeled a “social plague” and a “social scourge” in the same category as alcoholism and tuberculosis, all of which resulted in the “degeneration and stunting of the race”. W. Wesołowski, *Syfilis w stosunku do społeczeństwa*, „Zdrowie”, no. 20, February 1904, p. 446–447.

³³ On infanticide in Galicia and Congress Kingdom *vide*: A. Okolski, *O domach Podrzątków*, Biblioteka Warszawska, January 1889, p. 22; J. Kończycki, *Stan moralny społeczeństwa polskiego na podstawie danych statystyki kryminalnej*, Warsaw 1911, p. 80–81; *Sprawy bieżące*, „Niwa”, 1890, nr 5, p. 79–80; *Z kroniki policyjnej*, „Gazeta Narodowa”, March 8, 1905, p. 2.

³⁴ See the cycle of letters from Warsaw old town residents published in the local press, including „Kurier Poranny”, January 9, 1883, p. 2; January 10, p. 3; „Kuryer Codzienny”, September 27, 1901, p. 2; October 1, 1901, p. 2. These reports are also summarized in W. Zaleski, *Z dziejów prostytucja w Warszawie*, Warsaw 1923, p. 28–35.

³⁵ Maszyński, letter to the editor, „Kurier Codzienny”, October 6, 1901, p. 2.

Prostitution was a serious challenge both to middle class respectability and a threat to Poland's future fortunes because it symbolically exposed the nation's inadequacies³⁶. By the early years of the twentieth century, Polish intellectuals and charity workers in all three partitions set out to reduce the impact of these "fallen women" on the reputation of the rising national cause. They highlighted the public health implications of widespread prostitution usage, warning that the uncontrolled spread of venereal diseases threatened future generations of Polish citizens³⁷. Journalists expressed alarm that innocent women and children were being exposed to open sexual debauchery on city streets³⁸. An anxious public characterized sexual immorality as contagious in a pattern similar to the transmission of bacteria in medical science. Such rationales for policing Poland's prostitutes reflected a deep concern to protect and patrol the sociological boundaries of the nation. Poland's scientific community framed the prostitution "problem" as a growing mandate to avoid contaminating the public image and the biological inheritance of the nation by legally excluding those who violated the pre-conditions for "proper Polish womanhood". The prostitute stood in marked contrast to the *Matka Polka* paradigm that was so central to Polish national self-conceptions during the partitioned period. Sex workers with their multiple partners, brazen public behavior, disdain of family life, garish dress, and moral turpitude could not qualify as legitimate members of the martyred nation. Because of this, women who sold sex had to be hidden from sight, their actions regulated, and their effects cloaked in medical secrecy.

THE VIOLATION OF BOURGEOIS SPACE

Despite their seeming challenge to the gendered values so carefully promoted among elite spokespeople, marginal characters such as prostitutes were very much a presence in bourgeois social spaces³⁹. Their activities bridged the per-

³⁶ K. Stauter-Halsted, „Slavic Review”, vol. 68, no. 3, Fall 2009, p. 557–581.

³⁷ Polish Eugenacists were keenly focused on prostitution and venereal diseases as dangers to the nation's biological future. *Vide*: M. Turda, P.J. Weindling, *Blood and Homeland: Eugenics and Racial Nationalism in Central and Southeast Europe, 1900–1940*, Budapest 2007, especially K. Uzarczyk, „Moses als Eugeniker”? *Medical Circles in Interwar Poland*, Budapest – New York 2007, p. 283–295.

³⁸ B. Prus comments on concerns about this moral contamination in „Nowiny”, Jan. 21, 1883, reprinted in *Kroniki*, vol. 6, Warsaw 1957, p. 12–13; „Kurier Poranny”, 1883, no. 10, reprinted in *Kroniki*, vol. 6, Warsaw 1957, p. 13.

³⁹ For a more detailed discussion of the points that follow *vide*: K. Stauter-Halsted, *The Devil's Chain* (forthcoming).

meable boundaries between the middle class home and the public filth of the urban street. The very individuals whom imperial governments and local administrators set out to brand and exclude from mainstream society by legal restrictions, pass books, and humiliating medical inspections also served in bourgeois apartments as nurses, housekeepers, and nannies. Police registries in Poland's key cities reveal that inscribed prostitutes also functioned as fulltime domestics without whom the comfortable bourgeois existences of their employers could not have been sustained. Despite their minimal wages, which often amounted to no more than left over scraps from the family dinner and a corner on the kitchen floor, household servants liberated their mistresses from the responsibilities of childcare, permitting them to participate in social reform and charity work. Evidence from municipal police registries confirms a direct link between prostitution and domestic service. In Warsaw, 53 percent of registered prostitutes listed "domestic" as their previous or current profession in 1889 and a similar portion of serving girls were inscribed on the registry of "secret" or "clandestine" prostitutes⁴⁰. By 1895, 100 out of a total of 192 new prostitutes on Warsaw's city register were domestics⁴¹. By 1903, nearly sixty percent of Warsaw prostitutes and 66 percent of those active in the sex trade in Lwów were drawn from the ranks of domestic service⁴². Awareness of the fluid movement between household service and paid sex fed a popular understanding throughout the Polish lands that "with very rare exceptions... it is possible to state boldly that all of our serving girls are de facto prostitutes," as one muckraking journalist in Lwów proposed⁴³.

⁴⁰ The second most common profession appearing on the police registries was needle worker in a small workshop (14%) or seamstress (7%). Komisyja Województwa Kaliskiego, Central Archive of Historical Records in Warsaw, sygnatura 1697e, [in:] J. Sikorska-Kulesza, *Prostitution in Congress Poland...*, p. 130–131; J. Sikorska-Kulesza, *Miasto-przestrzeń niebezpieczna...*, p. 346.

⁴¹ A. Wysłouch, *Ohyda Wieku...*, p. 6.

⁴² Similar fractions were reflected in Lwów police records, with 213 of the 366 registered prostitutes functioning as domestic servants before or during their period on the police registry in 1904. Dr. Wł. S-I, *Prostytucja ze szczególnem uwzględnieniem stosunków Lwowskich*, „Świat Płciowy”, October 1905, p. 11–15; M., *W sprawie służących*, „Ogniwo”, November 22, 1903, p. 195–196. In contrast, West European metropolises recruited significantly from among household servants, though in slightly reduced percentages: 44 percent of public prostitutes in Petersburg were former domestics; 49% in Paris, and 51% in Berlin. K. Rząśnicki, *Prostytucja a proletariat*, Warsaw 1920, p. 7–10.

⁴³ J. Bilewski, *Służące a prostytutka*, „Świat Płciowy”, October 1905, p. 33–39. Bilewski was responding to a series of articles published prior to this in Warsaw's „Kuryer Codzienny” regarding the close link between household servants and the incidence of prostitution.

Prostitutes were also very often the shopkeepers and waitresses who staffed the shops and cafes that comprised the core of bourgeois sociability. Local officials in Lwów acknowledged the reality of café workers and barmaids doubling as informal prostitutes and passed new regulations governing so-called “discreet prostitution” in March 1906. The revised statute introduced a separate police registry for those sexual encounters attached to professions that were “known to be inclined to selling sex”. The regulations applied, above all, to “waitresses and cashiers in coffee shops and low class locales” whom “every guest and even more so the police know are available to anyone for money and that many of them are actually prostitutes”⁴⁴. Such policies both acknowledged that many working class women sold sex part time to make ends meet and, at the same time, painted all poor females with the brush of sexual indiscretion. The regulations tacitly assumed that every clerk or waitress in a shop or café upheld standards of virtue far different from their bourgeois sisters and that her customers and clients could safely regard her as a *de facto* prostitute⁴⁵.

Additionally, many of the factory workers who fueled the newly established industrial enterprises in Warsaw, Łódź, Białystok and elsewhere were also known to sell sex informally⁴⁶. Indeed, the cycle of unemployment that characterized life in these factories was responsible for a great deal of short-term prostitution work. A 1903 study of female professions in Lwów concluded that the average worker simply did not “earn enough to support even herself”. Interviews with fifty-six female workers in Lwów from seventeen different professions revealed that across a broad range of “difficult, exhausting work in various professions,” most of the subjects experienced prolonged periods of unemployment and severe hunger⁴⁷. One of the most common nonfactory posts for unskilled women was that of seamstress or needle worker, a position that appeared frequently on the prostitution registry as a current or previous occupation of a registered sex worker. Needle workers, partly because of the large number of women who aspired to this profession, suffered from low wages, unhealthy working condi-

⁴⁴ *Prostytucya we Lwowie*, part 2, „Świat Płciowy”, February 1906, p. 24–26.

⁴⁵ K. Stauter-Halsted, *Moral Panic and the Prostitute in Partitioned Poland: Middle Class Respectability in Defense of the Modern Nation*, „Slavic Review”, vol. 68, no. 3, Fall 2009, p. 557–581.

⁴⁶ The total number of industrial workers grew steadily in the Polish Kingdom from 130,000 in 1885 to 300,000 in 1905. Much of this new industrial development was in Łódź, where over half the workers were female, and some 60 percent of these were under the age of twenty. M. Sikorska-Kowalska, *op.cit.*, p. 39.

⁴⁷ Dr. S. Perlmutter, *Położenie lwowskich robotnic chrześcijańskich*, „Nowe Słowo”, December 1, 1903, p. 535–341.

tions, and institutionalized abuses⁴⁸. In Cracow, Lwów, Warsaw, and Łódź and elsewhere, thousands of young women worked from dawn to dusk as seamstresses for miserable wages. In such a situation, experts opined, “it is easy to understand the turn to prostitution”⁴⁹.

Not only did female sexual promiscuity touch private bourgeois spaces, prostitution was also a liminal profession in a second sense. Rarely functioning as a fulltime, permanent career, the sale of sex typically comprised instead a short-term expediency, a temporary tool of survival after migrants relocated or when single women were separated from support networks. Prostitutes were the women who sold sex while they were between jobs or while earning inadequate wages. Border settlements like Katowice, Sosnowiec, and Bytom in Silesia were particularly well served, as desperate young women made their way out of the empires controlling Polish territory and toward port cities like Hamburg or Trieste in the hopes of beginning a new life and brighter fortunes abroad. For many of these marginal women, prostitution was neither a permanent nor a fulltime activity⁵⁰. Young female migrants, factory workers, shop keepers, and domestic servants leveraged their ability to sell sex in order to bridge period of unemployment or to supplement their painfully low wages. Prostitution was prevalent because ambitious lower class Polish women often traded sexual favors to get ahead—to leave the village, to get established in the city, to protect their factory jobs, to make ends meet in poorly paid positions as domestic servants⁵¹.

POLICE, PHYSICIANS AND JOURNALISTS:
THE GATE KEEPERS OF POLISHNESS

The ideal of Polish womanhood, particularly during the nineteenth century battle for national sovereignty, encompassed a version of femininity that was mostly passive and private, maternal and familial. Yet Polish social commentators were faced with myriad examples of women who transgressed this code of conduct. As a result, a whole army of gatekeepers set about policing and

⁴⁸ B. Prus, „Kurier Warszawski”, November 4, 1883, reprinted in *Kroniki*, Warsaw 1957, p. 223.

⁴⁹ M. Moriconi, *Przyczynek do sprawy prostytucji*, p. 171.

⁵⁰ As Michał Baczkowski notes, “if the legal registry is to be believed, most girls did not practice prostitution for their entire professional lives”. *Prostytucja w Krakowie na przełomie XIX i XX w.*, „Studia Historyczne”, 2000, vol. 43, no. 4(171), p. 596.

⁵¹ The vast majority of prostitutes working in the border town of Sosnowiec, for example, were also reportedly “factory girls”. S. Skalski, *Prostytucja w Guberni Piotrkowskiej*, „Zdrowie”, no. 8(22), August 1906, p. 547–550.

patrolling the boundaries of the Polish nation by administratively excluding women they defined as “fallen”. Doctors, police, scientists, academic experts, and journalists worked to write the urban poor, the diseased, the criminally deviant, and anyone else who violated gender norms out of the national community. Such individuals had to be prevented from assimilating by means of legal, scientific, and intellectual practices. At the forefront of this effort to restrict the freedom of these so-called “public women” was the police-medical committee established in every metropolitan center in the Polish lands⁵². This amalgam of law-enforcement officials and medical personnel worked to circumscribe the activities of those they labeled professional prostitutes. In so doing, they employed an ever more expansive definition of prostitution, one that effectively branded thousands of women on the margins of society who may or may not have, in fact, sold sex routinely. These categories of definition are important for understanding the agenda of the officials tasked with implementing the complicated system of tolerated prostitution. Among those whom the police could legally detain on suspicion of prostitution and forcibly submit to medical examinations were women who socialized publically with men not legally related to them; women wandering unaccompanied near a military barracks; and those discovered in restaurants catering to the sex trade or in the company of known prostitutes⁵³.

After 1905, several municipalities in the Polish territories expanded the definition of prostitution, placing additional categories of workingwomen on the police registries. In towns such as Lwów, anyone employed as a waitress, a barkeep or a shop girl was fair game for the vice squad and could be forcibly registered even if they did not self identify as prostitutes⁵⁴. Factory workers in Warsaw, Łódź, and elsewhere were subject to this kind of treatment on the grounds that they were also informal prostitutes who might communicate diseases to their clients. In Poznań, women working in sugar refineries were required to submit to medical examinations and proposals circulated for the routine inspection of domestic servants as part of their terms of service. According to

⁵² Along with J. Sikorska-Kulesza’s *Zło tolerowane*, see also the studies produced during the interwar years, including Józef Macko, *Prostytucja*, Warsaw 1927; W. Zalewski, *Z dziejów prostytucji w Warszawie*, Warsaw 1923. M. Baczkowski has written on the police regulations system in Austrian Galicia. See id., *Prostytucja w Krakowie na przełomie XIX i XX w. . . .*, p. 593–607.

⁵³ On the expansive definition of prostitution and the risk of mistaken identity *vide*: B. Prus, *Doraźna kara*, „Kurier Warszawski”, March 3, 1888; *Znowu donżuaneria*, „Kurier Warszawski”, March 6, 1888. Reprinted in *Kroniki*, vol. 11, Warsaw 1953, p. 311–312.

⁵⁴ *Vide* for example *Prostytucja we Lwowie*, „Świat Płciowy”, February 1906, p. 24–26; J. Papee, *Kiły u prostytutek we Lwowie*, Warsaw 1908.

this increasingly broad definition any lower class, unskilled, single female worker who was employed in a setting where she was regularly exposed to men could be arrested on suspicion of prostitution.

As the legal definition of prostitution expanded to include most unmarried working class girls, so too did the medical profession refine its approach to controlling prostitution⁵⁵. Newfound professional confidence and prestige garnered nineteenth century doctors a more central role in the regulation of “fallen women”. Physicians had the authority to impose examinations on women suspected of conducting sex work. They could incarcerate those with visible signs of disease in police hospitals and detain them until all evidence of infection had disappeared. And they could impose painful and often disfiguring treatments on unsuspecting patients in order to eliminate venereal sores⁵⁶. As scientific understandings of sexual diseases shifted, so too did medical attitudes toward the women believed to be their primary communicators⁵⁷. By the early twentieth century, with revelations about the dangers of congenital syphilis and the realization that no effective cure for venereal disease was available, Polish doctors began to treat their venereal patients, prostitutes chief among them, as permanent outcasts, individuals from whom society needed to be protected. Their status switched from one in which they were suffering from temporary illness but could eventually rejoin “normal” urban life to a more permanent prognosis. The challenge for physicians became that of isolating contagious women from the healthier portions of society. It was in this context that the eugenics movement in Poland was born, with its peculiar emphasis on containing the effects of prostitution, venereal disease, and alcoholism—an admixture unique to the Polish setting. In the Polish lands, as scholars like Magdalena Gawin have shown us, eugenics was less about ethnic categorization and cleansing the national body of “foreign” genetic

⁵⁵ On physicians, police, and other local administrators charged with enforcing prostitution regulation within the imperial bureaucracies *vide*: P. Franaszek, *Zdrowie publiczne w Galicji w dobie autonomii (Wybrane problemy)*, Cracow 2002, p. 7–10; B. Sejda, *Dzieje medycyny w zarysie*, Warsaw 1973, p. 460–494; A. Chwalba, *Polacy w służbie Moskali*, Warsaw–Cracow 1999.

⁵⁶ Doctors had great latitude in determining whom to incarcerate in venereal wards and how long to detain their patients. *Vide* for example T. Belke, *Kilka słów o sposobach tamujących szerszenie się chorób wenerycznych*, „Medycyna”, 1881, no. 9, 443–445; J. Rogowicz, *Ogłędziny lekarskie kobiet w obliczu obowiązującego u nas prawa*, „Medycyna”, 1896, vol. 24, no. 1, p. 19–21.

⁵⁷ This sense of medical confidence is expressed, for example, in *Prostytucja w mieście Warszawie w latach 1867, 1868, 1869*, „Gazeta Lekarska”, 1871, vol. 5, no. 30, p. 479–480; *Wykład chorób wenerycznych*, Warsaw 1874, p. 403–407.

influences than it was about health and hygiene⁵⁸. Polish eugenics focused on disease and dissolution, on immoral behavior and its implications for national strength. Much of this process of medical exclusion stemmed from the categorization of gendered and sexual activities.

CONCLUSIONS

In all of these ways, professional experts with increasing public authority began patrolling the boundaries of the nation. If the prostitute could neither be reformed nor cured of her ailments, these specialists contended, she would have to be isolated from others. This was the task of the army of police officers, professors, scientists, social workers, and journalists, who along with medical doctors set out to redraw and reinforce the parameters of Polishness in the late partitioned period. They did so not just along class lines (although this was clearly part of their definition) as had been the case prior to the partitions, but also according to moral criteria. Taking as their tacit example the longstanding trope of the *Matka Polka*, they evaluated the swelling ranks of lower-class urban women for their potential contribution to the nation's wellbeing. In this way, women and their public behavior became part of a newly gendered and sexualized conception of the nation. Those labeled as prostitutes – whether accurately or not – were socially ostracized and deemed unreformable, diseased, and dangerous. In contrast to the simple peasant girls lauded for their links to folk culture, urban prostitutes, vagrants, and the working poor were now open threats to the eugenics strength of the nation. Physicians and their allies sought to restrict public women from marrying, from bearing children, and from appearing in open view. Holding out little hope that the institution of paid sex might be eliminated, they sought instead to hide practitioners from the public eye and to protect society from the deadly impact of their activities.

The wave of country girls suffering temporary setbacks after migrating to urban jobs was, of course, not unique to the Polish territories. Yet the value placed on female virtue as a foundational element in the campaign for national independence led to gendered efforts at exclusion that had a particular Polish cast. By labeling women with the permanent stigma of prostitution, Polish experts created a cohort of legal boundary violators, permanently inscribed on police roles and shunned from “legitimate” avenues of employment. In expan-

⁵⁸ M. Gawin, *Rasa i nowoczesność. Historia polskiego ruchu eugenicznego (1880–1952)*, Warsaw 2003.

ding the categories of women suspected of prostitution they inadvertently branded as suspect women who were ambitious, upwardly mobile, or otherwise sought to challenge the social status quo. These examples suggest that national membership and the ways in which it is defined has much to do with gender and sexuality. The study of marginal females in an urban setting has the potential to provide a richer understanding of the interplay between gender and a sense of national belonging or exclusions. Scholars may treat the *Matka Polka* imagery as an outmoded stereotype, but when we look beneath and beyond these images, we find a much richer, more complex and more interesting picture of Polish history.