

# Chapter 4: PROSTITUTION IN THE EYES OF THE SOCIETY: Written discourse at the turn of the 19th and the 20th centuries

## 1. Abolitionism vs. regimentationism

The first voices of criticism against tolerating prostitution appeared in Western Europe at the end of the 1860s. The support, or at least indifference towards the regimentation system characteristic for the 1st half of the century (when the State was expected to manage the physical and moral filth – the human dumpster, both literally and figuratively) gave way to negating the utility of the system and a growing discontent regarding the existence of prostitution as such. Earlier, public harlotry had been, almost exclusively, the concern of “good police”, doctors and officials. Even in places where the scale of the phenomenon brought it to the public eye (e.g. Paris, London), prostitution was rarely discussed outside of the mentioned environments. However, as the lack of success in combating venereal disease and street prostitution became increasingly obvious, the relevant discourse spread to much wider circles. These deemed prostitution to be one of the social disasters of Europe and declared war against regimentation and harlotry, in which they wanted to involve the entire society.

Historians of prostitution agree that the key role in this process was played by the so-called neo-abolitionism,<sup>894</sup> which gained immense popularity, comparable to that of the anti-slavery movement.<sup>895</sup> It managed to mobilise a large portion of the public in Europe and America to strive to set “white slaves” free from both legal and social discrimination they were facing. The criticism of the European regimentation system originated in England. The Contagious Disease Act, introduced by the Westminster Parliament in 1864, gave courts in localities that held garrisoned troops or the fleet the right to force public women to undergo medical examinations and treatment in designated hospitals. Thus,

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894 The name of the movement referred to the campaign for the abolition of slavery. For more on neo-abolitionism see e.g.: Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, pp. 86–89, 90–112; Berlière, *La police*, pp. 131–165; Veniamin Tarnovsky, *Prostitutsiya i abolitsionizm* (Petersburg: Izdaniye Karla Rikera, 1888).

895 Bristow, *Prostitution*, pp. 80–84.

in contrast to the French, Polish and Russian system, the British solution was rooted in parliamentary legislation; the role of the police was limited to finding suspects, while the verdict was left to judicial authorities. Nevertheless, the legislation was criticised almost immediately. The success of the vigorous social campaign against the Contagious Diseases Act, which led to its utter repeal in 1886, ought to be ascribed primarily to Josephine Butler, one of the female activists of the Ladies' National Association.<sup>896</sup> Butler's movement gained the stern support of various circles (workers, women, clergy), as evidenced e.g. by the fact that her petition to the parliament was signed by over 2.5 million people.

The opponents of tolerated prostitution were heard ever clearer everywhere across Western Europe. Their expertly tackled propaganda activities (e.g. Butler's tour of the continent, Yves Guyot's activity in France – the latter was to abolitionism what Parent-Duchâtelet to regimentationism) and slogans that fell on fertile social and ideological ground made the movement attractive to many. In 1874 neo-abolitionists founded an international federation associating activists and proponents of social changes. In the course of the following decade, they organised four international congresses to tackle the issue (1877 in Geneva, 1880 in Genoa, 1883 in Hague, 1886 in London). During their very first meeting, the Federation formulated the ambitious goal of striving towards the absolute elimination of prostitution from social life, and indicated the steps to be taken in this direction. The fact that its ideas were incorporated into the programme of the feminist movement had a huge impact on the abolitionists' success, as they managed to turn the attention of people everywhere from the Atlantic coast to the Ural Mountains to the matter of prostitution.

Reaching such a broad spectrum of the public would have been impossible if prostitution at the time was not linked to so many other problems within the society. The abolitionist movement was built on the foundation of social and mental transformations taking place in Europe. Other favourable factors included the speed at which information travelled and the distance it covered (the development of the press), the ongoing democratisation of many aspects of life and the growing aspirations of the marginalised social groups. Consequently, the idea of neo-abolitionism proliferated in Europe and gave this issue (which

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896 Josephine Butler, Stanisław Posner, *"Mój pochód, krzyżowy"*. *Zarysy autobiograficzne żywota i pracy*, foreword by Stanisław Posner (Warsaw: Ogniw, 1904); Nancy Boyd, *Three Victorian Women Who Changed Their World: Josephine Butler, Octavia Hill, Florence Nightingale* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 23–92; Glen Petrie, *A Singular Iniquity: The Campaigns of Josephine Butler* (New York: Viking Press, 1971).

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was but one of many worries of the society at the time) publicity and importance, perhaps greater than merited.

In Polish territory, prostitution became a topic of public discourse later than in the rest of Europe. Abolitionist ideas were slow to seep into the mind of Poles. In 1888 the Warsaw paper *Głos* published Bolesław Limanowski's article denouncing the system of regimentation, especially critical towards the medical examination of prostitutes, "the vilest form of female slavery", "the barbaric practice that so offends the democratic and humanitarian sensitivities of today. It is demanded by the modern drive towards equal rights for women", yet the text was exceptional in nature.<sup>897</sup> The fact that the programme of the abolitionist movement was presented in 1889, in a summary of the proceedings of the 2nd International Women's Congress in Paris, given by one of the speakers at a meeting of the Guardians of the 3rd Sewing Workshop of the Charitable Society in Warsaw (Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit or Aleksandra Krycińska) lacked any broader consequences.<sup>898</sup> The women's movement in Polish territory was still at the stage of formulating its programme and the forms of interacting with the public, which is why the issue of prostitution was only tackled by these circles ten years later.

In the last three decades of the 19th century, the press informed the public of philanthropist initiatives to help fallen women, of cases of disturbance of the peace involving pedestrians being accosted by prostitutes, of human trafficking, and also of criminal cases in which women of loose morals were implicated. The language of these articles makes it apparent that their authors distanced themselves from the issue of prostitution (and especially the women engaged in such activities), even going as far as to present the issue in a humorous manner.<sup>899</sup> The phenomenon itself was hardly regarded as a problem; the existence of prostitution

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897 Bolesław Limanowski, "Reglamentacja występku", *Głos*, no. 31 (1888). Limanowski may have taken interest in the problem after meeting women arrested in the course of evening round-ups, during the night he spent in a jail in Lvov.

898 "Konferencja publiczna w walce z handlem żywym towarem. Referat Pauliny Kuczalskiej-Reinschmit", *Ster*, no. 4–5 (1914). On the Polish women participating in the Congress: Jan Hulewicz, "Kuczalska-Reinschmit Paulina", in: *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, ed. Michał Girdwoyń and Adam Gross (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1959–1960), Vol. VIII, pp. 69–70.

899 For instance, writing about the workhouse for "fallen women" or, as the author puts it, the "sinful daughters of Eve". The institution was also meant to ensure "that underage Evies displaying bad tendencies did not fall into the arms of... Adams, upon the chink of a coin" – "Echa warszawskie", *Przegląd Tygodniowy*, no. 39 (1882).

was simply an aspect of human physiology. In 1868, the journalist reviewing the Warsaw stage production of Alexandre Dumas<sup>900</sup> *Camille* claimed that the author had no right to make a fallen woman into a protagonist, much less to rehabilitate her through the plot of the story. The review reads: “the women of his *demi-monde* have long treaded the edge of the abyss, so long, in fact, that they earned the reputation of loud coquettes, and only when the divine spark of (one dares say: dubitably) true love flares in their hearts do they transform into Magdalenes whose tears fall at the feet of their beloved, into the victims of the other half of humankind, victims who cry in the author’s own voice: for reform, for a rebirth, or for punishment and retribution. No, it needs to be said outright, that even if the rehabilitation of beings wallowing in filth (regardless of what the unfortunate initial motivation may have been) had a true and good aspect to it, and stirred the audience to compassion and contentment, under no circumstances should it be used to idealise or erect altars to heroism. Women of the *demi-monde* ought not to be protagonists, if only due to the fact that they have nothing in their defence, not even passion which, as a force, propels the drama in a compelling manner – their actions were a series of decisions taken willingly, after just one, the first (which was forced), and thus constituted consent to the state of affairs; while the sudden love, which the author wishes to portray as true and immortal, can never be so, and will never purify, as anyone may easily attest. If it were so, how would the love of pure, noble women, or the love of women who had erred but once in life, differ from the affections of women who had for long years lived in corruption?”<sup>901</sup> The journalist reviewing Mieczysław Dzikowski’s novel *Dziewczyna*, published in 1870 (which tells the story of a seduced seamstress), rejects the issue as unbecoming in literary works, opining that it belongs solely to the realm of police services and public health, since “there are things

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900 E. L[ubawski], “Pojęcia pani Aubray. Komedia w IV aktach Alexandra Dumasa syna. Przekład Władysława Umiastowskiego”, *Biblioteka Warszawska*, Vol. III (1868), pp. 505–510. Another reviewer – Fryderyk H. Lewestam – called the work “filth” in a public speech.

901 Lubawski continued: “No, there is so many urgent needs that call for aid and mercy, for help and alleviation, that the issue of fallen women from the alien *demi-monde*, shall forever remain a sign of the times in French literature, and a monument to elegant style, bold statements, striking arguments denouncing the wrongdoings of the society, yet will not become a model for drama involving universally human feelings, universally experienced moments (...) but we are, inadvertently, cross with the author, that he made us feel moved with such an issue, which shall be repeated until the world’s end, with no hope of being mended whatsoever.”

on Earth from which the novel (. . .) turns its eye in disdain.”<sup>902</sup> Such unworthy, hitherto avoided topics were only introduced to literature by the programme of the positivist movement, and did not become the focal point until the rise of naturalism. Aleksander Świętochowski defended Dzikowski’s work for this very reason. He was drawn to the issue of prostitution, not because of the social, but ethical concerns – the problem of reconciling the existing moral norms with reality, the conflict between biological needs and moral obligations. As he wrote in a letter to Piotr Chmielowski, it was the contradiction “that I see constantly, even in you and in myself. For instance, I am moved by *Camille*, but still accost seamstresses.”<sup>903</sup>

In time, owing to foreign and Polish *belles-lettres* as well as reviews and discussions published in the press, readers gradually became more accustomed to this delicate issue and gained knowledge about different aspects of the phenomenon. In the late 1860s and early 1870s such a role was played by Alexandre Dumas’ *Camille*.<sup>904</sup> Later, the reviewers’ passions were stirred by works written by Guy de Maupassant, Joris K. Huysmans, Leo Tolstoy, Bjørnstjerne Martinius Bjornson, and finally by the naturalists led by Emile Zola. Representatives of this movement, whom Bolesław Prus dubbed “Columbuses of the gutter,”<sup>905</sup> made human misery into one of the central topics of their works, turning prostitutes (as mentioned in the introduction) into titular characters – e.g. in Zola’s *Nana*. In Polish literature, fallen women and their clients appear as background or central characters in the works of Adolf Dygasiński, Bolesław Prus, Stefan Żeromski, Gabriela Zapolska, Władysław Berent and several dozen other, now forgotten writers.<sup>906</sup> Phenomena characteristic for the *Zeitgeist* of the turn of the centuries, such as decadence, interest in pathologies and the lowest instincts, absolutising sexual factors, etc., bred dozens of literary texts in which prostitutes were

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902 After: Aleksander Świętochowski, *Wybór pism krytyczno-literackich*, introduction and footnotes by Maria Brykalska (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1973), pp. 97–100.

903 After: Maria Brykalska, *Aleksander Świętochowski. Biografia* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1987), Vol. 1, pp. 142–143. Świętochowski often discussed the problem of moral responsibility in the light of biological predetermination.

904 *Przegląd Tygodniowy* published it as a complimentary supplement for subscribers in 1869/1870.

905 Prus, *Kroniki*, Vol. VI, p. 178.

906 See: Ewa Ihnatowicz, “Miasto kryminalne?”, in: *Miasto – Kultura – Literatura – XIX wiek*, ed. Jan Data (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Gdańskie, 1993), pp. 113–124; Zacharska, *O kobiecie*, pp. 139–159.

portrayed – depending on the author’s views – as victims or seductresses and liberated women. Works by Żeromski and Zapolska prompted public discussion on the situation of women and male sexual behaviours.<sup>907</sup>

As far as Polish public is concerned, the first to bring the issue of prostitution and the ideals of the abolitionist movement to the centre of attention were feminist activists, who followed the example of their western-European counterparts and introduced the matter of regimentation of prostitution and the development of new standards of sexual morality into the programme of women’s emancipation movement. Inspired by the experiences of foreign social activists, they used forms and arguments known from France, Germany and other European countries. In May or June 1900, Teodora Męczkowska, who was one of the most active members of the women’s movement (also with regard to prostitution), presented a report at the so-called “Delegation of women’s work”. In it, she described prostitution as an important current issue that required social work. She concluded with the appeal to expand the programme of the women’s movement to include the matter of abolishing regimentation and initiating educational work towards the prevention of prostitution.<sup>908</sup> Męczkowska complained that the issue of prostitution and the related ethical concerns were thoroughly disregarded in public discourse and that the wide spread of the ethical movement did not translate to any factual changes, while “the deeply rooted tenet that this is not a subject to be openly discussed still prevails”.<sup>909</sup> Years later, she recalled that no respectable paper was willing to tackle the issue; the only periodical not afraid of delicate subjects was *Głos*, yet even there her article on public morals was censored by the editors (for instance the word “prostitution” was

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907 For instance: “O biernej Ewie (Z okazji Żeromskiego ‘Dziejów grzechu’);” *Ster*, no. 6 (1908); “To o czym się nie mówi”; *Ster*, no. 6 (1909); Kazimiera Bujwidowa, “O czym się nie mówi”; *Ster*, no. 7–8 (1909); Samuel Hirszhorn, “Dwie moralności (‘O czym się nie mówi’ – powieść Gabrieli Zapolskiej);” *Czystość*, no. 29 (1909).

908 “Konferencja publiczna.” Political activist Stanisław Koszutski also referred to Męczkowska’s presentation, appreciating the effort to bring the subject to everyone’s attention and discussion. He did, however, criticise the methods of prevention she proposed, and even her evaluation and analysis of the problem – Koszutski, “Na mównicy”.

909 Teodora Męczkowska, “Moralność obyczajowa”; *Głos*, no. 28 (1900). A similar statement: “Prostitution is perhaps the only area in which the society turns away from the weak, refuses to extend a hand to beings wishing to stand up; on the contrary, does everything in its power to keep them on their road to degradation” – J. L., “Policja obyczajów”; *Głos*, no. 30 (1900).

replaced with “indecenty”).<sup>910</sup> Indubitably, anyone who tackled the problem of prostitution, and especially women, needed to be brave and unrelenting; female activists addressed it in spite of the opinion of the majority. According to Męczkowska, initially their work was appreciated by very few people.<sup>911</sup> These included physicians, such as Antoni Wysłouch and Leon Wernic (venereologist, hygienist, the editor of *Zdrowie*) and lawyers such as Stanisław Posner (journalist and social activist with leftist inclinations). In 1900 they joined Męczkowska to establish (illegally, due to the circumstances at the time) the Society of Abolitionists (*Towarzystwo Abolicjonistyczne*) based in Warsaw, an association of proponents of Josephine Butler’s programme (members of the Society exchanged correspondence with Butler and made her manifesto available to Polish readers, publishing it under the title *Przez drogę krzyżową*).<sup>912</sup> Before the outbreak of the Great War, several other organisations designed to combat prostitution were also created in the Kingdom: *Warszawskie Chrześcijańskie Towarzystwo Ochrony Kobiet* (the Warsaw Christian Association of Protecting Women, 1902), *Żydowskie Towarzystwo Ochrony Kobiet* (the Jewish Association of Protecting Women, 1904), *Towarzystwo Walki z Chorobami Płciowymi i Szerzenia Zasad Abolicjonizmu* (the Association to Combat Venereal Diseases and Propagate the Principles of Abolitionism, 1906), *Towarzystwo Reformy Obyczajów* (the Association for the Reform of Morals, 1906), *Towarzystwo Szerzenia Czystości Obyczajów* (the Association to Propagate the Purity of Morals, 1906).<sup>913</sup>

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910 Teodora Męczkowska, *Pamiętnik pisany w Zakopanem w r. 1944/45 na wygnaniu*, Biblioteka Narodowa, Oddział Rękopisów, sygn. 10303 II, k. 47–50.

911 “Plon odpowiedzi”, *Ster*, no. 3 (1914); Męczkowska, *Pamiętnik*, k. 50.

912 Witold Chodźko, *Handel kobietami* (Warsaw: Polski Komitet Walki z Handlem Kobietami i Dziećmi, 1935), p. 18. In 1915 the Society of Abolitionists was transformed into the Polish Society to Combat Prostitution and Venereal Disease (*Polskie Towarzystwo Walki z Nierządem i Chorobami Płciowymi*), which subsequently changed into the Polish Eugenics Society (*Polskie Towarzystwo Eugeniczne*) led by Leon Wernic. On the pre-eugenic themes in these circles see: Magdalena Gawin, *Rasa i nowoczesność. Historia polskiego ruchu eugenicznego (1880–1952)* (Warsaw: Neriton, 2003), pp. 83–85.

913 The goals of these associations were stated e.g. in *Czystość*, the press organ of abolitionist societies; “Wyjątki z ustawy Warszawskiego Towarzystwa dla walki z chorobami sekretne i szerzenia zasad abolicjonizmu”, *Czystość*, no. 27 (1909); August Wróblewski, “Towarzystwo do zwalczania chorób płciowych”, *Czystość*, no. 29, 30 (1909); Sruł Auerbach, “Przed zebraniem Towarzystwa dla zwalczania Chorób Płciowych”, *Czystość*, no. 31 (1909); Leon Wernic, “Cel i zadania Towarzystwa dla zwalczania chorób płciowych”, *Czystość*, no. 31 (1909).

Officially, the proposal to denounce the regimentation of prostitution and to demand its abolition was adopted at the first Conference of Polish Women, held in Cracow in 1905.<sup>914</sup> One plenary session at the 1907 meeting and a separate section was devoted to prostitution and the so-called double morality.<sup>915</sup> In 1909 the Cracow branch of the women's rights protection movement issued the so-called primer of women's issues, written by feminist and education activist Kazimiera Bujwidowa. It was composed of briefly stated postulates for socially aware women and had the form of a pad with removable pages, resembling a calendar. The eight principal postulates of the women's movement, defining its goals in terms of economy, education, legislation, politics, motherhood and the protection of children, included "the abolition of administratively legalised prostitution" (clause 7).<sup>916</sup> This testifies to the importance women's rights activists ascribed to the problem of prostitution. It was discussed at length in Cracow feminist papers *Ster* and *Nowe Słowo*; with the latter publishing a special supplement *Czystość*, pertaining primarily to these issues.<sup>917</sup> However, the matter of prostitution was not mentioned at the 1913 conference, either in the discussion around education, or women's work in industry, not to divide activists representing various approaches to the movement by presenting an issue which took some feminists very far in their musings on the underlying causes and proposed changes.<sup>918</sup>

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914 "Program wspólnej pracy uchwalony na I Zjeździe Kobiet Polskich w Krakowie w dniach 20–23 X 1905 roku", *Nowe Słowo*, no. 20 (1905).

915 After this conference, the opponents of regimentation circled around the abolitionist August Wróblewski and his periodical *Czystość* sent a member of the Duma, Alfons Parczewski, their proposals regarding e.g. the gradual withdrawal of the regimentation system – first the de-legalisation of brothels, followed by the cessation of tolerance for independent prostitution; "Projekt ślubów cywilnych i zwalczania rozpusty", *Czystość*, no. 1 (1908); August Wróblewski, "Reglamentacja prostytucji w Warszawie", *Czystość*, no. 25 (1909).

916 Kazimiera Bujwidowa, *Czy kobieta powinna mieć te same prawa co mężczyzna?* (Cracow: Towarzystwo Wydawnicze "Encyklopedyi Ludowej", 1909), p. 4. Clause 8 mentioned the abolition of all privileges of gender expressed in codified and moral laws.

917 Anna Pawłowska, "Kwestie etyczno-obyczajowe w prasie kobiecej przełomu XIX i XX wieku (na łamach 'Steru' i 'Nowego Słowa')", *Studia Historyczne* R. XXX, issue 4 (119) (1987), pp. 571–587.

918 Kazimiera Bujwidowa, *O postępowym i niepostępowym ruchu kobiecym w Galicji* (Lvov: Drukarnia "Polska", 1913), p. 16.

The principal and direct aim of the abolitionist movement was to put an end to the police-and-medical supervision of prostitutes, force all brothel houses to close and convince the authorities to introduce changes to the penal code (more severe punishment for panderers). As the initiator and patron of the regimentation system, the State was therefore both the addressee and the main opponent of their postulates. Given the political situation of the Kingdom of Poland, whose citizens had no legal means of political pressure, the issue was difficult, and sometimes downright impossible to advocate. Only after the system changes that took place in Russia in 1905 did Poles acquire the instruments that enabled them to give this activity an organised form and put social pressure on the authorities through the Parliament. The revolution of 1905 brought not only the liberalisation of public activity in the Kingdom (the right to form associations, replacing preventive censorship with a repressive one), but released an enormous charge of activist energy channelled through various types of social activity. The mentioned pogrom of public houses in Warsaw in May that year was another factor that made prostitution seem an even more interesting and pressing issue. Anti-regimentationist activity intensified in the final years before the outbreak of the war, due to the ongoing legislative work in the third and fourth Duma, aimed at drafting laws against human trafficking (cf. Chapter 1). Russian legislative initiatives regarding women's rights and offenses against morality opened new opportunities for proponents of the delegalisation of prostitution. The most prominent role at the time was played by the Union for the Equal Rights of Polish Women (*Związek Równouprawnienia Kobiet Polskich*; hereinafter ZRKP), led by Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit. Established in 1907, the organisation represented the most radical direction of feminist ideas. The first Polish campaign towards the abolishment of the regimentation system was organised in 1909 in connection with a proposed draft of a "law regarding the means towards the curbing of the trade in women for harlotry," presented at the Duma. The ZRKP expressed their demand to disestablish regimentation, close brothels and uphold the legal protection of persons under 21 years of age, sending letters to the Polish Circle in St. Petersburg and organising two conferences in Warsaw. The one in May, entitled "Women's Perspective on the So-Called Flesh Trade" managed to gather a sizable audience (including representatives of the press, women's organisations and charities). Teodora Męczkowska delivered a lecture presenting the history of regimentation in Warsaw and the principles of the system's operation; Władysława Weychert focused on women's paths towards prostitution, illustrating the issue with the stories of prostitutes she spoke to in gaol; the principal organiser of the event, Kuczalska, presented an overview of the issue of human trafficking in the broad context of the development of women's rights movement in Europe and

its goals.<sup>919</sup> The second conference, “On the means of self-defence”, took place in September 1909. This time, speakers included Kazimiera Bujwidowa and Teresa Lubińska.<sup>920</sup> In 1910, the press organ of the ZRKP summarised the theses presented by the participants of the Russian conference tackling the issue of the trade in women, held in St. Petersburg.<sup>921</sup> As the initiative of the All-Russian League of Equal Rights for Women led 44 members of the Duma to make a motion to close cathouses, abolish regimentation and treat venereal diseases in accordance with universally applicable principles (1913), the management of the ZRKP passed a resolution (9 December 1913) to appeal to Polish members of the parliament to support the proposal, as well as to the public, asking for voices of support to be sent to the editing board of *Ster*.<sup>922</sup> Other societies with similar goals were also contacted in order to organise coordinated actions to spread information through conferences, lectures, public appeals, etc. Editors of *Ster* sent two thousand copies of their “Appeal to the society” out to doctors, lawyers and famous activists, asking them to formulate their opinion on the issue of regimentation. They received 304 replies, which were subsequently published in *Ster* and sent to the MPS along with the Union’s memorial.<sup>923</sup> In accordance with the resolution, members of the Union organised a conference featuring female doctors, Julia Blay (a promoter of sexual education), Justyna Budzińska-Tylicka, as well as Kuczalska’s closest associate, Józefa Bojanowska. Kuczalska delivered a programmatic speech, in her usual militant style, summarising the activities of

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919 “Opinia Związku równouprawnienia kobiet polskich ‘O projekcie nowego prawa, zmierzającego do zatamowania handlu kobietami w celach nierządu’”, *Ster*, no. 4 (1909); “Związek równouprawnienia kobiet polskich. Głos kobiet o tzw. handlu żywym towarem”, *Ster*, no. 5/6 (1909); Władysława Weychertówna, “Źródła społeczne i etyczne handlu żywym towarem (Odczyt wypowiedziany w dniu 18 V 1909 r.)”, *Ster*, no. 6 (1909).

920 Romana Pachucka, *Pamiętniki 1886–1914* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1958), pp. 173–174; Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit, “Przeciw ohydzie t.z. handlu żywym towarem”, *Ster*, no. 4 (1909); K. “Niemożliwa propozycja”, *Ster*, no. 5 (1909).

921 S. Kijowski, “Walka z prostytucją. 1-szy Wszechrosyjski zjazd w sprawie t.zw. handlu żywym towarem”, *Ster*, no. 5 and 6 (1910).

922 “O konwencji międzynarodowej w sprawie handlu żywym towarem. W oświeceniu Towarzystwa Prawniczego”, *Ster*, no. 7–8 (1913); “Do Społeczeństwa”, *Ster*, no. 19–20 (1913); “Uchwała Związku R.K.P. o zniesieniu reglamentacji prostytucji”, *Ster*, no. 19–20 (1913); “O ‘nieodpowiedni ton’”, *Ster*, no. 1–2 (1914); “Wezwanie”, *Ster*, no. 4–5 (1914).

923 Pachucka, *Pamiętniki*, pp. 269–271; “Plon odpowiedzi”, *Ster*, no. 1–2, 3 (1914).

the Polish women's movement regarding prostitution.<sup>924</sup> In the final years before the outbreak of the First World War, prostitution and the related issues were tackled (during conferences, open meetings, in periodicals published by women's organisations and in social and cultural weeklies) by the most prominent and most active feminists of the day.

What critics of the regimentation system regarded as fundamental were the moral and legal consequences of state tolerance for prostitution. The medical aspect was only a minor concern. The Conference of Polish Women in 1905 denounced regimentation as an idea, presenting three reasons: (1) regimentation is an affront to ethics and justice, (2) it only applies to women and is an affront to their dignity, (3) it causes the dissemination of venereal disease.<sup>925</sup> Critics judged the system primarily from the moral perspective, stating that the regimentation of prostitution is tantamount to the acceptance of public harlotry, and consequently to its propagation, as tolerance allows people to entertain the thought that prostitution is not an evil, since the State does not counteract it. Legally licensed public houses provide incentive for young men, giving them the right, as Kuczalska put it, "to violate a woman's honour and dignity". Abolitionists, in turn, vilified prostitution as a uniformly harmful phenomenon with dire hygienic, moral and social consequences felt by everyone. In her programmatic text on the ethical and social goals of the women's movement, Teodora Męczkowska wrote: "Prostitution is perhaps the best evidence of what can emerge from perverted relations between people, how easily the violence of some breeds the moral and physical enslavement of others, finally, how this enslavement and exploitation lead downward a slippery slope of the dehumanisation of both the abusers and the abused. Verily, one finds it hard to comprehend how civilised societies deem to fight prostitution solely because it brings the physical degeneration of the nation, disregarding the very essence, the immorality of relations in which one party commits a misdemeanour with impunity, and the other – the victim – is forever stigmatised for this deed." She also declared that women were no longer willing to stand for "such an opportunistic stance, degrading to human dignity. They fight not the consequences of prostitution, but prostitution itself, as filth and barbarity. Every women's association demands, first and foremost, the utter abolishment of regimentation, in the assumption that supervision over

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924 "Konferencja publiczna; Przemówienie Dr. Julji Blay", *Ster*, no. 4–5 (1914); "Sprawozdanie Zarządu ZRKP", *Ster*, no. 4–5 (1914).

925 "Program wspólnej pracy; Życie z życia", *Ster*, no. 1–2 (1914).

prostitution is, in itself, immoral.”<sup>926</sup> Activists invoked the State’s fundamental obligation to protect moral values. “The law cannot enter into an agreement with prostitution,” wrote Adolf Rzańnicki (a doctor and a socialist), “and yet the entire system of regimentation is nothing short of a tacit agreement to a crime.”<sup>927</sup>

The most often invoked argument as to why regimentation should be opposed was the status of prostitutes, compared to that of female slaves. It was also the reason why feminists were interested in the issue. Without any detailed analyses, abolitionists wrote that the regulations of the system put prostitutes outside of the law and society, denying them their basic rights as citizens that had been developed by European societies of the 19th century – freedom, equality in the eyes of the law, and personal immunity. They listed the numerous tragic consequences of legalising brothels, registration and police-and-medical supervision: the transformation of women occasionally selling their bodies into professional prostitutes, and the shift from a seasonal occupation to a career due to the practice of confiscating passports and the resulting difficulties in abandoning the practice, as well as the slave-like (as was believed) dependence on brothel owners and dealers of the “flesh trade”, the objectification of women, their utter subordination to police authority, the round-ups of prostitutes and all women suspected of licentiousness, the mandatory medical examinations infringing on the freedom and dignity of women, and finally all the related examples of police malpractice. The audience of the first Conference of Polish Women in Cracow heard in connection with licensed brothel houses: “Regimentation treats a woman as an object, a commodity to be traded by the worst dregs of the society. Furthermore, regimentation allows for the establishment of warehouses of human goods, as long as the traders pay taxes and register their merchandise to be controlled by the police. The policeman lords over life and death. If a woman falls into the hands of the police but once, she is already buried alive. She is denied even the chance to improve, as this will not be taken into consideration by the police, unless her parents or her husband vouchsafe for her.”<sup>928</sup> The press commented on the moral police (in France, yet it was widely surmised that the

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926 Teodora Męczkowska, *Ruch kobiecy. Ideały etyczno-społeczne ruchu kobiecego* (Warsaw: skł. gł. w Księgarni Gebethera i Wolffa, 1907), p. 25.

927 Adam Rzańnicki, “W sprawie prostytucji”, *Społeczeństwo*, no. 40 (1909). Similarly: M. Kor., “Towarzystwo Schronienia św. Małgorzaty”, *Prawda*, no. 49 (1908). “For as long as organised harlotry exists and remains under the governance of separate laws, the open, festering wound in the society will remain”, as *Prawda* wrote in 1904 (no. 33, “Fejleton. Ściągnięte cugle”).

928 “O konieczności zniesienia reglamentacji”, in: *Program wspólnej pracy*.

Warsaw branch operated in a similar fashion): “The agent of morality differs from a pimp in that he is even more depraved, and moreover operates with the authority of an official (. . .) a panderer’s authority over a prostitute is rooted in the law of the knife, an agent’s – in administrative regulations.”<sup>929</sup> The public was frightened with claims that the same fate may befall random women who find themselves within the range of police activities. Thus, the presentation of the problem in Polish press was very different to the dramatic and frequent reports of police malpractice published in French periodicals.<sup>930</sup> This was partially due to censorship, but also because the individuals speaking against regimentation in Polish territory had very little information on the realities of the life of local prostitutes.

The issue that thrilled contemporaneous readers the most was the so-called trade in living goods (human trafficking, cf. Chapter 2). Not much effort was needed to persuade everyone that professional procuration and the trade in women could not be effectively combated as long as brothel houses existed, as they provided a market for “human commodities”. The issue captivated people’s imagination, revealing various interests, both individual and national in nature. During the 1909 conference, Kuczalska addressed the need to enact legislation “which would also prevent the special brand of ‘Polish goods’ from being built in universal markets. Let others see that the Polish nation does not wish Warsaw to be a wholesale warehouse of white female slaves.”<sup>931</sup> References to the issue of international flesh trade fuelled the criticism of the existing system even further, compelling the public’s attention across countries and consequently securing the success of the abolitionist movement. Having realised the potential of this topic, abolitionists invoked it with considerable frequency.<sup>932</sup> The topic proved convenient for many participants in the discussion (as well as for the State, as it discouraged people from emigrating), allowing them to easily gain the society’s sympathy. The trade in women was vilified by the proponents of regimentation, who used it as an argument for more State involvement in the issue, as well as by the abolitionists, who blamed the State (or the privileged classes) for tolerating

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929 Jerzy Huzarski, “Dzieje grzechu Marianny. Policja obyczajności”, *Spółeczeństwo*, no. 37 (1910).

930 Berlière, *La police*, pp. 7–10.

931 “Głos kobiet”, *Ster*, no. 5 (1909); On Englishmen’s emotion regarding the trade in British women see Philipa Levine, “Venereal Disease. Prostitution and the Politics of Empire: The Case of British India”, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 4 (1983), p. 593.

932 Bristow, *Prostitution*, p. 37; Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, pp. 250–251.

any form of prostitution. Due to its sensational nature, the subject remained a fixture in the press of the day, and the focal point of brochures and conferences (such as the one organised by the ZRKP in Warsaw). The factual and exaggerated data circulating in the society led to a kind of panic. Stories were told of innocent victims of ruthless panderers, who abducted them to brothels in faraway, overseas countries, where they were entirely isolated from the world and doomed to die a slow, agonising death.<sup>933</sup>

The fate of the regimentation system was decided primarily by the medical context, i.e. its value as the principal preventive measure against venereal diseases. In this respect, abolitionists held no doubts whatsoever – regimentationism had not served its intended purpose of limiting the incidence of the diseases. Those among abolitionist activists who used more tangible arguments (mainly doctors) pointed to the ineffectiveness of the medical examinations (superficial diagnostics, low frequency of check-ups) and treatment (discharging women that had not completely recovered).<sup>934</sup> Their conclusions were, essentially, nothing new and had already been made by the executors of the system (cf. Chapter 1), yet did help spread awareness in the society and popularise the view that the security measures taken by the State were insufficient. The alleged surety of prostitutes' health brought the opposite of their intended goal – facilitating the spread of the disease, as they gave men the illusion of safety during their congress with licensed prostitutes. What feminists saw as crucial was the moral implications of the fact that examinations were conducted solely on women (as was repeatedly emphasised). They saw it as an example of the State protecting the men who were responsible for prostitution at the expense of women; which was all the more unfair given the fact that the clients were the offenders – and prostitutes their victims.

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933 Maria Turzyna, "Handel kobietami" in: *Głos kobiet w kwestii kobiecej*, ed. Kazimiera Bujwidowa (Cracow: Nakładem Stow. Pomocy naukowej dla Polek im. J. I. Kraszewskiego, 1903), (reprinted in: *Chcemy całego życia. Antologia tekstów feministycznych z lat 1870–1939*, ed. Aneta Górnicka-Boratyńska (Warsaw: Res Publica, 1999), pp. 203–212); In 1909 alone *Czystość* published the following articles on the issue of human trafficking: "O handlu żywym towarem" (no. 22); "Handel kobietami" (no. 23); A. Wr[óblewski], "Handel kobietami na Węgrzech" (no. 26), "O handlu kobietami" (based on "Der Mädchenhandel" by doctor Schrank, no. 35, 36, 37); A. W[róblewski], "Do Żydów o handlu kobietami" (no. 37); See: Bristow, *Prostitution*, pp. 43–45; Bristow, *Vice*, p. 189.

934 "O projekcie", *Ster*, no. 4 (1909).

Opponents of regimentation also invoked empirical arguments, namely statistical data on the incidence of syphilis among prostitutes (which indicated that the majority of infected prostitutes were brothel inmates, cf. Chapter 2) and on the occurrence rates of venereal diseases in countries that abolished regimentation (Great Britain) or liberalised the system (Italy<sup>935</sup>). The variety of sources for the numbers presented, the contradictory or simply divergent, incomplete and incomparable data quoted in specialist publications and texts for the general public allowed both sides of the argument to choose and interpret their information to fit whatever thesis they wanted to present. This was hardly even a case of deliberate manipulation, but rather the result of dilettantism and an uncritical approach to information. Moreover, the commentators of the day disregarded the multitude of other factors outside of the regimentation system that could influence the society's health and had a greater impact in quickly developing countries than the existence or nonexistence of police surveillance. Abolitionists claimed that statistics showed no medical benefits of tolerating prostitution, emphasising that countries that had done away with regimentation (e.g. Great Britain) noted a decrease in the incidence of syphilis.<sup>936</sup> They refused to accept the compulsion and discrimination ingrained in the healthcare policy that was (in a slightly exaggerated view) represented by regimentationism and the steps taken by State administration. Abolitionists did not underestimate the threat of venereal diseases; to the contrary, in fact, their criticism of the existing system coincided with a period of increasing syphilophobia (see: Chapter 2), to which they also deliberately contributed, as did their ideological opponents. As with the matter of human trafficking, they used commonly shared fears to win over the public and convince more people to their ideas. However, the principal postulates of the critics of medical-and-police surveillance regarding venereal diseases included universally educating the youth about the dangers posed by such illnesses, de-stigmatising sexually transmitted diseases as shameful and regarding them as any other malady, as well as expanding the scope of free medical assistance and infrastructure. This line of thought was indubitably progressive, yet proved more than risky given the backwardness of Polish lands and the underdevelopment of healthcare in the Kingdom of Poland (and in Russia, where

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935 On 29th March 1888 Francesco Crispi oversaw the repeal of patents, compulsory examinations and hospitalisation in Italy – Gibson, *Prostitution*, pp. 52–54.

936 Zofia Sadowska, “W sprawie zniesienia reglamentacji”, *Ster*, no. 4 (1909). The journalist presented data concerning the number of syphilitic patients in the English army and navy and the decrease of the number of deaths resulting from venereal diseases (in fact, the mortality rate has never been a great problem in the case of syphilis).

all the important decisions were taken). The State's interests were not considered. Medical concerns remained in the background outside of specialist press. The readers of the press, brochures and leaflets, and the audiences at conferences, meetings and public gatherings were reminded of the subjugation and humiliation of women brought by the regulations pertaining to venereal diseases, and the malpractice they bred in the treatment of not only prostitutes, but other women (e.g. the examination of factory workers – which could have resonated with people unwilling to sympathise with the fate of public women). It was, after all, a matter of principles. Within the public discourse at the turn of the centuries, prostitution was certainly more than an aspect of the issue of syphilis. The argumentation was largely accusatory in tone. The system could not be successful, because it focused on opposing women – the victims of prostitution. The laws applied to them infringed on their basic human right to freedom. Regimentation was not the key to combating prostitution. As the physician Antoni Wysłouch put it “no rules and regulations will heal this festering ulcer on the society.”<sup>937</sup>

Abolitionists ambitiously strove towards the complete elimination of prostitution, presenting it as an all-encompassing evil directly affecting not only the hundreds of thousands (as it was believed) prostitutes worldwide, but also their clients and, through them, innocent women and children. The metaphors they chose to use were often taken from medical jargon – this was a characteristic feature of the social discourse of the day, stemming from the development of medical sciences and the impact the theory of evolution had on the perception and understanding of the social reality. Thus, abolitionists wrote of a bleeding, putrid “open and festering wound on the body of the entire society”, compared prostitution to an ulcer (one of the worst ones to affect the social organism), leprosy which “causes the organism of contemporary cultured nations to become leprous”, a gangrene of the society, a “hell of human degeneration.”<sup>938</sup> Along with venereal diseases and alcoholism, prostitution was counted among the deadly poisons of the modern human race, discussed in the press since the 1860s in connection with the alleged issue of its degeneration. These were the threats that could potentially lead to humankind's degeneracy and destruction. The perceived scale of the problem proved important for the discourse on prostitution: “Nearly 100 thousand women, pushed into the abyss of harlotry – this is no ulcer, no wound, but a general disease of ‘the social organism’, whose examination and

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937 Wysłouch, *Ohyda*, p. 9.

938 For instance – “Fejleton. Pamiętnik. Ściągnięte cugle”, *Prawda*, no. 33 (1904); Annański, “Zagadnienie prostytucji”.

treatment requires deep analysis, serious consideration, extensive means and deliberate action involving large forces and powerful energies,” noted Stanisław Koszutski.<sup>939</sup>

The connection between prostitution and disease was, therefore, three-fold: it was a symptom of the civilisation’s moral affliction, an evil and a disease in itself, and finally the direct cause of physical illness for thousands of people (syphilis and its horrifying, irreversible consequences).<sup>940</sup> Although the proponents of abolitionism questioned the role of prostitutes as the principal carriers of diseases, they did not deny or underestimate the role prostitution played in spreading infection. In the latter half of the 19th century the problem was regarded as a much graver threat than in previous decades, largely because of the thesis of the so-called secondary heredity of syphilis, popular since the 1870s, which prompted discussion on the fate of innocent children and women who were the victims of syphilis contracted by their fathers and husbands.<sup>941</sup> Following Alfred Fournier,<sup>942</sup> commentators invoked the alarmingly high incidence of infertility, miscarriage, stillbirths and infant mortality – in other words, the hecatomb of children. The fears regarding the far-reaching demographic consequences of marriages in which one partner was suffering from a venereal disease seemed justified: “Should carnal relations persist in the same conditions as they do today, the fundamental aim of sexual activity – the continuation of the species – will be lost”.<sup>943</sup>

The obsessive fear of syphilis in particular is, in itself, a fascinating topic. The scare resulted in an avalanche of texts, also literary, discussing the consequences of venereal diseases, and was one of the underlying motives behind the struggle

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939 Koszutski, “Na mównicy”. Earlier, *Głos* dubbed prostitution “the specter of physical and moral misery, irreparable in its consequences, a hundred times more devastating than the bubonic plague in Bombay” – “Głosy”, *Głos*, no. 8 (1900).

940 Cf. A. Kowalski, “W drażliwej sprawie”, *Nowe Słowo*, no. 14 (1902).

941 “The source shed light on all aspects of the issue, revealing the horror and turpitude of the terrible disease [prostitution] of the modern society, a disease which is tearing thousands of girls away from the working class every year, in secret and duplicity, and having transformed them into bodies infected with diseases and alcohol, subsequently spread the poison to the male youth, afflicting wives and children, those very women and innocents for whose alleged benefit the institution that fills any honest man with horror had been established and tolerated” – Maria Turzyma, *Wyzwalająca się kobieta* (Cracow: skł. gł. w Księgarni G. Gebethnera i Spółki, Drukarnia W. L. Anczyca i S-ki, 1906), p. 46.

942 On Fournier as “the new pope of syphilography” – Corbin, *Les Filles*, pp. 362–363, 366.

943 Annański, “Zagadnienie prostytucji”.

to introduce sexual education (others saw it as an argument to maintain a system of regimentation). A campaign was launched to enlighten the society as to the tragic consequences of the disease, even though it did not pose any direct threat (unlike e.g. tuberculosis). Doctors were often aware of the exaggerated nature of the statements, yet fuelled the fear of the pathological effects of prostitution. They provided social activists and journalists with scientific, medical arguments. Aside from unbiased information accordant with contemporaneous theories in medical science, detailing the long-term consequences of syphilis and other venereal diseases, the press and the *belles-lettres* of the day disseminated expressive descriptions of the macabre repercussions of contracting the disease – visions of appendages falling off, eyes pouring out of the skull, open wounds and ulcers.<sup>944</sup> “The hell invented by fanaticism is a fiction, yet hell on Earth does exist – its name is Syphilis”, one young journalist wrote, striking terror in the readers of *Ster*.<sup>945</sup> Diseased men frequenting brothels or prostitutes’ apartments passed their condition to their wives, and produced – as activists were convinced – diseased offspring. The same author claimed that “family homes increasingly often turn into infirmaries”. As mentioned in previous chapters, the threat of degeneracy was substantiated by the belief in the tragic consequences of congenital syphilis coupled with the conviction that the disease affects almost all men, and through them also women and children.<sup>946</sup>

The vocal objection to prostitution was therefore an expression of the growing intolerance for the existence of the phenomenon, not as a symptom of economic and social inequality experienced by tens of thousands of young women forced to sell their bodies, but as a threat to the very condition of the society consumed by various maladies, and lastly, as a reflection of the status of women and the existing state and nature of the institutions of family and marriage. Compassion for women (who were usually blameless in the situation) and the basic sense of justice made people care for the situation in which the regimentation system put any registered or even potential prostitute. The “white female slave” of the 20th century, freed by her defenders from the responsibility for her fate (choices), the victim of social and economic relations, embodied the situation of women almost perfectly. The existence of prostitution was an affront to women’s dignity and emphasised the aspect to which feminist activists were particularly sensitive – reducing a woman to a commodity, an object of sexual desire. For this

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944 For example in: “Pocałunek Almanzora!”, *Ster*, no. 10–11 (1908).

945 Joanna Olszewska, “Moralność jutra”, *Ster*, no. 8, 9 (1911).

946 Stefan Kijowski, “Z życia”, *Ster*, no. 11, 12 (1910).

reason, the champion of women's movement Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit stated that "prostitution needs to be removed from accepted customs, for health, ethics, justice and the happiness of nations demand it."<sup>947</sup>

## 2. The perceived origins of prostitution

The first task in the process of building a world without prostitution was to provide the society with an explanation of the origins of this seemingly universal and timeless phenomenon. The 19th-century discussion of the issue involved two essential hypotheses regarding the causes of prostitution, which modern social and medical science attempt to combine.<sup>948</sup> The first one assumed prostitution to be the result of social and economic changes; the other saw it as rooted primarily in biological factors. Both were given a theoretical grounding and an academic veneer already in the 19th century.

The scientific theory of the pathological origins of prostitution and the innate tendencies for lechery observable in some women was developed by the Italian psychiatrist and anthropologist Cesare Lombroso, the co-founder of the anthropological school of criminology (along with Enrico Ferri and Raffaele Garofalo).<sup>949</sup> According to his theory, "scientifically" substantiated by the results of various anthropological studies,<sup>950</sup> prostitutes were born with certain characterological propensities for the profession ("natural born prostitutes"). This

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947 "Konferencja publiczna".

948 See: Małgorzata Kowalczyk-Jamnicka, *Spoleczno-kulturowe uwarunkowania prostytucji w Polsce* (Bydgoszcz: Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczna, 1998).

949 Their works were translated into Polish: Cesare Lombroso, Guglielmo Ferrero, *Kobieta jako zbrodniarka i prostytutka* (Warsaw: H. Cohn, 1895), pp. 294, 375; An overview of their theories in: Kazimierz Imieliński, *Manowce seksu. Prostytucja* (Łódź: Res Polona, 1990), pp. 119–120, Hilde Olrik, "Le sang impur. Notes sur le concept de prostituée-née chez Lombroso", *Romantisme. Revue du dix-neuvième siècle*, no. 31 (1981), pp. 167–178.

950 By attaching electrodes to the tongue, nose, breasts, abdomen and vulva of prostitutes they "scientifically" proved that they have more tolerance for pain than other women (on whom, incidentally, such experiments were not conducted), that they display male features (especially with regard to sexual urges), and that they were, in a word "primitive men". Cesare Lombroso "discovered" that a prostitute is "a relic of an earlier stage in human evolution: mentally undeveloped, physically deformed and subhuman" – Nickie Roberts, *Whores in history. Prostitution in Western Society*, (London: Harper Collins, 1992), p. 229.

was the perceived causes of their increased sexual drive,<sup>951</sup> indolence, vanity and deviatory features. Biological preconditions were used to explain observations that seemed difficult to comprehend, especially for women – such as the fact that prostitution was sometimes the occupation of individuals who were not forced to choose it due to financial concerns. The theory was rather convenient for the privileged classes, as it absolved them of any blame for the fate of women and leading them to sell their bodies. The views of Lombroso and his school were popular and readily accepted among regimentationists; its supporters included the venereologist professor Benjamin Tarnowski, the author of a comprehensive study on regimentation and abolitionism. Furthermore, the biological theory was popularised by naturalist literature, also in Poland. Adolf Dygasiński, for instance, considered instincts and the forces of nature to be at least as important as economic and social factors.<sup>952</sup>

No theory of a pathological predestination to prostitution found support among abolitionists and proponents of thorough reforms to the morals of the day. Although observation studies of the milieu of prostitutes (scarce as they were) indicated the presence of a certain number of pathological types among them – “abnormal, evidently hysterical women and various kinds of neuropaths” – the deviation was ascribed to environmental conditioning, i.e. the extremely harsh conditions for living and socialising among the groups to which the majority of prostitutes were born; they were “the hereditarily burdened daughters of alcoholic parents.” The society and the law it developed pushed these women “into a bottomless abyss.”<sup>953</sup>

Polish abolitionists adopted the theory presenting prostitution as the product of a historically cultivated subordinate status of women and the social and economic circumstances of the modern world. The most comprehensive overview of this concept was offered by socialist authors, who portrayed the causes of

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951 Already in the late 18th century the physician Lafontaine wrote in the same vein, describing Warsaw prostitutes of the worst ilk: “Each alleyway serves as their venue for satisfying sexual urges for a small fee, for a glass of vodka” – Kausch, *Wizerunek*, p. 291.

952 Adolf Dygasiński, *Na warszawskim bruku* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1959), works: “Głód i miłość”, “Na warszawskim bruku”.

953 Stanisława Wertensteinowa, “Z truizmów życia”, *Prawda*, no. 13 (1907); Rząsnicki, “W sprawie prostytucji”; Koszutski (“Na mównicy”) argued that the hypothesis of natural born prostitutes was a misconception, as even though there were people prone to debauchery, the predisposition to sell oneself did not exist. The principal critic of this theory was Alfred Blascho.

prostitution in a systemic manner, as an element of the description of the historical process and the existing 19th-century reality. They developed a cohesive evaluation of the social and moral factors determining the demand for sexual services and supplying an army of women ready to provide them. The issue of prostitution was tackled by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, yet the work that had the greatest impact on the views of its contemporaries was August Bebel's *Woman under Socialism*,<sup>954</sup> whose theses, arguments and examples were repeated in many texts on prostitution written by leftist abolitionist activists and feminists. With regard to the Polish press, the matter was discussed nearly by all prominent thinkers and activists with socialist inclinations: Ludwik Krzywicki, Stanisław Kelles-Krauz, Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz, Stanisław Koszutski, Julian Marchlewski.<sup>955</sup> The principal authority presenting the connections between prostitution and the working class was the physician Adam Rzańnicki, who authored many articles and booklets in the issue.

August Bebel analysed the topic of prostitution from a historical perspective, in the moral and economic context, against the backdrop of the “bourgeois marriage” of the day, the status of women and the material and moral situation of the proletariat. Prostitution, he claimed, was a social construct necessary in the bourgeois world. “Marriage presents one side of the capitalist or bourgeois world; prostitution presents the other. Marriage is the obverse, prostitution the reverse of the medal.”<sup>956</sup> Arranging marriages for purely financial reasons, the obligation of marital fidelity for married women and sexual abstinence for unmarried ones, i.a. for financial reasons – all of these factors generated the demand for buying erotic love expressed by bachelors and men who found no sexual satisfaction in their marriage. They constituted an enormous market for prostitution.

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954 August Bebel, *Woman under Socialism*, trans. Daniel De Leon (New York: New York Labor News Company, 1904); the first Polish translation of this work was published in London in 1897.

955 “Prostitution is the most heinous social crime [...] it has existed in all places where the society is divided into masters and servants.” In another passage he states: “with the development of commerce and the trade in goods, the hawking of women’s bodies becomes more common. This social leprosy develops fully within societies based on free hire; prostitution takes its most hideous form, that of an organised trade, it becomes an enterprise based on the exploitation of women selling their bodies” – Julian Marchlewski, “Prostytcja”, *Głos*, no. 1 (1901).

956 Bebel, *Woman*, p. 143. The Communist Manifesto regarded prostitution as the most characteristic symptom of the deterioration of moral standards, to which capitalism was inevitably heading.

“Prostitution thus becomes a social institution in the capitalist world, the same as police, standing armies, the Church, and wage-mastership,” concluded Bebel.<sup>957</sup> His arguments regarding the status of women, all the social and gender limitations imposed upon people, and the nature of marriage at the time, no longer fulfilling its purpose, were particularly appreciated by feminists.

Referring to prostitutes themselves, Bebel described the dire situation of women of the proletariat, exploited by the labour market, struggling under the twin yoke of the home and the factory. He explained the path towards prostitution experienced by peasant women as a necessity of life, the consequence of abject poverty as well as poor morals and progressive demoralisation resulting from the social relations developed by the capitalist system and the terrible reality of working-class families in which women were forced to seek employment, while their children were being brought up by the street. Poverty, hardship, the conditions at work and at home, and unenlightenment were dooming thousands of people from the proletariat to degeneracy and the atrophy of ethical principles warding them off prostitution. “The conditions of the material kind and, consequently, ethical as well, in which the working masses live, or are forced to live, create an environment that inevitably breeds an abundance of moral leprosy,” informed Julian Marchlewski.<sup>958</sup>

Associating the underlying causes of prostitution with economic conditions seemed obvious and resulted from observations that could be made by anyone willing to see the problem. All research indicated that the majority of prostitutes hailed from the poorest classes (and remained there). The reception of such views was further facilitated by the growing feeling of disappointment with the advances of civilisation expected to arrive with the development of industry and sciences. The intelligentsia had been voicing such sentiments since the late 1880s. The public was equally dissatisfied with the tragic consequences of the social relations created by capitalism, and expressed these feelings by criticising the moral aspects of civilisation. The national ideologist Jan Ludwik Popławski presented the multi-faceted causes of prostitution (appearing to be the symptoms of an affliction of the civilisation at the time) as the price to be paid for the pace of the changes. He noted the multitude of factors stimulating debauchery, such as deliberate actions of groups who profited from it, the propaganda of moral pornography, militarism, the economic circumstances of the working class that prevented people from marrying early, and the dissemination of certain

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957 Bebel, *Woman*, p. 143.

958 Marchlewski, “Prostytycja”.

vulgarised doctrines claiming that the satisfaction of natural urges is invariably beneficial and morally right (*naturalia non sunt turpia*). “Most likely,” he wrote, “the weakening of legal familial relations, or even the existence of prostitution, are not yet tantamount to utmost sexual debauchery, yet do constitute a foundation on which it may easily develop. The conditions of professional work, both physical and intellectual, the horrible sanitary conditions of large agglomerations, the precarious, feverish life with no certainty of tomorrow, requiring strong stimuli after the depressing work, all of this contributes to neural degeneration, so to speak. On the other hand, the excess of means and pleasures coupled with an equally precarious and even more feverish existence leads to the degeneration of the privileged classes. This degeneration is the backdrop for the dissemination and development of sexual promiscuity, which may largely be considered a pathological symptom.”<sup>959</sup> Similar views were expressed in *Prawda* in 1907. “The refinement of needs, effeminacy of manners, development of life’s pleasures and increased difficulty for a man to feed a family consequently leads to marriages of financial convenience and prostitution with pandering. This is facilitated by the legally sanctioned option to manage private capital, which leads to malpractice. This option, coupled with the degenerate sexual drive which is passed down to future generations as a deviancy of the nerves or of the brain, leads men towards debauchery.”<sup>960</sup>

The economic factors behind prostitution were described in varying stages of meticulousness and accuracy, primarily pointing to the unemployment rates and the low wages offered to women. Their earnings usually did not allow them to support themselves or covered only the basic necessities, which inevitably led to disaster in the event of illness or dismissal.<sup>961</sup> Living conditions were described as particularly pathogenic – the practice of renting a single space to several families (even as many as 10 people in one room), or leasing “corners” in a room to unfamiliar women or men.<sup>962</sup> Nobody, however, used the argument that prostitution was a relatively well-paid occupation and that it could seem an easy living

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959 J-L. P[op]ławski, “Walka z rozpustą”, *Głos*, no. 6 (1892).

960 S. Wertensteinowa, “Z truizmów życia”.

961 See: the discussion on the causes of prostitution held in *Nowe Słowo* in 1902: A. Kowalewski, “W ‘drażliwej sprawie’” (no. 14); Stanisław Kelles-Krauz, “Półśrodek” (no. 19); Iza Moszczeńska, “Prostytucja i praca kobiet” (no. 24).

962 Marchlewski, “Prostytucja”. Męczkowska directly claims that the situation has a demoralising influence: “they behold the most hideous scenes. It is hardly surprising that urges are prematurely awakened, as is the wish to satisfy them?” – Męczkowska, “Moralność”.

in comparison to, for instance, factory work. Such a line of thinking excluded the element of compulsion and made it a question of choice, which abolitionists perceived as applicable only to exceptional and rare cases.

Socialists prophesised that prostitution would disappear with the fall of the capitalist system. “The victory of the proletariat”, wrote Rzaśnicki, “will be the demarcation line beyond which prostitution will cease to be the rule, and will turn into an exception.”<sup>963</sup> The fight against prostitution was therefore tantamount to the struggle against the entire social and state system in the name of the liberation of the proletariat. Friedrich Engels promised that “far from disappearing, it [monogamy] will, on the contrary, be realized completely. For with the transformation of the means of production into social property there will disappear also wage-labor, the proletariat, and therefore the necessity for a certain – statistically calculable – number of women to surrender themselves for money. Prostitution disappears; monogamy, instead of collapsing, at last becomes a reality – also for men.”<sup>964</sup>

Socialists unmasking the connections between prostitution and the system along with those who benefitted from it revealed the true nature of the alleged (and, in their eyes, duplicitous) help for prostitutes and all ideas for solving the problem proposed by groups not associated with leftist thinking. Rzaśnicki wrote: “Why, one has to do something to becalm the awakened pangs of conscience, to subdue the screaming hues, in order to continue one’s life of peace, so that one’s afternoon nap is not disturbed by the screams of victims. We know these philanthropists all too well to believe that the tears glistening in their eyes as they deliver their speeches commiserating with the fate of the ‘white female slaves’ are anything else but tears of duplicity! We claim that they are not sincere in their struggle towards the liberation of women, since we are aware that neither the contemporary society, nor the Christian-bourgeois philanthropists and moralists have any will to truly combat prostitution, because the moment the movement they themselves established gained any radical features, they would become its most vicious opponents and defend the *status quo ante*. We do not believe in the goodwill of the people, as the modern society cannot do without prostitution, and neither does it want to. We do not believe the bourgeois orators

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963 Rzaśnicki, “W sprawie prostytucji”.

964 Friedrich Engels, *On the Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, In the Light of the Researches of Lewis H. Morgan*, trans. Alick West, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1940), ([https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/origin\\_family.pdf](https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/origin_family.pdf)), p. 40.

or the representatives of the modern states, since they are at the same time proponents of public houses and the system of regimentation.”<sup>965</sup>

Owing to the efforts of the feminist and abolitionist movements, prostitution started to be associated not only with economic and social factors, but also with the discussion regarding the cultural and moral origins of the phenomenon, touching on a very wide array of topics. The condemnation of prostitution, and the energy expended to identify its causes and present them to the public, stemmed not only from feelings of compassion for proletarian prostitutes. More than any other group voicing their views on the issue, feminists linked their opinion with women’s underprivileged position in marriage and the society as a whole. Women’s rights activists put much effort into propagating a different image of prostitutes and a different approach towards them. They conceptualised and established various organisations aimed at helping prostitutes abandon their profession, described the economic factors leading women from the poorest classes to engage in prostitution, but devoted at least the same attention to matters of the family and the relations between men and women. Thereby, they touched upon issues to which prostitution was only indirectly related or served as a pretext to discuss, issues that were fundamental for the women’s rights movement and required radical reforms. Family, marriage and love were the primary fields of activity for women from the social strata whose interests feminists represented and from which they themselves hailed, stirring much emotion. The matters discussed were therefore considered important, even though most women saw feminist activists as too radical in their approach.

Debating the causes of prostitution resulted in the identification of those responsible. Almost all feminists, i.e. the radical side of the women’s movement of the early 20th century, made numerous statements accusing men and emphasising their past and present, direct and indirect responsibility for the existence of prostitution. It was one of the motifs in the discourse on the accountability of men, on whom feminist thought put the blame for the state of such “darkly viewed” civilisation.<sup>966</sup> It was “with their [men’s] money”, “for their entertainment”, due to “weakness of character” and “even weaker morals”, for the “satisfaction of their untamed animal instincts” that “dens of debauchery” were

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965 Rząśnicki, “W sprawie walki”.

966 The subject was tackled by Aneta Górnicka-Boratyńska, *Stańmy się sobq. Cztery projekty emancypacji (1863–1939)* (Izabelin: Czarna Owca, 2001), pp. 110–111. The work also discusses prostitution (pp. 9–11).

created, “dooming young maidens’ lives.”<sup>967</sup> In this context, revealing the extent of destruction wrought by prostitution, the executioner was also presented as a willing victim who loses his health and moral chastity, while in traditional discourse the criticism directed against men frequenting brothel houses pointed only to prostitution as the cause of financial ruin.

In accordance with abolitionist views, feminists questioned the reasoning behind tolerating prostitution as a necessary evil, based on the alleged nature of male sexual drive. Similarly to regimentationists, they believed the sexual practices of men to be the principal cause for the development of prostitution, but did not acknowledge these as biologically determined. In their eyes, such behaviours were the product of culture, not nature. Thus, they argued that the view which presented the satisfaction of sexual urges as necessary for men’s health and abstinence as harmful was “a monstrous lie”, “an atavistic belief”, “a hideous superstition” that needed to be rooted out.<sup>968</sup> Feminists associated with *Ster* and *Nowe Słowo* did not, however (aside from a few remarks), refer to the other premise of prostitution as a necessary evil, still popular in the 20th century, namely the view that prostitution was a means of protecting the chastity of middle-class women. Their public statements on prostitution and male sexuality, rather bold at the time when coming from women, were less focused on the sexuality of the fairer sex.<sup>969</sup> It was still a taboo subject for the majority of women’s rights activists; they were the victims of the very relations which they

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967 “After all, a prostitute is usually a mentally challenged person, a hungry creature coming from the most cruelly disowned strata of our society, often a child of 15 or 16 years of age, led astray by a ‘gentleman’ from the so-called polite society, an intelligent man, a man of a certain standing. Who, then, is the fallen one?... Who should be forbidden from committing heinous crimes? The one who, entirely consciously, commits a disgraceful deed, does fatal harm to a being that is ignorant, gullible and almost invariably naïve.” – Męczkowska, *Ruch kobiecy*, pp. 24–25; Also – W. N., “Parę słów o zbrodniach”, *Humanista Polski*, no. 3 (1913); Turzyna, “Handel kobietami”, p. 205.

968 “Na Straży. Niemożliwa propozycja”, *Ster*, no. 4 (1909); K. Bujwidowa, “O czym się nie mówi”; “O czym kobiety nie mówią”, *Ster*, no. 1 (1913).

969 On feminist views on sexuality see: Jerzy Franke, *Polska prasa kobieca w latach 1820–1918* (Warsaw: Stowarzyszenie Bibliotekarzy Polskich, 1999), pp. 235–240; Górnicka-Boratyńska, *Stańmy się sobą*, pp. 112–116; Katarzyna Dormus, *Kazimiera Bujwidowa 1867–1932. Życie i działalność społeczno-oświatowa* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo i Drukarnia ‘Secesja’, 2002), pp. 117–118; Jolanta Sikorska-Kulesza, “Prostytucja a program reformy obyczajów na początku XX w.”, in: *Spółczeństwo w dobie przemian*, pp. 119–126.

were describing and criticising, and which limited the expression of female sexuality. Perhaps this was one of the reasons why most of them demanded for the ideal of sexual temperance obligatory for women to be applied to men as well. A different opinion on the matter was voiced by Zofia Nałkowska. During the 1907 women's conference she stated: "Poverty is not the sole cause and feature of prostitution, since poverty may now be found in so many aspects of life; the selling of flesh is not a feature exclusive to prostitution, since all too often we, the so-called honest women, in our married life sell not only our bodies, but also our souls. The cause of prostitution lies in us, honest women, whose virtue, whose ethical ideals of chastity are conditioned by the existence of prostitution alone. We grow upon it like artificial flowers on a swamp – and it is we who cannot do without it, not men. They only need a woman, we only need a prostitute."<sup>970</sup> In stating: "we want a full life", Nałkowska demanded the right for women to enjoy the sexual freedom available to men: "By shunning a woman who was seduced, by cutting ties with a woman who fled her husband, by condemning any emancipated woman as fallen, by limiting her possibilities to earn money with our social and societal ostracism, we – honest, respectable ladies – make her into a prostitute or push her towards the embrace of the *demi-monde*."<sup>971</sup> However, the circle of authors writing for *Ster* distanced themselves from such "modernist" views in the vein of free love.

A key issue examined by the proponents of women's emancipation was the so-called double morality, different for men and women, a concept referring to the existence of two disparate worlds of life and values.<sup>972</sup> The struggle against this state of affairs and the acceptance thereof was ingrained in the slogans of the women's movement. In the realm of eros, the standards of double morality

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970 Zofia Nałkowska, "Uwagi o etycznych zadaniach ruchu kobiecego", in: *Chcemy całego życia* (first published in *Krytyka*, no. 11 (1907); followed by a discussion the speech generated).

971 Nałkowska, "Uwagi", p. 359. The blame lay not only on husbands frequenting houses of ill repute and fathers taking their sons to such venues, but also on mothers "looking at their misdeeds through the cracks" and often also on "women practicing prostitution under the guise of married life, selling embraces in the comfort of their homes, for money to get garments and luxuries", wrote J. P[opławski], "Walka z rozpustą", *Głos*, no. 6 (1892).

972 The issue was repeatedly tackled e.g. by Iza Moszczeńska: "Podwójna moralność", *Nowe Słowo*, no. 5 (1903); "Podwójna moralność. Kobiety upadłe", *Krytyka*, R. VI, issues 8–9, 10 (1905); "Podwójna moralność. Panowie stworzenia", *Krytyka*, R. VIII, issue 2 (1906); see also: Keith Thomas, "The Double Standard", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 20, no. 1 (1959), pp. 195–216.

required women to remain chaste, while putting no such limitations on men. In the event of a transgression, these standards dictated that the woman in question be excluded from her circles and bombarded with absolute disdain. In some social groups a person like that faced rejection from her family and could be literally thrown out from her home, which was but a step away from prostitution, whereas men were not punished for such misdemeanours in any way, be it in the personal or social sphere. This was seen as an even greater injustice given the fact that, as it was presented, women transgressed out of ignorance, weakness, love in which they lost themselves, whereas men – out of cynicism, egoism and dishonesty – nothing beyond the wish to quench “animal urges”, beyond “momentary ecstasy”. A man who seduced a woman, accused of “the first thrust” against her, could simply leave her, often with a child, and still suffer no consequences. Feminists tried to convince women who took such matters for granted that the world did not have to operate on such premises and that the situation depended on the women’s own attitude.<sup>973</sup>

The double morality that emerged over the course of history in order to guarantee the legitimacy of male offspring may have contributed to the popularity of prostitution among the middle and upper classes, ingrained in the public awareness of the fact that passion in married life is an evil. This belief must have stirred anxieties of varying nature, especially in women, and limited marital sexual activity. Thus, the passions of men, including married ones, found release in public houses, with almost official consent. The line of thinking at the time could be summarised as: “love your wife, have sex with a prostitute.”<sup>974</sup> The bourgeois morality sanctified the asexuality of a wife and mother, created an image of a wife as a Madonna, a keeper of the home and hearth, the very opposite of the sensual, sinful Magdalene, contemptible, yet indispensable for the satisfaction of the vital needs of men.<sup>975</sup>

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973 The negative consequences of such “weakness” as one of the origins of the inferior status of women were discussed by Maria Turzyma [M. Wiśniewska], *Wyzwalająca się kobieta*, pp. 1–17 (the chapter entitled “Potrójne więzy kobiety” [the threefold restraint on a woman]); Turzyma perceived these restraints in women’s nature and motherhood, whereas another activist, Kazimiera Bujwidowa, saw them in the social development of women and their acceptance of their own inferior position, hence her motto: Let us become ourselves (*Stańmy się sobą*) – Kazimiera Bujwidowa, “Stańmy się sobą”, in: *Chcemy całego życia*, pp. 290–299 (first published in *Krytyka*, Vol. 2 (1907)).

974 See: Bristow, *Vice*, pp. 52–53.

975 See e.g.: Walkowitz, *Dangerous Sexualities*, p. 370.

The commentators of the day were convinced that the services of prostitutes were a universal experience for men, a “malady of the age.” “With regard to the state of contemporary morals, no-one will likely deny that in terms of sexual deviation it has been teetering on the edge of an abyss, beyond which all humanity may face utter destruction”, noted Turzyna.<sup>976</sup> Neither feminists, nor other moralisers were interested in the habits of workers and soldiers. Their discourse on the clients of prostitutes referred to men of their own classes, whom honest women had to, so to speak, share with streetwalkers. A propaganda text by Kazimiera Bujwidowa reads: “Yet the men availing themselves of this prostitute are our ‘beloved’ fathers, husbands, brothers, our ‘respected’ members of parliament, doctors, merchants, attorneys. Thus, the cause of destroying this double morality, this duplicity of principles, is taken up by the emancipated woman.”<sup>977</sup> Turzyna posed the question: “And is this woman [a prostitute] so far removed from us? Do we not share life with her every day through our son, our brother, our husband, our friend, our acquaintance, is she not being said hello or goodbye to by the one who will become or fiancé tomorrow, who is now the beloved of our soul, and will soon be the master of our fate?” She also mentioned the consequences: “He goes there and brings disease, which he will instil in us with the first kiss of his love, which he will pass down to our children born in excruciating pain and bred with endless affection by our powerless, helpless hands. He goes there, leaving behind his respect for women, his reverence for love, his gift of feeling and giving the immense, beautiful pleasure that emerges from the mutual surrender of two pure, honest beings. There goes our love as well, and later becomes to him so sapless, excessive and incomprehensible that he returns there again, away from our arms, cold and unloving, for they no longer feel pure mutual affection.”<sup>978</sup>

The scale of men’s interest in paid sexual services is impossible to estimate; one may only reiterate the earlier conclusion that prostitutes were visited by men of all classes, from workers to the aristocracy. Surveys regarding the sexual activity of Warsaw’s students revealed that prostitutes were frequently involved in the sexual initiation of young men, and that many of them used such services on a regular basis.<sup>979</sup> An example of regarding a visit to a brothel house as a

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976 Turzyna, *Wyzwalająca się kobieta*, p. 125.

977 Bujwidowa, *Czy kobieta*, p. 13; Very similar views – M. Bujno-Arct, “Gdzie najwinniejsi”, *Prawda*, no. 22 (1905).

978 Turzyna, *Wyzwalająca się kobieta*, p. 54.

979 Łazowski, Siwicki, *Życie płciowe*; M. Falski, “Niektóre dane z życia młodzieży szkół średnich”, *Nowe Tory*, no. 9 (1906).

natural way to “satisfy an organic need,” all the more telling given that it comes from a sensitive socialist, may be found in the views of Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz. He wrote to his fiancée about his sexual chastity: “I have infringed on it twice in my life, driven by a physiological need (. . .). I have no intention of concealing from you that, when I feel a compelling need thereto, I will do so again; though, on the other hand, it is no boast when I add that I do it not to take pleasure, that I overdose not this medicine, that I suppress this need for as long as can be suppressed without harming the body and spirit”. He further explained his attitude in the reply to her next letter: “I sternly deny that such satisfaction of a natural need took away any part of my human dignity, that it has animalised me to even the smallest degree (. . .) it was so much an addressing of a physiological need on my part, so far was I from any thought of amorous pleasure, that I have not once kissed any of them, and having satisfied my need I conversed with one of them of their terrible situation and exploitation by entrepreneurs. It would be a feat indeed to find more horrible stories than the ones she told me.”<sup>980</sup> In this view, sex was utterly disconnected from any emotional attachment, which is why feminists so often wrote about “animal instincts” when tackling male sexuality.

The 21-year-old Stefan Żeromski, in turn, found visiting brothels a less-than-easy experience. He was tormented by pangs of conscience. He wrote in his journal: “Yesterday evening. . . the devil in the blood was victorious. It is a devil indeed, for it followed my every step, overwhelming my thoughts, my body – and prevailed. And so, after nearly two years, I have befouled myself and plunged into this loathsome filth, bathed therein. . . Nature and society shake hands to throw the burden of responsibility onto the individual. In their horrific brotherly embrace, a noble figure crumbles, falls and is tainted. . . Yesternight, on my way to these horrid Eumenides, who hunt the virtue of youth, to these accursed dens of dishonour – I felt only horrendous desire that seemed to me a right, as much a necessity as life – so horrible, horrible today!”<sup>981</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the issue of prostitution was related to the nature and condition of marriage at the time, and feminist press devoted much attention to exploring this connection. The greatest fault of the institution of marriage were its ties with the economy, which made it into a forced union with no warm feelings,

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980 Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz, *Listy 1890–1897*, ed. Feliks Tych (Warsaw – Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1984), Vol. 1, pp. 125, 131. In Kelles-Krauz’s case this was unlikely to be the only source of information on the suffering of the people, yet many clients came in closer contact with the lower classes only through prostitutes.

981 Stefan Żeromski, *Dzienniki*, Vol. II, p. 193. He regarded prostitution in terms of blame and punishment, as a disease to pay for “old sins, as a result of new faults” (p. 393).

in which the woman was to play the role of *une madame pour faire des enfants*,<sup>982</sup> a “pleasant pet”, an “idle female”, an “item to satisfy the instincts of men.”<sup>983</sup> The connection between marriage and prostitution was, in a way, twofold – causative (a man in a loveless marriage seeks sexual satisfaction outside of his home) and structural (marriage as the result of a contract and “selling oneself”<sup>984</sup> “loveless marriage” and “loveless harlotry”, the submissive attitude of women). The accuracy of this evaluation is another matter altogether. In any case, the harsh metaphor of a prostitute-wife was also an expression of a certain phobia regarding the social reduction of women’s role to the realm of the sexual. What feminists saw as the most important were the similarities in the fate of a wife and a prostitute, the disadvantageous position of both – as Maria Turzyna put it, marriage and prostitution were two altars on which women were the sacrifice.<sup>985</sup>

The loneliness and humiliation women experienced in marriage, the danger of being seduced and joining the armies of prostitutes, were all used by feminists to criticise the one-sided education of girls that ensured that women eternally remained “at the stage of childhood”. It gave them one more reason to propose and emphasise the need for a new model of upbringing and schooling for girls, which would prepare them for independent life, for coping with challenges, in order to avoid the fate of a “female slave.” This was the reason behind the importance of educational work and the proposal of far-reaching reform regarding women’s status in society.

### 3. Aid for prostitutes and the struggle for a new morality

Social activists, journalists, physicians and educators involved in the fight against prostitution tried to organise some forms of help for fallen women and prevent others from following in their footsteps. They also raised public awareness, hoping to elicit a change in behaviour that would eliminate prostitution from social life entirely (“The ideal to which we aspire is for the human livestock to find no buyer”<sup>986</sup> Neither of these activities was easy or brought any

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982 Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit, *Młodzież żeńska i sprawa kobieca* (Warsaw: skł. gł. w Księgarni Naukowej, 1906), pp. 16, 21.

983 Bujwidowa, *Czy kobieta*, p. 3.

984 A statement likening married women to prostitutes appeared in the very first issue of *Ster* – Zofia Lamprecht, “Prostytucja w małżeństwie”, *Ster*, no. 1 (1907). The author of the article held very similar views on men marrying to get the spouse’s dowry (calling them “prostitutes”).

985 Męczkowska, *Ruch kobiecy*, p. 22; M. Turzyna, *Wyzwalająca się kobieta*, p. 4.

986 Męczkowska, *Ruch kobiecy*, p. 26.

visible success, yet they were planned to span for many years. The degree of dissatisfaction with the existing social norms and the level of radicalism varied; sometimes, perhaps, the rhetoric of the struggle made these sentiments appear stronger than they really were. In any case, participants in this discussion directed their postulates not only at the State – its officials and politicians. They were only responsible for the abolition of the system of medical and police supervision, the de-legalisation of brothels and the strengthening of punitive measures against procurement. Abolitionists aspired to much loftier goals, imagining a world without prostitution (or, at least, with it reduced to a much smaller scale), striving for much greater, more fundamental changes than the end of regimentation. The fight against the sources of prostitution required not only legal, social and economic transformations, but a new perspective on sexual morality and the relations between genders. Thus, abolitionists appealed directly to women and men. With a hearty dose of idealism, success could have seemed easier to achieve than changes in economy, as it depended solely on the goodwill of each and every individual.

The causes of prostitution and the aims indirectly related to paid sexual services naturally put the actions of abolitionists in a broader context (apart from socialist struggles against the system) of the movement of moral reform, correlated with abolitionism.<sup>987</sup> In Polish territory, the movement was represented by youth organisations, e.g. “Ethos” and “Eleusis” in Galicia, as well as by press titles such as *Czystość* and *Przyszłość*. The most prominent role in the periodicals was played by Augustyn Wróblewski; contributors included Antoni Wysłouch and Leon Wernic.<sup>988</sup> The movement drew inspiration from the fear of the degeneration of humankind, present in public discourse since the 1860s. This outcome was presented as possible, due to, among other factors, the rampant spread of venereal diseases and alcoholism. Members of the moral reform movement strove towards the establishment of new standards of ethics, centred around the key term of “purity”. “Pure life” was regarded as the path to the rebirth of individuals and entire nations. The idea was incorporated into the feminist programme of “moral restoration.” Understood rather broadly as “the purity of thought, feelings and deeds”, the ideal also pertained to the realm of human sexuality, entailing the sanctity of pre-marital abstinence and fidelity in marriage. “The old ethical dualism can persist no longer, the demands made towards women

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987 For more on the subject see: David Pivar, *Purity Crusade: Sexual Morality and Social Control, 1868–1900* (Westport–London: Greenwood Press, 1973).

988 Pawłowska, “Kwestie etyczne-obyczajowe”, p. 576.

and regarding their chastity must be fully applied to men as well,” wrote Teodora Męczkowska in 1900.<sup>989</sup> The aim was to nurture a fitting approach towards sexual matters, a new morality in erotic relations – sex mainly for procreation, out of love and solely within the bonds of marriage. The promotion of sexual restraint required the organisation of a public educational campaign; it was one of the objectives and elements of the ongoing and proposed sexual education for children and adolescents, and the efforts to convince their parents of the benefits thereof. A resolution on the need for sexual education in the spirit of “sexual purity” was adopted by the congress of women in Cracow in 1905. The curriculum for such classes was presented at the meeting by the pioneers of Polish abolitionism – Antoni Wysłouch and August Wróblewski. Much persuasion was required to convince the public that sexual abstinence caused no harm, since the prevalent opinion (previously shared by most doctors) was that “chastity has an adverse effect on a man’s health.”

The programme of sexual education that emerged in Polish lands in the early 20th century, partially in response to the scale and consequences of prostitution, included (among many other things) the postulate of sexual chastity until matrimony, and the foregoing of paid sexual services as unhealthy, dangerous and, most of all, immoral. It also entailed a different approach to women. This last aim was to be achieved through the popularisation of a new model of child rearing.<sup>990</sup> High hopes were associated with coeducational schools. There was a consensus that the previously practiced separation of the genders at the time of physical and spiritual adolescence only “agitated the senses and cultivated wrong urges,” directing the imagination in an improper direction, leading to the development of erroneous assumptions of the opposite gender. The clash of these two very different worlds upon marriage was then believed to breed conflict and prevent understanding.<sup>991</sup> This was but a step away from paid sex. Separate education for

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989 Męczkowska, “Moralność obyczajowa”; Turzyna contested this view: “Applying to men a reverse dogma, an equivalent of that which has been affecting women, cannot be regarded as a valid solution to the problem. The demand for physical chastity as the only measure of a person’s worth is equally demeaning when applied to men, as it was when it constituted the only theoretical (if not always practical) value of a woman. Just as it created half-virgins, this measure may well create a thoroughly depraved type of man, with the preservation of physical chastity, forced for whatever reasons” – M. Turzyna, *Wyzwalająca się kobieta*, p. 125.

990 Everywhere in the world, the purity movement focused mainly on the education of the younger generations. See: Pivar, *Purity Crusade*, pp. 7–9.

991 Teodora Męczkowska, *Szkoły mieszane (koedukacyjne)* (Warsaw: M. Arcta, 1906), pp. 59, 71.

boys and girls stemmed not only from the fear of its adverse effect on the youth's moral condition, but also from the belief in the difference of the mental capacities of men and women, which naturally led to the tenet of the inherent inferiority of the fairer sex.<sup>992</sup> Coeducation was thought to decrease lustfulness in men, and teach them to respect women, treat them as partners, as “an equal human being”, not (as is widespread), as “an instrument of ecstasy or entertainment”<sup>993</sup> The new ideals to be imparted to young men included a sense of responsibility (it is immoral to seduce, and equally immoral to abandon one's own child) and the lesson that the search for pleasure was not the meaning of existence.

Looking at the issue from our modern perspective, it may seem surprising that representatives of the movement truly had faith in the transformation of human nature and the self-improvement that was to result from education and the persuasions of the (lay) moralists. As noted by Katarzyna Dormus, who analysed Bujwidowa's views, the belief is likely to have stemmed from deeply ingrained humanism, yet involved the desire to enforce a “righteous” way of thinking on all individuals for the sake of humanity – an approach that invariably leads to compulsion.<sup>994</sup> It should be emphasised that the abolitionists' attitude towards sexuality went against the new *Zeitgeist* manifesting itself in more individual freedom in the realm of sexual activity, acquiescence for erotic love outside the bonds of marriage, a more liberal approach to sex (reduced to a matter of personal opinions and individual conduct), different from the strict rules championed by the purity movement.

Amidst their work towards cultivating a new morality, the movement did not forget about tangible aid for prostitutes and women in danger of following this path. The need to help “fallen, depraved women” had been voiced earlier, even before prostitutes became the subject of public concern and attention. Warsaw had a shelter for fallen women since at least the early 1880s. Located at Żytnia Street, the institution was called *Zakład Opieki Najświętszej Marii Panny*, and belonged to a chain of the so-called Magdalene charities operating across

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992 Męczkowska, *Szkoły*, p. 60.

993 “Our task should be to remove the filth from our homes, to bring opinions on the right track, so that they stigmatise not the victim, but the perpetrator, and finally, to educate the young generations, so that they perceive a woman as a citizen, a companion in labour, a mother, a sister and a wife, and not an instrument of carnal pleasure”, wrote Bujno-Arct, “Gdzie najwinniejsi”.

994 Dormus, *Kazimiera Bujwidowa*, pp. 107, 104–120 (listing Bujwidowa's publications on ethics); See also: Katarzyna Dormus, “Warszawski ‘Ster’ (1907–1914) i jego program wychowawczy”, *Rozprawy z Dziejów Oświaty*, Vol. 49 (2000), pp. 87–110.

Europe. With the support and patronage of women from the elites of the society (e.g. Kazimiera Ożarowska in the 1890s), the shelter aimed at converting fallen women (alcoholics, thieves, prostitutes) to return to honest living.<sup>995</sup> It comprised several wooden and brick buildings, housing (or confining) around one hundred girls and women between thirteen and over forty years of age. Upon entering, these women were given new names and were forbidden to talk about the past. Their lives were filled with work (embroidery, weaving, cooking, household chores, washing) and prayer. Such education was said to bear fruit after four to six years.<sup>996</sup> Bolesław Prus, who described the institution, refrained from commenting on these methods, yet the press of the day sometimes remarked on the little to nonexistent efficacy of similar resocialisation models intended to turn prostitutes into disciplined members of the Christian community.

In 1895 lady Ludwika Moriconi organised a shelter for five girls who fled a brothel house. After several years, this “tiny space” at Grzybowska Street in Warsaw was replaced by a sizable institution in Piaseczno near Warsaw (*Schronienie św. Małgorzaty*<sup>997</sup>), sheltering 50 young women who wished to abandon prostitution and prepare for “an honest occupation and morally right conduct”. One of the contemporaneous periodicals praised it as ranking among the best-managed shelters of this kind in Europe in terms of social arrangements. By 1907 it admitted 520 prostitutes (including 310 licensed ones); only 57 failed to be resocialised. On 7th January 1908, Moriconi founded the Society of St. Margaret’s Shelter. Its charter contained plans for nationwide incentives, establishing shelters for girls and women “pulled out of prostitution” (Art. 1 mentions aid for individuals “pulled into prostitution between infancy and adulthood), separate for minors and adults, with shelters for chronically ill children to operate in association with the latter.<sup>998</sup> Article 4 ensured that a woman admitted to such a shelter would be automatically removed from the police-and-medical register.

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995 A trial held in 1882 and the subsequent information provided by readers revealed that the shelter was used to confine not only fallen women, but also young “difficult” girls left there by parents or guardians who were unable to control them – “Echa warszawskie”, *Przegląd Tygodniowy*, no. 39 (1882).

996 Prus, *Kroniki*, Vol. XV, pp. 227–229.

997 Referring to saint Margaret of Cortona, a lewd woman famous for her looks, who later became a “penitent sister” at the Third Order of Saint Francis.

998 M. Kor., “Towarzystwo Schronienia św. Małgorzaty”, *Prawda*, no. 49 (1908); See: A. Wr[óblewski], “Przytułki dla upadłych kobiet”, *Czystość*, no. 26 (1909); Tomasz Nocznicki, “Przytułek dla nieszczęśliwych kobiet”, *Czystość*, no. 28 (1909); “Konferencja w sprawie niesienia pomocy upadłym kobietom”, *Czystość*, no. 9 (1908/1909).

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In 1905, after the May pogrom of brothels in Warsaw, the Jewish Association for the Protection of Women organised a shelter for 20 prostitutes. With very modest financial resources at its disposal, the institution functioned for a year and a half, offering lodgings for 45 women.<sup>999</sup> All of such shelters used work, prayer and educational talks as the principal means for resocialisation. The press mocked them at times, questioning the effectiveness of religious practices.

The belief in the need for and the beneficial effects of extending a helping hand to fallen women was greatly tested, because many prostitutes left the shelters to go back to their former occupation.<sup>1000</sup> They found it difficult to return to normality, the habits and traits they had acquired made them recognisable; besides, not all of them had the will to exchange the life they had been living for hard work, from which many of them had fled to engage in prostitution. The low efficiency rates of “rescue work” for the benefit of public women were noted everywhere across the world.<sup>1001</sup> The observations made in the Jewish shelter for prostitutes suggested that “degenerate and corrupted from childhood, the daughters of immoral parents, they usually returned to harlotry.” Due to their way of life, “they had become excitable, and would sometimes fly into a temper” that did not allow them to live a different existence. Rehabilitation was, however, considered worthwhile in the case of women driven to harlotry by adverse circumstances (destitution, unfortunate turns of events, their own stupidity or gullibility, deception or persuasion). Out of the 45 women staying in the shelter, 6 returned to their families, 4 became servants, 3 started to work in a factory, 2 got married, 17 left the institution without permission (possibly to return to prostitution), 5 were confirmed to have returned to their former occupation, 8 remained in the shelter’s care.

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999 Wertensteinowa, “Z tragizmów życia”; After the pogrom of Warsaw’s public houses in May 1905, one of the worker’s associations decided to “offer hospitality to fallen women in order to pull these unfortunate ones from the abyss of degradation and dependence on despicable environment. Those wishing to enter the path towards self-improvement will be taken in by honest worker families, so that, under the good influence, they also get to work.” The group committed to provide these families with 10 roubles a month for the upkeep of these prostitutes, until they themselves found some employment (the funds came from private associations and charities) – “Pogrom”, *Prawda*, no. 21 (1905).

1000 Happy endings could be found in positivist novels, which portrayed the fate of prostitutes in accordance with the model: fall from grace – rehabilitation – penance and return to the society. See: Ichnatowicz, “Miasto kryminalne?”, p. 118.

1001 Evans, “Prostitution”, p. 113.

Regardless of the wishes of prostitutes themselves, charitable institutions offering help to such women were scarce. The press wrote about societies offering aid to “the outcasts of the female world” in other countries.<sup>1002</sup> Bolesław Prus acknowledged the need to establish in Warsaw a shelter for women loitering the streets, where “such paupers could receive a free meal, sit around, stay the night.”<sup>1003</sup> Charitable aid in the Kingdom of Poland, well-organised as it was, could only help a small fraction of those in need; moreover, very little of it was directed towards prostitutes. The charitable institutions (shelters, hospitals) operating in the first half of the 19th century and managed by the Church or the Charity Association (*Towarzystwo Dobroczynności*; since 1814) were, in principle, intended for the elderly and the disabled, often with the provision that they were to cater to “have-nots of good conduct”, that “priority would be given to individuals of impeccable moral bearing.” In the case of aid for young people, patrons would state that it was reserved e.g. for “maidens of good conduct and legitimate origins.”<sup>1004</sup> The specific political situation the Polish society experienced in the 19th century also had an impact on the sources of aid – the contribution of State institutions was much smaller than in other countries, especially Western Europe, where they bore the financial brunt of helping the needy.<sup>1005</sup> In the 2nd half of the century the Kingdom, or at least Warsaw, had a considerable number of charitable institutions that offered assistance in finding employment and provided shelter to people who found themselves in particularly difficult

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1002 For instance: W. Rabski, “Listy z Krakowskiego Przedmieścia”, *Kurier Warszawski*, no. 91 (1900). Rabski described the workings of ethical societies from London, Paris, Vienna and Berlin. Representatives of the institutions were sent out to walk the cities at night and invite the “outcasts of the female world” for talks. Girls wishing to abandon their occupation were provided with room and board and gradually accustomed to regular work. Next, the charitable societies “introduced the woman torn away from the mud to special classes, where she would learn tailoring, millinery, bookbinding, midwifery, etc.” Midwives reacted to such news with outrage, shocked at the prospect of former prostitutes entering their professional group; Bolesław Prus commented on this as an example of obstacles the society placed before women wishing to abandon prostitution (“every decent path is hermetically closed before the unfortunate sinners”) – Prus, *Kroniki*, Vol. 16, pp. 421–426.

1003 Prus, *Kroniki*, Vol. 16, p. 426 (an excerpt from *Gazeta Codzienna*, no. 104 (1900)).

1004 “Jak”. Fundusz ubogich panien w Wiślicy (1865 r.) – AGAD, RGOSz, j.a. 262.

1005 For more on the subject (with Warsaw as an example) see: Mazur, *Dobroczynność w Warszawie*; see also: Chlebowska, *Między Miłosierdziem*, p. 17.

circumstances.<sup>1006</sup> It may therefore be argued that they saved some percentage of women from prostitution.

Abolitionists focused on prevention, on not allowing prostitution to happen, on saving women from the trap set for them by panderers and human traffickers (hence the descriptions of the methods they were using). Their most ambitious initiative involved the creation of societies for the protection of women, modelled after the ones operating in other European countries since the late 19th century. The Christian Society for the Protection of Women was founded in 1902, the Jewish Society for the Protection of Women – in 1904.<sup>1007</sup> Their members were divided into three groups: honorary, obliged to active aid, and active (so-called agents). The latter category, exempt from membership fees (5 roubles per year), contributed by doing actual work, as it was they who implemented the statutory goals of the societies. The “legislation” of the Society defined these aims as “the protection of adolescent girls and women from downfall and leading the fallen towards the path to decency.”<sup>1008</sup> The preventive measures, listed in 10 points, included caring for children (informing courts of the need to extend care over orphans and abandoned children, helping families with limited means find supervision and activities for their offspring), young women (helping adolescent girls and young women find honest work, protecting them from danger as they sought employment, by posting special notices, in Russian, Polish and “outlander” languages, in ports and railway stations, to prevent human trafficking and the practice of whisking women away to foreign countries, helping young workers find new jobs if they found themselves out of employ in the summer when textile workshops were less productive), and rescuing the fallen (inciting young women treated in hospitals or obstetric institutes to honest work, providing help in finding employment or lodgings at an appropriate shelter).

The Christian Society intended to organise venues for leisure activities and voluntary work, in order to offer proper entertainment to young women of limited means, temporary lodgings for newcomers seeking work or changing employment, and permanent shelters for women with no families (separate for Catholics and Protestants). The funds for all of this were expected to come from membership fees, revenues from concerts, lectures, etc., as well as donations,

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1006 For a description of the forms and scope of aid see: Mazur, *Dobroczynność*, pp. 48–78 (adults), 79–105 (children).

1007 See: Mazur, *Dobroczynność*, p. 77; “Warszawskie chrześcijańskie Towarzystwo ochrony kobiet”, *Czystość*, no. 33, 34 (1909); “Żydowskie Towarzystwo o kobietach” *Czystość*, no. 33, 34 (1909).

1008 “Kronika miesiąca”, *Biblioteka Warszawska*, Vol. 1, issue 2 (1902), pp. 396–399.

bequests, and finally investments (additional capital was to be composed of some of the revenue and converted to bonds and securities). It was hoped that the Society would contribute “to keeping many beings at the level of ‘humanity’, to uplifting many souls from ruin, to stopping many others at the edge of an abyss,” yet it failed to draw enough interest to implement all its postulates and expand its activity.<sup>1009</sup> In 1904 its managers established a separate branch that was to focus on finding work for young women (free of charge for every woman who came recommended by a trustworthy citizen, vouchsafing for her diligence and industriousness). Employees of this branch had to ensure that the women received remuneration for their work, since employers would often consider the very act of hiring personnel as a great favour, as was the case with the protégées of father Kirchner’s institution seeking jobs for the destitute.<sup>1010</sup>

Other philanthropist organisations also provided indirect or direct aid to prostitutes and young women in danger of following that path. The Warsaw Association for Hygiene, for instance, opened a department of educational hygiene; the Warsaw Charitable Society had a department of orphanages, 20 activity halls and 26 sewing workshops, organised medical assistance and helped with employment. The Gentry Society also contributed, delegating members to help the personnel of the reading room of the St. Lazarus hospital read morally instructive texts to female patients.

The success of such charity work depended on the society’s attitude towards prostitutes. It required a change in approach, and a dose of compassion. Thus, contemporary evaluation of prostitutes was very different from the earlier stereotype of a lazy, degenerate woman. The new counter-stereotype stemmed from shifting the blame from the public woman to other subjects: men, the society, the State, the political system. As mentioned above, the model prostitute of anti-regimentationist journalism was a victim, an unfortunate soul, hunted, persecuted, beaten, scorned and rejected by the society, but essentially noble and morally purer than her “vampire-client.” To use an example from literature, she was Sonia from Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*.<sup>1011</sup> Owing to abolitionist

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1009 *Prawda*, no. 46 (1904); *Przegląd Tygodniowy*, no. 33 (1904).

1010 “Echa warszawskie”, *Przegląd Tygodniowy*, no. 11 (1904).

1011 One columnist writing for *Prawda* criticised the male society of righteous and religious “gentlemen” coming to the city for leisure, the “pillars of society” ready for adventure. They objectify women, “take her as if she was some instrument essential to their lordly needs”. The journalist also stated that “the greatest thief is he who, taking advantage of the circumstances, steals the life of a human being, sucks out her blood like a vampire, exploits her underdevelopment; if anyone told him that the lowliest

journalism, by the end of the 19th century the entire Europe regarded prostitutes with a note of compassion and understanding, trying to justify their actions. This led to the emergence of related charity movements.<sup>1012</sup> The change in mentality was noted in *Prawda* in 1904: “It is a noble sign of our times that increasingly often do we repent ‘fallen’ individuals into unfortunate ones (. . .) Our society finds its fault even in their misdeeds, and, in its lofty aspirations, exerts more effort to improve itself than to penalise the sinners. Amidst these aspirations, the approach to the so-called ‘fallen women’ has been greatly transformed. There are still some who spit at them, yet there also are those who grieve for them. There still are some who push them into the depths of despair, yet there are also those who rescue them from therein.”<sup>1013</sup> Feminists tried to convince their readers that “regarding a fallen woman, they ought not to feel contempt, but fill their hearts with compassion, shame and outrage at the harm that had been done in the course of the centuries.”<sup>1014</sup>

Prostitution, human trafficking and venereal diseases were real and serious problems, even if – as modern historians claim – the press exaggerated their scale. The reasons for criticising the system of regimentation went beyond the argument that it did not stop the development of prostitution or nullify the threat of venereal disease. These reasons lay beyond prostitution, as it caused and stemmed from phenomena much broader than paid sex alone.<sup>1015</sup> The debate on prostitution taking place at the time derived from the ongoing social and ideological transformations in the 19th century: the progressive democratisation of the society and the growing aspirations of the underprivileged groups (women, workers), hoping for actual freedom, equality and dignity. The women’s movement saw prostitutes as the embodiment of the subservient role women played for men, socialists regarded them as a symbol of the oppression of the working class. In the eyes of the bourgeoisie, prostitutes were harbingers of a threat to the stability of the existing social order. “Mercantile love” became a symbol of

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prostitute stands on a much higher moral ground than these righteous men who rail against depravity while secretly sneaking out to brothels, such a gentleman would be surprised and offended, and likely comment that... freemasonry on our home turf begins to take alarming forms.” The excuse they use is that “these women are clearly not forced to do anything, they pester men themselves” – “Karnawał zielony”, *Prawda*, no. 22 (1904).

1012 See: Bristow, *Vice*, p. 63; Corbin, *Les Filles*, pp. 39–41.

1013 “Fejleton. Pamiętnik, Ściągnięte cugle”, *Prawda*, no. 33 (1904).

1014 Męczkowska, “Moralność obyczajowa”.

1015 Corbin, *Les Filles*, pp. 315 and following.

the widespread decline in morals. The changing mentality and social sensitivity brought doubts and both legal and moral opposition to the system of supervision applied to prostitutes. The social reception of the theory of evolution and heredity, juxtaposed with the image of the social and moral reality of the day (defined by some as “sexual abandon”) had a profound impact on the perception of the problem, the evaluation of opinions and dangers, as well as the search for preventive measures. The debate on prostitution was, in fact, a discussion on the great issues of the day – equality, justice, liberty and morality.

