

“Public women”, police regulation of prostitution and workers in Rio de Janeiro in the Beginning of the 20th Century

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Abstract:

This article examines the social organization of the sex trade in the city of Rio de Janeiro during the period known as the First Republic (1889-1930). In the context of “non-regulationist” police’s vigilance in the turn of the 20th Century, and in the light of changing labour relations (only in 1888, in fact, slavery was abolished), the social experiences of prostitutes in Rio de Janeiro are revealing of many aspects of workers lives in that urban setting. Judicial records involving prostitutes show not only popular uses of the law, but also urban workers’ gendered sociability connected to prostitution.

In the first half of the 20th Century, two conflicting models on the policing and legal status of prostitution were at stake in many parts of the world. On the one side, the regulationist perspective, also known as the “French system”, granted prostitutes a separate status that entailed being under constant police and sanitary surveillance. On the other side, the abolitionist position, based on the critique of regulation system as immoral, illegal, and inefficient, called for the criminalisation of those who exploited prostitutes for their own benefit.

While regulation measures were supported by medical arguments on the dangers of the spread of venereal diseases, abolitionism attracted feminists and other reformists interested in the defence of individual rights, self-control, and the denunciation of the repressive effect of regulationism on young working class women. Abolitionists argued that regulation put young women under a veil of suspicion over their moral conduct. In the first decades of the 20th Century,

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regulationist systems were seen as increasingly unacceptable in the international arena, as it became clear that regulating the sex trade —thus intervening in the practice of prostitution instead of criminalising the exploitation of prostitutes— ultimately benefited pimps and favoured international traffic in women, also known as *white slavery*, until the First World War. By the mid-century, the abolitionist perspective was predominant in all international forums.

However, the main lines of this narrative do not fit well in the daily dynamics and social organization of prostitution in South American cities. For instance, Buenos Aires adopted a strong medical regulation in 1875 that lasted until the mid-1930s. It gained broad social acceptance, which included parts of the local Socialist Party. In contrast to the debate on other parts of the world, widespread stories of white slavery involving Buenos Aires did not undermine the strength of regulation practices. Rio de Janeiro was a different case: it never adopted a formal regulation. Instead, tacit powers to control and locate prostitutes were increasingly granted to the police since the last years of the 19th Century. By the 1920s (and for the rest of the century), Rio de Janeiro was known for having a “peculiar” implicit police regulation. This situation allowed Brazil to attend to international congresses against white slavery as an abolitionist country, in an attempt to differentiate from Argentina and its ill fame as a receiving centre of European women in white slavery. Both countries’ daily experiences of policing prostitution, however, cannot be easily classified into abolitionist or regulationist models.¹ Following the historian Luise White, who studied prostitution in Nairobi, it would be the case to ask whether those contexts were so peculiar that they just don’t fit anywhere or whether our categories are just too much centred on 19th Century European medical views.²

This article follows the “non-regulationist” daily practices in Rio de Janeiro during the period known as the First Republic (1889-1930). Examined in the light of local politics and changing labour relations, the social experiences of prostitutes in Rio de Janeiro can be revealing of unexpected aspects of workers lives, particularly, popular uses of the law and of some workers’ gendered sociability.

The historical process of the abolition of slavery in Brazil in 1888, together with the consolidation of an authoritarian republican regime in 1889, created the conditions that allowed Rio de Janeiro’s police to enforce a policy of surveillance and control of specific groups of prostitutes.³ This policy resulted in the increasing

clustering of prostitutes – particularly those who used to parade themselves in the doors and windows of their own homes – in designated urban spaces.

Police and court officers tried to prove that delinquents, vagrants, and pimps surrounded prostitutes. However, police and court records indicate that a very specific social space revolved around women prostitutes, their work, and the money they earned. Prostitutes were immersed in local life, which was marked by unstable hierarchies, solidarities, and conflicts between them, their neighbours, and police authorities.

1. Rio de Janeiro in the Turn of the 20th Century

Social historians locate the first Republican initiatives to police prostitution within the context of radical urban reforms which took place in Rio de Janeiro during this era. These were inspired by a hygienist ideology among the city's elite, which coalesced into public policy during the final years of the 19th century. Increased immigration from Europe and the internal migration of recently freed slaves intensified fears of social unrest. Series of repressive policies that sought to impose order and control over the burgeoning new metropolis followed. These policies had enduring consequences for the city's physical and social organization. In the first years of the 20th century, the old colonial center of Rio was demolished to make way for new, tree-lined and electrically illuminated avenues. Such measures also directly intervened in working-class cultural and life-practices, attempting to repress forms of sociability that were considered to be “unhealthy” or “backwards”.⁴

In other words, the relocation of prostitution took place alongside a radical and deep process of urban transformation that redefined the city's downtown profile in the first years of the Republic. It was not just the replacement of the old colonial houses by new and ostentatious buildings, or wide new avenues instead of the winding narrow alleys that had been typical of Rio's downtown. Urban development also meant that public officials' were determined to systematically expel various groups of workers who lived and took their leisure in that area. Police officials repeatedly justified evictions of prostitutes from the streets, where streetcars passed and “families” lived, on moral and hygienic grounds. Similar arguments were also made to justify the eviction of other groups of workers. Their collective practices were not seen as compatible with the postcard image of a modern and civilised Rio de Janeiro.⁵

The organization of the labor market for prostitution in Rio de Janeiro has been strongly marked by the racial and national origins of the women who participate in it. Rio has long been a city which has received large contingents of immigrant labor: African slaves up to the mid 19th century; Europeans (particularly the Portuguese) from the late 19th to the mid-20th century; and, finally, significant numbers of migrant workers from other parts of Brazil (in particular the northern and northeastern regions) throughout the late 19th and 20th centuries. The city has also had a historical and persistent lack of housing, which has made it seem over-populated and ramshackle. This, combined with Rio's status as Brazil's principal metropolis up to the 1950s (and its second largest city since then), has meant that the city has historically been characterized by the close proximity of different social groups and classes.

Rio's population doubled in size from 1820 to 1840, with the African presence expanding in particular during this period. By 1850, when the trans-Atlantic slave trade was finally abolished, Rio probably contained the largest urban concentration of slaves in the Americas, a characteristic that fascinated foreign visitors. The visibility and persistence of prostitution exercised by slaves and their descendants was one of the most noteworthy characteristics of the social organization of local sexual commerce throughout the 19th century. African and African-descended women were prominent in all parts of the city's service sector and it was common for carioca men to buy slaves as "prostitutes, lovers, concubines, or companions". Slave prostitution in Rio de Janeiro was therefore part of a greater continuum of activities that included domestic services, concubinage and street commerce.⁶

It should not be presumed, however, that slave prostitution was the only sort of commercial sex on display in 19th century Rio. Contemporary observers throughout the century left descriptions of various segments of the market for sexual labor, identifying hierarchies based upon the origins and racial identities of the women engaged in prostitution. The arrival of Portuguese prostitutes in the mid-19th century from the continent and the Atlantic islands (the later group being known locally as "Ilhoas") created a visible contrast with the black slave and native born free women with whom they divided the Sacramento parish downtown.

French prostitutes had been a fixture in Rio since the early 1800s. The presence of foreign-born sex workers in the city's houses of ill-repute increased in the late 19th century, however, as the city's population of European immigrants (generally male,

young and single) grew. This resulted in a popular cultural identification of two types of immigrant sex workers which would persist well into the first half of the 20th century. On the one hand, there were the women designated as “French”. In contemporary media and popular literature, they were portrayed as living in expensive hotels, elegant boarding houses, or alone. As elegant, expensive prostitutes, they were considered as exercising a civilizing influence upon the city, the distaff counterparts of a local male elite whose identity and projects for the nation were informed by an abiding Francophilia. As consumer fetishism grew in Brazil, the ability to buy “French” sex became an identifying characteristic in the construction of the carioca bourgeoisie's socially distinct masculinity.⁷

At the other extreme were the “Poles”, poor white and generally Jewish immigrants, who were popularly associated with a kind of exploitation decried by local elites and was “trafficking in women”. Polish women were, in the words of a Portuguese observer in the 1880s, “white as snow, perfect specimens of the East”, but were understood by the carioca elite as having been tricked into immigrating by “promises of an honest, hardworking life” in Brazil, ending up being prostituted by exploitative pimps. These women generally divided the same decrepit downtown knocking-shops and street spaces with Rio’s poor black and brown prostitutes and the term “Pole” was thus often applied to cheap prostitutes in general, no matter what their color or national origins.⁸

In spite of the symbolic importance of the European presence in Rio de Janeiro from 1870 onwards, however, contemporary reports indicate that Brazilian prostitutes were always in the majority among sex working women. A third category of prostitute that began to gain in popularity and visibility in the early 20th century was the mulatta. From the second decade of the 20th century on, carioca sexual humor magazines expressed local men’s ambivalent attraction to women of African descent, a situation which was to persist throughout the 20th century. The term “mulatta” became associated with sensuality and African-descended beauty, contrasting with the negative associations connected to the word “preta” (black woman), which referenced degraded sexual practices, poverty and ugliness. In an erotic story published in 1914, mulattas were cast as specializing in anal sex – the most expensive form of commercial sex – and were also understood as having a tendency to fall in love with their clients. Meanwhile, European prostitutes were characterized as being oral sex specialists and – while their technique was much appreciated – were also renowned

for practicing their trade in a mechanical and disinterested fashion, not allowing “affairs of the heart” to mix with commerce.⁹

IMAGE DI CAVALCANTI

Caption suggested: Emiliano Di Cavalcanti is one of the best known modernist painters of Rio de Janeiro’s landscape. His portraits of “mulattas” and “prostitutes” became well-known and express his concern for Brazil’s identity and social problems, a characteristic of his generation of modernists who created a long-lasting Brazilian imagery. See Daniel Balderston and others, *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Latin America and Caribbean Cultures*. NY / London: Routledge, 2012, p.306.

Over time, the terms “French” and “Pole” began to be used as short-hand for two different styles of commercial sex: the first geared towards the sensibilities of the middle- and upper-classes and the second towards the working- and lower classes. Mulattas, while generally situated towards the lower end of this dichotomous hierarchy could, in fact, be classified as “French” as well.¹⁰ In reality, these two idealized extremes of prostitution were composed of a wide spectrum of colors and nationalities, competing for space and clients in the townhouses and streets of central Rio de Janeiro. Photos of elegant prostitute boarding houses dating from the second decade of the 20th century, for example, show that these brothels contained a wide variety of racial and national “types”. Literary references also reveal such as stories as that of a well-known madam of the 1910s known as “Rocking Horse Alice”, who was described as a “great mulatta” and who was famous for treating her boardinghouse’s residents as “slaves”, but who also had many important republican politicians among her clientele.¹¹

This was one of the things that apparently worried carioca elites the most when they contemplated their city's sex trade: the organization and hierarchies of commercial sex were more complex, chaotic and less predictable than the simple division into “Poles” and “French”, “high” and “low”, could account for.

Between 1870 and 1920, moralising campaigns of successive police precinct chiefs and the daily negotiations between “window prostitutes” and various police officials gave rise to important changes in the social organisation of the sex trade in Rio de Janeiro. In 1870, the houses of “public prostitutes”, in the words of medical doctors, were located in the city’s busiest downtown streets, where “families” lived and thrived and the new streetcars were running towards the suburbs. In 1920, houses of prostitution were concentrated mainly on specific streets, especially in the more

distant area of Mangue, and the bohemian Lapa neighbourhood. In 1870, observers were discussing the presence of female slaves among those parading in the windows. They also recorded an increase in the number of women arriving from different parts of Eastern Europe, brought by unknown men. The newly arrived settled in houses also located on the busiest business streets and plazas. In the 1920 police records, Polish and Russian women appear as the most important madams in Mangue, renting rooms by the day to a large number of women, most of them Brazilian. In the midst of these visible changes, there were less evident transformations. Ideas of individual rights, labour, exploitation, and privacy that shaped public conflicts over the policing of prostitutes continued to be central, but their meanings changed significantly throughout the period.

In the following, I address the social dynamics of prostitution in the early twentieth century from different perspectives: police evictions, moral distribution of spaces inside collective dwellings, as well as relations between prostitutes, their neighbours, the police, and a variety of men who walked the city streets in their leisure time. Ultimately, the “non-regulationist” policies enforced by republican authorities resulted in discretionary police powers to define control over prostitutes and promote their spatial and social segregation. However, the women involved in the sex trade did not live as outcasts in a separate world of crime and marginality. Rather, through a network of controversial relations, they were deeply involved in local life.

2. Prostitutes face police evictions

Brazilian public debates on prostitution ultimately were related to the shaping of two different ways of thinking about the future of labour relations and politics in Brazil. These conflicting views would clash against each other in the first years of the Republic.¹² One more inclusive view sought to incorporate different sectors into the legal system. But another vision was also widespread: one who sought to define the borders between different “classes” of people and social groups, which in turn resulted in an unequal division of social goods and legal rights.

Prostitutes who became object of police attention lived in the same houses where “they worked the windows”, next to all kinds of stores and to the storeowners’ families. Although this was not the only public and blatant modality of the sex trade in the Rio de Janeiro, it was particularly visible. Prostitutes were always standing in

doorways and windows, from which they not only sought clients, but also established a close and constant exchange with other neighbours, passers-by, acquaintances and friends, and also with police agents. It was precisely due to this conspicuousness that they were more worrisome than other forms of prostitution for public authorities, journalists, and other professionals. Thus, after 1889, police measures on prostitution primarily aimed at these houses and their female occupants.

This double function of the houses of prostitution - home and workplace - turned the conflicts created by police intervention into controversies over fundamental individual rights. In 1876, protesting against the closing of windows, many claimed the constitutional principle of household inviolability. The ambiguity between the private and public use of the houses of prostitution, used to prevent their regulation, also served at the turn of the twentieth century to question and curb police intervention against them. Through *habeas corpus* claims many women successfully stopped, albeit temporarily, the invasion of their homes, eviction orders against them, and irregular arrests.¹³

In order to exercise the control over women, police officers were forced to make the most of the periods in which individual guarantees were suspended, such as during the state of siege decreed in late 1904.¹⁴ A journalist tried to define the obstacles to police action by categorizing the women as an exceptional kind of “tramp”, one who in fact had a “home address”. Police officers used the same repressive strategy against women that they had been applying to men for whom the borders between employment and unemployment were very thin. They repeatedly charged those women with vagrancy. Contrary to common “tramps”, however, these women - who police officers knew well and whose home address was known - could neither be held in jail for a long time, nor could they be prosecuted for vagrancy.¹⁵

Besides finding a way to control the exhibition of prostitutes in the public space, the republican police had to deal with the persistence of houses of prostitution in very busy business areas, where tramlines ran connecting the suburbs with the downtown. Police officers also continued to receive complaints from neighbours and storeowners. In order to deal with the situation, precinct chiefs began to lead “moralising” campaigns. The first step was to evict women from their houses. As one eviction followed another, Rio’s police began to define the districts suitable for prostitution: Lapa on the one hand, and Mangue on the other. This resulted in a very peculiar non-regulationism Brazilian-style.

The first big republican eviction wave took place in 1896 and it was heavily resisted by prostitutes, who filed *habeas corpus* claims. The streets affected were the same ones that had been at the centre of the 1876 debate, especially Senhor dos Passos Street, mostly occupied by Brazilian women (who had arrived in increasing numbers from Northeast Brazil since the last years of slavery). Another one was Sete de Setembro Street and surrounding areas, settled by a majority of European prostitutes, especially “Polish” ones. Faced with the failure of their strategy, police precinct chiefs would take years to evict prostitutes from Sete de Setembro Street. Evictions that did finally occur were effected through police initiative combined with urban reforms.

In this context, the defence of prostitutes’ individual rights and the inviolability of their homes continued to be a key strategy of prostitutes’ defenders to frustrate police evictions. When, in 1919, a judge granted a *habeas corpus* writ to the owner of a women’s boarding house who had been prevented from leaving her house by a police order, he berated the officer for treating her “like a human entity outside the law.”¹⁶ Emphasising that Rio was not a regulationist city, the judge questioned “the extraordinary and excessive measures that disgrace legal and procedural rules, which entail suspending the guarantees of individual freedom [...]” Although the judge’s argument was reminiscent of previous decades, the situation had changed dramatically. In 1919 the police prerogative to confine the houses of prostitution to certain streets was widely acknowledged. In fact, in this case the judge granted *habeas corpus* because, aside from not being allowed to exit and enter her own house, the establishment under attack was located precisely on Joaquim Silva Street in Lapa, an area where the police had already allowed prostitution. At this point, therefore, the advocacy of basic constitutional rights was no longer incompatible with the police authority over prostitutes and their homes.

It became increasingly evident that the police had gained social approval of their actions, although reservations were still voiced. In the later years of the decade of 1910, evictions affected, for the first time, what an observer called the city’s “prostitution centre,” the traditional group of streets next to the Praça da República, where houses of prostitution had been located since 1870. This eviction was not only due to usual police practices; the visit of the Belgian royalty to Rio also prompted evictions.¹⁷

In 1930, the Russian Fanny Galper remembered that massive eviction, since she herself was affected by it, having lived in Sao Jorge Street for many years. Forced to close her house, Galper moved to the heart of Mangue.¹⁸ But women like Galper were not the first to occupy the area. In 1905, another observer recalled the increase of “poor people” who had been expelled from downtown streets by city renovations, and sought room rentals “they could afford with their dwindling workers’ wages.”¹⁹ In 1916, a journalist described the opening of the first houses of prostitution in Mangue, “until then only inhabited by families.”²⁰ Complaints by working-class families – probably the same poor families that had been forced to move in some years before— did not seem to bother the police. This points to the class prejudice involved in the process of establishing moral spaces in the urban landscape.

3. Prostitutes and workers’ sociability

Prostitutes’ windows were an important site of the controversy over the policing the sex trade. Windows also mediated the contact between prostitutes and a variety of men who passed by their houses. The central role of a specific masculinity performed in public in the construction of police authority allows us to consider the possible meanings of other collective interactions, such as ritualised bantering and relations between groups of young workers and the women at the windows. Thus, the houses with their female dwellers in the streets of downtown Rio articulated multiple social relations, which could not be described only in terms of an exchange of sex for money.²¹

Windows also had a central role in the relationship established between prostitutes and various groups of neighbours. However, sometimes both parties could find themselves at the same side of the window, metaphorically speaking. Besides the repetitive and regular articles and reports in newspapers complaining about the moral promiscuity of the houses of prostitution in the city, coexistence was not always expressed in chaotic or promiscuous terms. Rather, it supposed a certain organisation and shared views about urban space and its uses.

Although their sexual availability was a recurrent theme in the prostitutes’ relationship with other groups, it was not the only feature of their interactions. For example, in 1896, many neighbours reacted negatively to the first police campaign to evict prostitutes from Sete de Setembro and Senhor dos Passos streets. When a group

of women filed a habeas corpus claim, many men offered to testify on their behalf denouncing the brutality of police actions. Moreover, in their statements men revealed surprising aspects of their lives involving the prostitutes. A Portuguese tavern owner confessed to the judge that his business had “greatly” suffered from the police persecution of prostitutes, “and sales have gone down by half since some of the women moved and the tramps disappeared.”

Another Portuguese man, who identified himself as a “worker” and resident of Senhor dos Passos Street, had himself been the victim of police abuse when he was once put in jail for participating in a “rowdy serenade” with his friends. This witness could have been what the other man called “a tramp.” However, being a victim of the same police brutality as the prostitutes, he was not exactly sympathetic to the women. Despite agreeing to testify on the women’s behalf, he had also taken the opportunity to express his personal opinion that there were still too many women in that street, and that they “were a nuisance.”²² In turn, one of the authors of the habeas corpus claim, a self-proclaimed “procurer and collector,” and former police inspector, stated that he used to accompany the women to the police station when they were taken for different reasons. He justified his actions on behalf of prostitutes by stating to the judge that he was interested in “the rights of prostitutes” because “he believes that women deserve to have a defence.”²³ The statements of the neighbours in Senhor dos Passos Street suggest the complexity and diversity of the relations between them and their unusual female neighbours. Their declarations reveal the central role played by the sex trade in articulating social relations and economic life in Rio’s downtown in the early 20th century.

Records of neighbours’ statements in habeas corpus claims or in pimping trials also reveal a great deal about the coexistence of houses of prostitution and other kinds of businesses, and how their dwellers related to each other before the wave of republican evictions. In the late 19th century, renting rooms to prostitutes was one of the most profitable deals for anyone who had a house or a room for rent. Faced with the growing housing deficit in the city, the increase in the cost of living, population growth, and real estate speculation, renting rooms in the city’s downtown could also be the only solution for many workers who preferred not to commute from distant and isolated suburbs. Prostitutes were willing to pay up to ten times more than any other worker for a front room overlooking the street.²⁴ Some of those houses were also an

important landmark for many young women newly arrived in Rio de Janeiro coming from Northeastern Brazil, or from different parts of Europe.

For many neighbours, owners of houses of prostitution were not so much considered “madams” or exploiters of women, but rather local businesswomen. Pepa Sinai, for instance, was an Austrian lady who in 1896 rented rooms in three houses around Tiradentes Plaza to women “who worked the window.” Other storeowners also knew her because she owned a deli and another boarding house where she also had male boarders.²⁵ The Portuguese lady Maria Augusta, who was in charge of a house with five women, was known to her neighbours also as the mother of a young girl recently married.²⁶ Clearly, these statements about women’s lives and the fact that “honest” men would testify on their behalf are significant. They speak of ways in which prostitutes and those who rented rooms to them related to their communities, which reveals quite a different scenario from the one portrayed in the repeated scandals, misconduct, and promiscuity associated with prostitution in newspapers at that time.²⁷

Part of the explanation for this coexistence may rest with the storeowners’ vested interest in the prostitutes’ continued presence in their streets. The Brazilian dry-cleaner Manoel Bastos Soares, who had a store on Sete de Setembro Street and lived with his family and other tenants in the back of a nearby house on the same street, came up with the idea –popular at the time-- of dividing the front of his own house into two rooms to rent them to two Austrian women.²⁸ At the very least, this entrepreneur envisioned a good economic deal.

However, this was not the only reason to rent the front rooms to prostitutes. The “moral” division between front and back followed the logic of business establishments in the same area. It was common for stores to be at the front, while owners, their families, and other tenants lived at the back, or on the second floor, away from the street. Thus, landlords did not have much choice in the matter. When a Portuguese bar owner on Sete de Setembro Street was tried as a pimp for renting the house next door to prostitutes, his lawyer argued that he simply had no other tenants for the front rooms because “in the neighbourhood, no families live on the first or second floor or stores overlooking the street.”²⁹ This explanation suggests certain logic of space distribution, generalised throughout the twenty years in which foreign prostitutes had steadily occupied the street. Relations between these women and their landlords and neighbours were much more complex than the complaints published in

newspapers indicated. The proximity to prostitutes was not completely unacceptable for the dry-cleaner Manoel and his family. Rather, most of the disadvantages of this shared existence were felt by the prostitutes themselves who, confined to the front rooms, lacked access to the facilities located at the back, such as sewers.

Police evictions disarticulated this logic of house distribution, and also the connections between prostitutes and “respectable” neighbours who could help them in their controversies with the police. Thus, by being displaced to the more distant regions of the downtown area, women became more vulnerable to “non-regulationist” police intervention in their lives.

It was evident since 1910 that the clustering of houses of prostitution was a key aspect of neighbourhood identity in Lapa, known ever since for its bohemian character, and in Mangue, which became a synonym for the most sordid kind of prostitution.³⁰ A complex, multi-class, and long lasting male sociability emerged around those prostitutes’ houses. In some contemporary and later accounts, such sociability would seem exceptional and marginal. However, even though these women were concentrated on certain streets they were not excluded from the mainstream life of Rio’s working class. Fragmentary sources of the lives of legendary Rio de Janeiro madam Alice Cavalo de Pau (Rocking Horse Alice) and her female tenants reveal how immersed they were in the daily practices of Rio’s working class men. Having moved on different occasions throughout the decade of 1910, although always within the limits of Lapa, Alice and her tenants were frequently found visiting healers (*feiticeiros*) of Cidade Nova, an area known as “little Africa,” where the main temples of Afro-Brazilian religion were located at the time. Alice also used to take part in the *Festa da Penha*, the second most popular festivity in Rio after carnival. Further, she was a regular at the famous carnival balls celebrated in many clubs of the city.³¹

Alice Cavalo de Pau’s life was not just reduced to her association with the sex trade. Neither was the case with the sociability of young male workers who used to patronize houses of prostitution. Again in the decade of 1910, an observer described a celebration in one of the many houses around the Praça da Republica, an occasion for regular clients of female tenants to eat a *feijoada* (bean and pork stew) together.³² It was not long before one grabbed a *violao* (guitar), always accompanied by a *cavaquinho* (similar to an uquelele). That was the signal “to begin the samba [...]”. At the very least, these descriptions reveal that inside the windows of the houses of

prostitution, spheres of sociability between tenants and clients were not restricted to sexual intercourse, nor were they defined solely by the conflicting and turbulent encounters mentioned in the previous section.

Through their work, prostitutes played an active role in the social experiences of some of the young male workers in Rio. Prostitutes' participation in the daily life of the city should be understood in its multiple dimensions, with the controversies and tensions it entails, and also because of the central role it played for the identities of young males in the urban landscape.

Through a peculiar “non-regulationist regulation”, the Republic's police articulated an exceptional public sphere, in which prostitutes faced threats of being reduced to “public women”. This meant that they could fall under a separate legal status and their homes turned into public houses, which could be invaded, closed, and intervened by police forces. However, prostitutes, together with their neighbours, clients, and other workers proposed an alternate public sphere, marked by relations of community and sociability.

¹ On Buenos Aires, see Donna Guy, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires. Prostitution, Family and Nation in Argentina*, Lincoln 1991. On Rio de Janeiro, Cristiana Schettini, *Que Tenhas Teu Corpo. Uma História Social da Prostituição no Rio de Janeiro das Primeiras Décadas Republicanas*, Rio de Janeiro 2006.

² Luise White, *The Comforts of Home. Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi*, Chicago 1990.

³ For an overview of the changes in labour relations with the abolition of slavery, see Fabiane Popinigis' article in this issue.

⁴ Social historians of the 1980s sought to situate prostitution within this general context, showcasing these public policies and their limitations. For a critical review of this scholarship, see Sueann Caulfield, *In Defense of Honor: sexual morality, modernity and nation in early Twentieth Century Brazil*, Durham, NC 2000.

⁵ This urban reform has been studied extensively in Brazilian historiography. See, among others, Teresa Meade, *Civilizing Rio. Reform and Resistance in a Brazilian City, 1889-1930*, University Park 1996.

⁶ Sandra L. Graham, “Slavery's impasse: slave prostitutes, small-time mistresses, and the the Brazilian law of 1871” , *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 33, 4, 1991; from the same author, also *House and street: the domestic world of servants and masters in Nineteenth Century Rio de Janeiro* Austin, TX 1992; Luis Carlos Soares, *Urban Slavery in Nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro*. London 1988.

⁷ Jeffrey Needell *A Tropical Belle Époque Elite Society and Culture in Turn-of-the-Century Rio de Janeiro* New York 1987.

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- ⁸ Schettini, 2006, s.138; Beatriz Kushnir *Baile de Máscaras – mulheres judias e prostituição: as polacas e suas associações de ajuda mútua*, Rio de Janeiro 1996.
- ⁹ Alessandra El Far *Páginas de Sensação. Literatura popular e pornográfica no Rio de Janeiro*, São Paulo 2004; Cristiana Schettini, 2006, ss.231-242.
- ¹⁰ Sueann Caulfield, "The birth of Manguê: race, nation and the politics of prostitution in Rio de Janeiro, 1850-1942", Daniel Balderston & Donna Guy (ed.) *Sex and Sexuality in Latin America*, New York 1997, ss. 86-100.
- ¹¹ Orestes Barbosa *Bambambã* Rio de Janeiro 1993[1922].
- ¹² On these clashing views of the legal status of prostitutes in the Republican regime, see Cristiana Schettini, 2006, s. 35.
- ¹³ *Habeas Corpus*: an order to bring a jailed person before a judge or court to find out if that person should really be in jail; the right of a citizen to obtain a writ of habeas corpus as a protection against illegal imprisonment.
- ¹⁴ *A Notícia*, 7 December 1904, p. 1. The state of siege was declared after the violent repression of a large popular uprising known as the "vaccine revolt". In 1904, the downtown and adjoining areas turned into a battlefield following the passage of a law that made vaccination mandatory and allowed health agents to forcibly enter people's houses. Most of the outcry in the newspapers focused on the attack against individual freedom entailed in this act. A synthesis of the historiography of that revolt and a dense narrative of the events can be found in Leonardo Pereira: *As Barricadas da Saúde. Vacina e Protesto Popular no Rio de Janeiro da Primeira República*, São Paulo 2002. See also Meade, 1996.
- ¹⁵ Among the conditions for trials against vagrancy were the lack of a job or known occupation, and the lack of a home address. Police precinct chiefs, who were much criticized by liberal constitutionalists, used vagrancy trials very liberally. See Marcos Bretas: *A guerra das ruas. Povo e Polícia na Cidade do Rio de Janeiro*, Rio de Janeiro 1997, ss. 66-68.
- ¹⁶ *A Noite*, 17 February 1919, p. 3.
- ¹⁷ See Evaristo de Moraes: *Ensaio de Patologia Social*, Rio de Janeiro 1921, pp. 282-283. The preparation for the royal visit is magisterially told by Sueann Caulfield: *In Defense of Honor. Sexual Morality, Modernity and Nation in Early Twentieth-Century Brazil*, Durham, N.C. 2000, ss. 48-78.
- ¹⁸ National Archive, Rio de Janeiro, IJJ7 – 148, Expulsion of Solly Debrotinier, 1930.
- ¹⁹ "Onde moram os pobres", *Renascença*, n.13, (Mar. 1905), 89, in: Oswaldo Porto Rocha: *A Era das Demolições. Cidade do Rio de Janeiro, 1870-1920*, Rio de Janeiro 1995, s. 84.
- ²⁰ *A Noite*, 21 January 1916, p. 1.
- ²¹ A similar perspective is developed by Lara Putnam: *The Company They Kept. Migrants and the Politics of Gender in Caribbean Costa Rica, 1870-1960*, Chapel Hill, N.C. 2002.
- ²² Statements transcribed in *O Paiz*, 22 May 1896, p. 2 and in *O Paiz*, 15 May 1896, p. 2.
- ²³ *O Paiz*, 21 May 1896, p. 2.
- ²⁴ Lilian Fessler Vaz quotes a 1906 study which revealed that the rental for a room in a boarding house was between 20\$ and 25\$, and in a tenement house between 50 and 60\$. Prostitute tenants paid at least 100\$ monthly. Lilian Fessler Vaz: *Contribuição ao estudo da produção e transformação do espaço da*

habitação popular. As habitações coletivas no Rio antigo M.A. Dissertation, PUC/UFRJ, Rio de Janeiro 1985, p. 197.

²⁵ National Archive, Rio de Janeiro, 6a. Vara Criminal, Pepa Sinai, proc.485, caixa 1983, 1897.

²⁶ National Archive, Rio de Janeiro, 6a Vara Criminal, Maria Augusta, proc. 434, caixa 1954, 1896.

²⁷ These trials for pimping are further analyzed in Schettini: Prostitutes and the law.

²⁸ National Archive, Rio de Janeiro, 6a. Vara Criminal, Manoel Bastos Soares, proc. 508, caixa 1970, 1897.

²⁹ National Archive, Rio de Janeiro, 6a. Vara Criminal, Frederico Casemiro da Silva and Adelia Visel, proc. 532, caixa 1962, 1897.

³⁰ See Sueann Caulfield, "The Birth of Manguê", 1997, ss.86-100. See also Schettini, 2006, ss. 83-88.

³¹ *Rio Nu*, October 30, 1907; 9 November 1912; 25 May 1916. See also Orestes Barbosa, 1993, s. 91 (originally published in 1922).

³² *Rio Nu*, 16 November 1910, 19 November 1910 and 7 December 1910.