

Zitierhinweis

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Jolanta Sikorska-Kulesza: *Tolerated Evil*. Prostitution in the Kingdom of Poland in the Nineteenth Century. (Polish Studies – Transdisciplinary Perspectives, Bd. 30.) Aus dem Poln. von Julita Mastalerz. Peter Lang, Berlin 2020. 353 S. ISBN 978-3-631-81584-7. (€ 78,50.)

With the recent publication of *Tolerated Evil*, international readers finally gain access to a groundbreaking work by Jolanta Sikorska-Kulesza that initially appeared in Polish in 2004 and has since acquired the status of being the fundamental study on prostitution in the Polish lands of the Russian Empire in the 100 years between 1815 and 1915. S.-K.'s book not only brought the first thorough, archive-based examination of the mechanics of regulated prostitution in the Kingdom of Poland but also initiated a new field of comprehensive research on the history of sexuality in Polish lands, divided during the long nineteenth century between the neighboring imperial powers and partially reunited only in 1918.¹

An unprecedented rise in prostitution in the nineteenth c. was due to the rapid industrialization and urbanization that widened the areas stricken by poverty, thereby supplying cities with an army of girls with no other means of subsistence. At the same time, the rigorous sexual purity imposed on women and the need for a man to achieve economic stabilization before starting a family made prostitutes indispensable for the proper functioning of bourgeois society. The dominant vision of male sexuality recognized men's physiological need to satisfy their sex drive and their inability to exercise continence. Prostitution was seen as a means to channel male urges to avoid sexual violence, meaning brothels were institutions of social benefit, especially in areas with high concentrations of soldiers or students. It was generally assumed that prohibiting prostitution would be more dangerous than tolerating and controlling it.

The first chapter, "The State versus Prostitution," thoroughly presents the legal framing of sex work. Although the historical overview goes back as far as the fifteenth c., the author highlights that the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had no consistent legislation in this regard. Prostitution became legally regularized after Poland lost its independence in the partitions. The first law was imposed in Warsaw and then in other towns by the Kingdom of Prussia, to which the former Polish capital was incorporated in 1795. The regularization from 1802 defined authorized prostitution and set the rules for its control; the control remained unchallenged until World War I, albeit the territory of its validity soon changed hands. In the Kingdom of Poland—a political unity established by the Congress of Vienna and whose initial autonomy was gradually reduced to the status of one of the provinces of the Russian Empire—prostitution remained legal and controlled by the state. In 1843, Russian bureaucracy supplemented the inherited Prussian legislation with detailed instructions for medical and police authorities to protect the population from the spread of syphilis.

The second chapter, based on official records of the local and central administration as well as transcripts of police investigations, is devoted to the "Police and Medical Supervision over Prostitution." The regularization of prostitution meant, on the one hand, state supervision exercised by medical and police committees of women registered as prostitutes and, on the other hand, the fight against illegal prostitution. Registered prostitutes had their passports stored by the police. Instead, as their identity documentation, they had to use a special booklet pointing to their profession, thus severely limiting their freedom and precluding any change in their life trajectory. The overriding aim was to protect clients from venereal infections, so the idea was to put as many women involved in prostitution under medical supervision as possible. A sophisticated tracking system registering those suspect-

¹ MARZENA LIPSKA-TOUMI: *Prawo polskie wobec zjawiska prostytucji w latach 1918–1939* [Polish Law on the Phenomenon Prostitution in the Years 1918–1939] Lublin 2014, provides an overview of the unified regulation system over prostitution put in place in the interwar Polish Second Republic.

ed of prostitution became an efficient tool for social control of women's conduct. It mainly touched women from the lower classes, especially the maidservants. However, under the legislation, any woman could be accused of prostitution, subjected to a medical examination, and eventually registered on the official list. In Warsaw, in 1841, the list included 823 names, and it reached 2,512 in 1909. There were several dozen times more illicit prostitutes. In total, the city counted over 100 prostitutes per 1,000 men aged 16–60.

Chapter three, “Legal Prostitution,” brings a meticulous social and demographic analysis of the population of registered prostitutes that refutes a few lingering beliefs. Exploring data acquired by the Statistics Department of the Ministry of the Interior in 1889, S.-K. shows, among other points, that it was not necessarily poverty that pushed women to the profession and that contrary to the stereotype, Jewish women constituted a minority among those working in brothels.

In the last chapter, “Prostitution in the Eyes of the Society,” the author points to the different discourses surrounding sexual work. As a highly visible element of the metropolitan culture, it was regularly commented on in the nineteenth c. Polish press. The theme also penetrated Polish literature, from Bolesław Prus's “The Doll” to the feminist novels of Gabriela Zapolska. At the end of the period, the abolitionist movement connected feminists and socialists in the fight to ban prostitution. However, their activities were illegal: contrary to prostitution, the Abolitionist Society, founded in 1900, operated underground.

A reader interested in those discussions, only outlined in the volume, will find a perspicuous analysis in the book published in 2015 by Keely Stauter-Halsted, highly indebted to S.-K.'s findings.² As the first Polish source-based study on the history of prostitution on Polish lands, *Tolerated Evil* has allowed many subsequent researchers to address the topic in a detailed fashion. The bibliography has been supplemented for the English language edition to reflect the most current state of the art, which is also recapitulated in the introduction.³

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² KEELY STAUTER-HALSTED: *The Devil's Chain: Prostitution and Social Control in Partitioned Poland*, Ithaca—London 2015.

³ Here should be noted the masterly work: ALEKSANDRA JAKUBCZAK: *Polacy, Żydzi i Mit Handlu Kobietami* [Poles, Jews, and the Myth of Trafficking in Women], Warszawa 2020, deconstructing the myth of Jewish trafficking in women.

Damian K. Markowski: Lwów or L'viv? Two Uprisings in 1918. Hrsg. von Anna Wolff-Powęska und Piotr Forecki. Aus dem Poln. von Jerzy Giełbutowski. (Geschichte – Erinnerung – Politik. Studies in History, Memory and Politics, Bd. 40.) Peter Lang. Berlin u. a. 2021. 407 S., 28 Ill. ISBN 978-3-631-82972-1. (€ 60,–.)

When this book was first published in Polish in 2019, it received the Janusz Kurtyka Award, named after the Polish historian who died in 2010 in the airplane crash in Smolensk that also cost the life of the Polish president Lech Kaczyński and nearly 100 other passengers. The translation into English was funded by the Janusz Kurtyka Foundation; while solid, it would have benefited from editing with an eye to idiomatic usage and readability.

The book offers a day-by-day account of the November 1918 fight for L'viv/Lwów. In the last days of Austria-Hungary, Ukrainian politicians proclaimed a Western Ukrainian People's Republic comprising all territories of Austria-Hungary with a Ukrainian majority. The centerpiece of the new republic was the eastern part of a Habsburg crownland, the Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria, known as East Galicia, where two thirds of the population were Ukrainians. The capital of the crownland, Lemberg (Ukrainian L'viv, Polish Lwów), lies in the eastern part and at the time had a slim Roman Catholic Polish majority. The second largest group in the city were Jews, who constituted almost one third of the