

Cristiana Schettini

Looking Through the Window

Prostitutes and Their Neighbours

(Rio de Janeiro, Early Twentieth Century)

ABSTRACT

This article analyses some of the debates on the regulation of sex trade in Rio de Janeiro and the enforcement of a particular set of “non-regulationist” policies at the beginning of the First Republic (1889–1930). I argue that against the background of conflicts in local politics and labour relations, “non-regulationist” policies in Rio de Janeiro opened up unexpected possibilities for prostitutes, who reinterpreted the available law in their dealings with neighbors and other workers. The historical process of the abolition of slavery in Brazil, together with the consolidation of an authoritarian republican regime, created the conditions that allowed Rio de Janeiro’s police to enforce a particular policy of surveillance and control of specific groups of prostitutes. 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. Although this process had a significant impact on the relationship between the groups of prostitutes and other workers and neighbours, it nevertheless failed to dissolve their bonds.

Keywords: prostitution, Rio de Janeiro, First Brazilian Republic, urban renewal, Buenos Aires

A very frequent statement in the historiography of prostitution in various Western contexts is that the social organisation of sex trade at the end of the nineteenth century reflected a choice between two conflicting models. The first model was a regulationist one, granting prostitutes a special legal status that entailed being under constant police and sanitary surveillance. The second model was an abolitionist one, based on the premise that regulationist systems were immoral, illegal, and inefficient. Abolitionists called for the enforcement of current legislation in order to police prostitution, focusing mainly on the criminalisation of those who exploited prostitutes for their own benefit. Studies of European regulationist systems have argued that regulatory practices had a destructive impact on the complex and fragile support networks between prostitutes and other

groups of workers. According to these analyses, state intervention ultimately created the category of a “public woman,” since regulationism prevented prostitutes from claiming other social identities, and deprived them of social roots and bonds.¹

In the case of South America, the debate revolves inevitably around two opposite and significant cases: Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro. Between 1875 and 1936, Buenos Aires regulated the sex trade through a number of city ordinances, while in Rio de Janeiro all proposals to pass regulationist legislations were systematically rejected until the 1920s. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, both Argentina and Brazil defined different styles of participation in the increasing international forums that sought to stop traffic in women; these styles were based on the different approaches to prostitution policies in their main cities. Throughout the twentieth century, regulationist systems were seen as increasingly unacceptable in the international arena, and Argentina’s image suffered greatly in the first half of the century because of its notoriety as a receiving centre of traffickers in European women for prostitution. The general belief was that regulating the sex trade – thus intervening in the practice of prostitution instead of criminalising the exploitation of prostitutes – ultimately benefited and protected pimps. Brazil, on the other hand, followed the world trend in the legislation of prostitution by refusing to apply regulatory measures and passing laws that criminalised the exploitation of prostitutes’ work.²

The polarisation between regulationists and abolitionists, so significant from the standpoint of international relations or medical debates, becomes less important when we focus on these models from the point of view of the daily practice of policing prostitutes, moving away from the preconceived international discussions. This article analyses some of the debates on the regulation of the sex trade in Rio de Janeiro and explores the enforcement of its “non-regulationist” policies in the beginning of the First Republic (1889–1930). Against the background of conflicts in local politics and labour relations, “non-regulationist” policies in Rio de Janeiro opened up unexpected possibilities for prostitutes, who reinterpreted the available law in their dealings with neighbors and other workers. The historical process of the abolition of slavery in Brazil, together with the consolidation of an authoritarian republican regime, created the conditions that allowed Rio de Janeiro’s police to enforce a policy of surveillance and control of specific groups of prostitutes. This policy resulted in the increasing clustering of prostitutes – particularly those who used to parade themselves in the doors and windows of their own

- 1 See Judith Walkowitz: *Prostitution and Victorian Society. Women, Class and the State*, Cambridge 1980, pp. 192–213.
- 2 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.

homes – in designated urban spaces. I also argue that although this process had a significant impact on the relationship between the groups of prostitutes and other workers and neighbours, it nevertheless failed to dissolve their bonds.

An approach that focuses on the experience of women, who worked as prostitutes in Rio de Janeiro at the turn of the twentieth century, sheds light on the relation between working-class sociability and changes in urban space. At the same time, it allows us to outline the social relations of the sex trade, in order to glean how contemporaries viewed prostitutes' role in working class sociability in the context of non-regulationist practices.

Police and court officers tried to prove that prostitutes were surrounded both by delinquents and vagrants, as well as by criminals that dealt with traffic in women. 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.

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 streets in the centre, 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.³ 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.

3 Rather than designating nationalities, those terms expressed a hierarchical view of foreign prostitutes. “French” women corresponded to the content of a certain style fancied by local elites, whereas Eastern European nationalities referred mainly to exotic and oppressed women in white slavery narratives. See Lená Medeiros de Menezes: *Os Estrangeiros e o Comércio do Prazer nas Ruas do Rio (1890–1930)*, Rio de Janeiro 1992, p. 44. See also Jeffrey Needell: *A Tropical Belle Époque. The Elite Culture of Turn-of-the-Century Rio de Janeiro*, Cambridge and New York 1988, ch. 5. On Jewish prostitutes, see Beatriz Kushnir: *Baile de Máscaras. Mulheres Judias e Prostituição. As Polacas e suas Associações de Ajuda Mútua*, Rio de Janeiro 1996.

The most visible aspect of such changes was the consolidation of larger processes taking place in Rio de Janeiro's urban social space in the early twentieth century. For instance, the relocation of prostitution took place alongside a radical and deep process of urban transformation that redefined the profile of the city center 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 centre. 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. The police 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.⁴

In this article, I analyse how such changes influenced the social relations between prostitutes and workers and neighbours in the city centre. Their controversial and unstable living networks were reorganised and relocated, although not actually destroyed. Even though notorious prostitutes had to leave their usual streets, they probably became more vulnerable to the discretionary action of police officers. As more immigrants from different nationalities arrived, the sex trade continued to influence the lives of many men who walked by, worked and took their leisure in the central bars, cafes, brothels and theatres.

In the first part of this article, I focus on the main topics of a large open debate triggered by a City Hall project to regulate prostitution in 1876. The plan was finally rejected, but the controversy, as reflected in the press, offers a glimpse into the organisation of sex work and its relation to the city's inhabitants at the time. The controversy also integrates some of the main debates of the following decades, particularly discussions related to the scope and limits of state intervention in the organisation of the sex trade.

In the second part, 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.

4 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. A detailed description of urban renewal is Jayme Benchimol: *Pereira Passos, um Haussmann Tropical, Rio de Janeiro 1992*.

The Failure of Tolerance

A year after Buenos Aires began regulating prostitution, Rio de Janeiro, which was by then the Brazilian imperial capital, witnessed an extensive and controversial public debate on a similar project. Submitted to the municipal chamber by a city councillor, who was also a physician, the project for Rio de Janeiro was not as detailed as the Argentine regulation. Nevertheless, with moral and hygienic concerns in mind, the councillor proposed a text that defined “houses of tolerance”, established what would be the working conditions for prostitutes, and regulated their public exhibition and circulation in the city, in a similar fashion to the law enforced in Buenos Aires.⁵

However, as its repercussion in the press demonstrated, many viewed the terms of this project as unacceptable – a perception that persisted in the following decades. In this section, I follow the 1876 public debate on the regulation of prostitution in Rio de Janeiro. I argue that Rio’s resistance to the regulationist municipal ordinances project should be read in light of the specific characteristics of the organisation of work relations in Brazil at the time, particularly the crisis of slavery, the growing abolitionist movement, and the republican movement. In the following decades, many of the terms of this debate informed controversies over the sex trade, its exploitation and its visibility in Rio’s urban space.

The failed attempt to regulate prostitution in Rio de Janeiro began with an order from the Chief of Police to his subordinates in November 1876, in which he recommended that they strengthen the control over prostitutes exposed in streets, cafes, and their own windows. One central police precinct chief not only acted against the women who infringed the law, but also took it upon himself to order that their windows should be closed at 10 pm.⁶ This triggered an immediate outcry in public opinion. During the following month, Rio’s principal newspapers devoted considerable space to either applaud or criticise police action.

Newspapers columns known as *A pedidos*, meaning literally “at the request of readers”, who could express opinions, protests and petitions by paying a small sum for being published, were filled with complaints, not so much against the order from the Chief of Police, but mainly against “the system employed by his employees in the execution of that order”, which they viewed as “arbitrary and humiliating.”⁷ Countless stories of women who “had not been the cause of any complaint”, forced to confront “policemen with no manners”, were published over the following days.⁸ Ultimately, as one reader who signed

5 Guy: *Sex and Danger*, pp. 37–76.

6 *Gazeta de Notícias*, 21 November 1876, p. 2.

7 *Gazeta de Notícias*, 20 November 1876, p. 2.

8 *Gazeta de Notícias*, 21 November 1876, p. 2.

an article as “Vigilante” asked, was the issue one of “open doors, or residents?”⁹ By referring to the moral difference among the residents behind the open doors and windows, this reader denounced the scope of arbitrariness in executing the Chief’s order, since it was police officers who were able to define which windows should be closed thus casting a shadow on the morality of specific residents. One of the consequences of such discretion was the frequent complaint by neighbours against police blunders and mistakes regarding the status of women caught at their windows.

Nevertheless, many voices were commending police actions and directing police attention to “scandalous” city areas. The streets mentioned in newspapers were in Sacramento parish, a part of the city with a buzzing business life. One journalist summarised the most important issues at stake. On the one hand, he regretted the inability of the police to deal with unrest in the streets notorious for prostitution, although he believed it was good that at least “no families lived there.” On the other hand, he believed that the situation was quite different and even outrageous on the streets “where streetcars of the Companhia de Sao Christóvão run back and forth transporting families.”¹⁰ Commentaries like this demonstrated the expectations for police action. However, such expectations went hand in hand with an entrenched disbelief in the ability of police precinct chiefs to appropriately deal with neither the propagation of prostitutes in busy streets, nor their control over the areas where they were already settled.

Many articles and complaints in Rio’s newspapers from 1876 shared similar anxieties: the visibility of prostitution in the city, as well as the inappropriateness of mixing “families”, passers-by, and prostitutes in the same space. In the midst of this discussion, in November 1876, municipal legislators began to debate a project to regulate “houses of tolerance”. The project, remarkably shorter than those enforced in other countries, together with the public debate it triggered, allows us to glimpse some of the meanings attributed to the sex trade by different social actors at the time, such as legislators, neighbourhood residents and workers.

The project had ten sections. After introducing and defining the notion of “house of tolerance”, which was meant to be occupied by more than two women working as prostitutes under the supervision of a madam, it defined the powers vested in the city hall and the police to oversee these establishments. It also specifically banned open windows “if the shutters were not closed,” thus reintroducing the controversial police order already in effect. It also prohibited masters from allowing female slaves “to live off prostitution in houses designed for that purpose,” taking up a moralising campaign that had been unleashed by a police captain a few years earlier, prompting nearly 200 lawsuits for

–9 *Jornal do Commercio*, 12 November 1876, p. 2.

10 *O Globo*, 7 November 1876, p. 2.

freedom on behalf of female slaves who worked as prostitutes in the Sacramento area.¹¹ Finally, the project foresaw the creation of a “sanitary service” for public prostitutes, in order to prevent the spread of syphilis. Rio de Janeiro’s police would be in charge of “the organisation of this service.”¹²

Few in the city remained indifferent to the regulation project. For several weeks, newspapers and their most involved readers heatedly discussed the pros and cons of the regulation. *O Globo* and *Gazeta de Noticias*, strong political allies in republican and abolitionist causes, took opposite sides in this debate.

At a time when Rio de Janeiro suffered the plight of recurring epidemics, most recently of yellow fever, and the authorities viciously described working-class residences as unhealthy and dangerous, hygienic arguments were made on both sides of the debate.¹³ Newspapers devoted much space to the discussion over the hygienic consequences of closed windows. Those who were critical of this measure believed it was a contradiction in terms, since reducing air circulation would result in worsening the already unsafe hygienic conditions of such dwellings.¹⁴ The project’s advocates, on the contrary, guaranteed that closed shutters would indeed protect the houses from excessive heat. The discussion might seem trivial. Actually, it was considerably secondary to “moral and legal order” arguments, or in other words, to the political aspects of the debate.¹⁵ However, it was precisely these arguments on unhealthiness and promiscuity that physicians advanced in the second half of the nineteenth century against a variety of tenements where the majority of urban workers, slaves, freedmen and women lived, next to the debated houses of prostitution. In other words, hygienic arguments were gaining an unforeseen political force by those years. The question of where those houses should be located was not separate from the more general controversy over the question of what to do with the mass of workers that clustered in the central neighbourhoods. Thus, the narrative on the growing immorality that seemed to threaten social order in the city may be analysed in light of the social tension that surrounded the presence and practices of other groups of workers in the city center.¹⁶

11 On those freedom lawsuits, see Sandra Graham: *Slavery’s Impasse. Slaves Prostitutes, Small-Time Mistresses, and the Brazilian Law of 1871*, in: *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 33:4 (1991), pp. 669–694, and Sidney Chalhoub: *Visões da Liberdade: uma História das Últimas Décadas de Escravidão na Corte*, São Paulo 1990, pp. 151–161.

12 The project was transcribed in *O Globo*, 24 November 1876, p. 1.

13 See Sidney Chalhoub: *Cidade Febril. Cortiços e Epidemias na Corte Imperial*, São Paulo 1996.

14 *O Globo*, 24 November 1876, p. 1.

15 A journalist stated: “It is not only hygiene that has a right to be heard on this matter. The issue is also a moral and legal one.” *O Globo*, 25 November 1876, p. 1.

16 Chalhoub: *Cidade Febril*, pp. 15–59.

The main conflict between advocates and opponents of the project of regulation, however, revolved around the anticipated political outcomes of such state intervention. Critics emphasised that adopting the regulation project would be a threat to the fundamental right of the inviolability of households. It would also relegate prostitutes to a separate legal status. Many voices argued that, despite what they were, prostitutes should not be deprived of their rights. Besides, the regulation would unleash police discretionary actions that had already been under heavy criticism.¹⁷

Along the same lines, a journalist questioned the procedure of creating a caste “outside the social order, outside law”, especially when such violence was aimed precisely at the weakest element of society, women who were “twice victimised for their abject condition and the absence of family and social esteem.”¹⁸ The recourse to notions of individual rights and constitutional guaranties allowed the author to shift the image of prostitutes: from their portrayal as threatening and outrageous elements in society to their representation as victims. The next step in this logic was to demand a law against “those tyrants who exploit and abuse the poor victims” instead of “an exceptional law against those wretched souls.”¹⁹ In this view, it was the responsibility of the state to offer protection, education, and the possibility of redemption for women who had “fallen” into prostitution.

Significantly, in this exchange – as well as in the overall debate – there was no mention of the prostitutes’ nationality or origin, or that of their “tyrannical” exploiters. In the discourse of those who criticised the regulation project, the victim-prostitute was an abstract category, faceless, and devoid of social roots. But anyone walking the streets of downtown Rio, or simply shifting through illustrations in the newspapers, would immediately realise that many of these women were of African descent, mixed with a growing minority of foreigners. Any contemporary would also remember the 1870 police campaign that had succeeded in liberating a hundred female slaves who “worked the windows”. That campaign took place while Brazilian congressmen were debating legislation to abolish slavery in a gradual way.

The decision to describe the prostitute as a “faceless victim without a past” allowed this journalist and others to avoid explicit associations between slave work and sex work, in such a politically delicate situation in which the end of slavery was at stake. However, it was popular knowledge that the debate took for granted the prostitution of female slaves,

17 *Jornal do Commercio*, 28 November 1876, p. 2.

18 *O Globo*, 25 November 1876, p. 1.

19 *O Globo*, 27 November 1876, p. 1. In fact, a broad-ranging legislation to punish pimping was approved in the first republican years. See Cristiana Schettini: *Prostitutes and the Law: the Uses of Court Cases over Pandering in Rio de Janeiro at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century*, in: Sueann Caulfield/Sarah Chambers/Lara Putnam (eds.), *Honor, Status and Law in Modern Latin America*, Durham 2005, pp. 273–294.

and this metaphor of slavery was then generalised to include other kind of women. Thus, women who were not the property of any master could be seen as virtual (white) slaves in the hands of exploiters. This case suggests how the debates and discourses that circulated in the international arena at the time acquired very specific meanings in the local context.²⁰ In the following years, the stories of traffic in European women for prostitution would gain weight and political relevance both in Europe and in the Americas. But in the Brazilian case, the narratives of “white slavery” interacted with these prior uses of slavery to speak about prostitution.

On the other end of 1876 debate, those in favour of regulating the sex trade argued that “this is not about making a law that creates a hateful exception for a class of people; it is those same people who made an exception of themselves, by exempting themselves from the duties imposed upon those who enjoy certain rights.”²¹ In other words, the people who threatened the rights of others by not complying with their moral duties justified the police’s discretionary action, state interference in matters of morality, and the assault on (prostitutes’) basic rights.²² Many of the project’s advocates offered a pragmatic justification: it was a matter of acknowledging a reality. According to one author, nobody thought that prostitution and its consequences were right, but at the same time, as one regulation defender stated, nobody thought that slavery was good either and nevertheless there were specific laws that regulated it. By making a different use of the comparison between slavery and prostitution, this author believed in the lesser evil principle: since he did not think it was advisable to end abruptly either one or the other, the best thing was to accept them, pass legislation, and keep (both) under control.²³

Therefore, debates on prostitutes 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 again clash against each other in the first years of the Republic.²⁴ 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. The fact that in 1876 representatives of both sides were

20 This argument is further developed in Cristiana Schettini: *Lavar, passar e receber visitas. Debates sobre a regulamentação da prostituição e experiências de trabalho sexual em Buenos Aires e no Rio de Janeiro, fim do século XIX*, in: *Cadernos Pagu* 25 (2005), pp. 25–54.

21 *Gazeta de Notícias*, 28 November 1876, p. 1.

22 *Gazeta de Notícias*, 2 December 1876, p. 3.

23 The gradual and slow ending of slavery was at stake in the legislation on the theme. See Chalhoub: *Visões da Liberdade*, and Joseli Mendonça: *Entre a Mão e os Anéis. A Lei dos Sexagenários e os Caminhos da Abolição no Brasil*, Campinas/São Paulo 1999.

24 On these clashing views of the legal status of prostitutes in the Republican regime, see Schettini: *Que Tenhas Teu Corpo*, p. 35.

actually Republican activists underscores the fact that, despite their common struggle to end slavery, this debate revealed they had different projects as regards the new republican society and citizenship in Brazil.

Some commentators concluded that although there might be good will on both sides, it was naive to believe that one law could change “social customs”. To think that the increased police powers would solve the disturbance caused by prostitutes’ visibility in the urban space was as ludicrous, suggested one editor, as believing that a law would actually prevent suicides or create good police officers.²⁵ It was ultimately this view that won the day.

Although the proposal to regulate houses of prostitution failed, the debate about it synthesised central issues that would cause controversy in Rio de Janeiro in the following decades, such as: the political overtones of scientific debates on state intervention in the organisation of sex work; the tension between individual rights and the protection of the common good; the decision of leaving the control and location of women in the urban space to the police; the tense relations between prostitutes and neighbours, reflected in complaints to the police and complaints against police brutality.

The early Republic (since 1889) witnessed the development of police practices adopted in light of the absence of formal regulation. However, these practices finally enforced something very similar to what journalists and chroniclers of the 1870s had described as regulation, that is, discretionary police actions that sought to isolate houses of prostitution both socially and spatially. What follows is a survey of that history and its relative failure, inasmuch as harassed women, evicted and relocated in the urban space, were still able to establish complex and lasting relations with their neighbours, and foster sociability among the working-class youth.

The Road to Eviction

It was not by chance that the “outrageous” prostitutes, who were the object of the regulationist debate in 1876, were women who lived in the same houses where “they worked the windows”. They lived next to all kinds of stores and to the shopkeepers’ 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.

25 O Globo, 27 November 1876, p. 1.

Moreover, in republican times, as in 1876, 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.²⁶

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 1904.²⁷ A journalist tried to define the obstacles to police action by categorising 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.²⁸

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 city centre. Police

26 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.

27 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 city centre 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: *Civilizing Rio*.

28 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 criticised 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, pp. 66–68. On vagrancy trials against women, see Leriche de Castro Garzoni: *Vagabundas e conhecidas: novos olhares sobre a polícia republicana (Rio de Janeiro, início século XX)*, M. A. Dissertation, Campinas 2007.

officers also continued to receive complaints from neighbours and shopkeepers. 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.

The early urban reforms in 1903 directly affected Sete de Setembro Street, which was broadened, and also the surrounding areas like the Tiradentes Plaza.²⁹ The demolition of old buildings and renovation of house fronts directly influenced the businesses and relationships around the houses of prostitution in the area. Rising real estate prices together with disgruntled shopkeepers, who strove to target a different kind of customers, created the conditions in 1904 for, once again, a police precinct chief to warn the prostitutes on Sete de Setembro to move out of their houses in five days.³⁰ The state of siege that was declared due to the repression of the vaccination revolt aided the plans of the police chief. His intention was not to define a zone for prostitutes, but to prevent them from occupying spaces in the newly restored areas that were then rebuilt and gentrified.

After this measure, Sete de Setembro finally ceased to have “window prostitutes”, who moved to other areas. Many houses of prostitution re-opened their business in the streets of Lapa, such as on the new Mem de Sá Avenue, built during the public works of urban renovation to connect the city centre with the nearby Lapa neighbourhood. Establishments that had been located in the vicinity of Praça da República (formerly Campo de Santana) since the nineteenth century moved into other streets of the same area.

The “window prostitutes” of Lapa had many comings and goings. They first settled on the main streets, in the crossings between neighbourhoods that concentrated most of the commercial establishments. As the streets where they were established varied over those years, the debates on their visibility did not. Thus, the news about the first houses established in the area were published together with the same kind of complaints of pre-

29 See Benchimol: Pereira Passos, p. 239.

30 See Tagarela, 27 October 1904.

vious decades, raving about the inappropriateness of mixing prostitutes and “families”.³¹ Although Rio de Janeiro was still officially non-regulationist city, the first records indicating that police officers were using a new strategy, authorising certain, more peripheral streets for the establishment of houses of prostitution date from the early years of the decade of 1910.³² In fact, police action sought to increase autonomy and discretionary powers, as police officers repeatedly regretted the absence of “a law or police regulation on customs” that would support their actions.³³ However, it was precisely because of the gap created by legal ambiguity that the police were able to shape specific lines of action.

In this context, the defence of prostitutes’ individual rights and the inviolability of their homes continued to be a key strategy of defenders of prostitutes 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.”³⁴ 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.³⁵

31 For early complaints see, for example, O Paiz, 16 February 1897, p. 2. See also the letters to the chief of police around 1908 in National Archive, Rio de Janeiro, GIF1, 6C – 257.

32 For instance, National Archive, Rio de Janeiro, Habeas corpus, Rosa Silva and Emma Sammans, n.796, box 1784, 6ª vara criminal, 1914.

33 For instance, see police officers’ complaints in National Archive, Rio de Janeiro, GIF1, 6C – 428.

34 A Noite, 17 February 1919, p. 3.

35 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*.

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.³⁶ 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 centre streets by city renovations, and sought room rentals “they could afford with their dwindling workers’ wages.”³⁷ In 1916, a journalist described the opening of the first houses of prostitution in Mangue, “until then only inhabited by families.”³⁸ 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.

Meanwhile, the Chief of Police, Aurelino Leal, a true advocate of “police regulation” – a phrase popular in newspapers – decided to apply a bizarre regulation system to the streets of Lapa. Contrary to the regulation project of 1876, shutters should remain closed or down *until* 10 pm.³⁹ Some years later, a journalist revealed that this rule did not last, having had the same fate as its predecessors.⁴⁰ In the end, police action had to depend, mostly, on the actions of its lower ranks. As critics of the 1876 regulation project had already observed decades before, police agents developed their own relations with the women, which did not always take the form of control and surveillance.

Moral Force and the Best Sunday Suits

The task of policing prostitutes was never a simple one. To begin with, the economic status of each party was significantly different. Even if prostitutes paid sky-high rents for houses with windows looking on to the street, they still made much more money than police officers, whose wages were always below average.⁴¹ The economic disparity in income compounded the other obstacles faced by the police in gaining the respect and obedience of these women. When a chronicler described night life on Sete de Setembro Street in 1905, he portrayed a typical scene with “slipperd *mulattas* on their tiptoes, filthy peignoirs or colourful shawls”, talking amicably with policemen who “holding

Sexual Morality, Modernity and Nation in Early Twentieth-Century Brazil, Durham 2000, pp. 48–78.

36 National Archive, Rio de Janeiro, IJJ7–148, Expulsion of Solly Debrotinier, 1930.

37 “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, p. 84.

38 A Noite, 21 January 1916, p. 1.

39 A Noite, 24 January 1916, p. 2.

40 A Notícia, 21 July 1922.

41 Bretas: A guerra das ruas, p. 49.

their arms [...] discussed with them the supremacy of their authority over that of the military police.”⁴² The intimacy with the women they were supposed to oversee resulted in everyday scenes, described and photographed by contemporaries, in which uniformed agents were observed in friendly conversation with prostitutes at their windows. Another factor which complicated this relationship even further was the rivalry between different authority figures that policed streets in the city centre at the time, especially between the civil and military police: the army, the navy, and the national guard were not innocent bystanders in this controversy.

In this context, whenever police officers sought to enforce the closed-shutters orders, they had to deal with situations that could jeopardise the very foundation of their authority. In 1902, for instance, a military policeman ordered a woman who lived and worked in one of Lapa's streets, to close her window. It was 11 pm, and the woman refused to do so, “stating that the policeman who usually patrolled that street had not issued any such order.”⁴³ The woman's refusal resulted in a heated discussion between the two agents, with the military police accusing the officer of being too feeble and permissive toward prostitutes' “abuses.”

Window prostitutes would not obey the orders of any man in uniform. Although police coercion and physical violence could reach violent peaks, the enforcement of police authority was part of a daily interaction involving a wide range of negotiations with prostitutes, in which other men also participated.

In this regard, nothing eroded the creation of male authority more than a female audience witnessing discussions among uniformed men. Civil Guard Inspector General stated this clearly in the early 1920s, when he accused a police officer of preventing the civil guards from participating in the daily vigilance of prostitutes. Once they were publicly stripped of their authority by the police officer, the Inspector's men were “forced to witness and withstand serious offences committed by prostitutes”, which deprived them of any “moral force” to act accordingly.⁴⁴ The statement describes exactly what was at stake in such cases: the daily construction of authority in personal relations, which in this case was linked to the public performance of qualities related to a certain version of masculinity. On the one hand, policemen had to avoid the image of seeming “feeble” when dealing with prostitutes, while at the same time appearing skilled at negotiating and harnessing their obedience. On the other hand, this version of masculinity implied not being questioned or discredited by men who belonged to other police corporations or who held a different rank. Agents could boast of higher orders, brand new uniforms and weapons, but without “moral force” -questioned in a public controversy between other uniformed men – it was nearly impossible to achieve successful results.

42 Rio Nu, 10 May 1905.

43 National Archive, Rio de Janeiro, Official Letter, 26 February 1902, GIF1, 6C-78.

44 National Archive, Rio de Janeiro, Official Letter, April 1923, GIF1, 6C-548.

Thus, the central role played by “window prostitutes” in the construction of police authority was directly related to the public exhibition of qualities associated with a perception of masculinity shared by other onlookers and participants. Other groups of men also participated in these dynamics, particularly young male workers in their leisure time. In the early 20th century, chronicler Joao do Rio recalled how these “working-class men in their Sunday suits” were the main characters on a Sunday in Tiradentes Plaza.⁴⁵ Gathered on the lawn and sidewalks, listening to music that was played in the houses of prostitution and entertainment, these “manual workers, coach drivers, [and] journeymen” seemed to derive their greatest pleasure in bantering with the women who stood on street corners. According to Joao do Rio, on such occasions these “grown children,” young men “generally simple and shy in the absence of female companionship, [...] found their courage in numbers and turned their lack of nerve into insolence, brutality, the desire to abuse, to hurt”, as they joked with women at windows. Joao do Rio’s narrative portrays them as infantilised bullies, suggesting lack of spirit and scarce contact with women. Nevertheless, he correctly interpreted the collective nature of the entertainment, attributing the sudden “change of behavior” to their “numbers.” For these young working men who took their leisure in the city center, the presence of *risqué* women gave them the chance to articulate a collective, boisterous, and rowdy male identity marked by aggressive jokes and propositioning.

In such collective and public performances, which elicited raucous humour, discussions, and even fights, different groups of men renewed their identities. They also confirmed the hierarchies that separated them, when different versions of masculinity were acted out in front of women. In one of the many cases recorded in the official letters between different police and military authorities, the commander of the National Guard defended his subordinates in a controversy that nearly ended in an armed struggle with Army men.⁴⁶ The commander stated that his men had reason enough to get mad, given the “permanent rivalry in the fight over common strumpets.” For him, this was an extenuating circumstance that “evidently defused the idea of collective hostility.” In his view the actions of his subordinates were quite natural and the occurrence was a misfortune. The implicit idea was that men such as soldiers, lower ranking civil guards, and also workers in their Sunday suits, possessed strong natural instincts, nearly impossible to suppress. This perception went hand in hand with the view that female prostitution was a necessary evil, since it prevented greater evils, such as sodomy. The commander’s condescending tone regarding his subordinates’ misconduct is, therefore, revealing. His depic-

45 Joao do Rio: D. Joaquina, in: Joao do Rio: A mulher e os espelhos, Rio de Janeiro 1995 [1919], pp. 25–31. p. 27.

46 National Archive, Rio de Janeiro, Official letter, 26 April 1906, GIF1, 6C–172.

tion of popular masculinity -and in some ways also Joao do Rio's- served to draw the line between men like himself governed by reason, and inferior men, governed by instinct.⁴⁷

Another chronicler, who wrote for a magazine that specialised in humour with sexual overtones, reviewed the custom of bantering with prostitutes from a perspective that seemed closer to the viewpoint of the male protagonists. “[Women] sinners,” he commented, “don’t always mind such things,” and ultimately, he concluded, “you cannot reproach a young man for bantering, sometimes even rudely, with a woman he could go to bed with if he wanted to. It’s just a question of money.”⁴⁸ Ideas about the blatant sexual availability of the women at the windows seemed to be shared by those who participated in the exchange and those who commented on them. Once they proved that the target of their joke, banter, insinuation, or proposition was a “sinner” there was nothing to be ashamed of. What divided those men were the meanings of such collective and public performances of masculinity.⁴⁹

It should not come as a surprise that those who actually suffered from these perceptions were the actual women at the windows. In 1910, a common type of case was brought to court involving three Italians – a shopkeeper, his employee, and a tailor. After drinking too much wine in a bar close to houses of prostitution, they started a fight with Edith, a window prostitute.⁵⁰ Apparently Edith, from her window, refused to have sex with any of them, which escalated the fight to physical abuse. In the ensuing trial, the attorney for the defence was surprised that Edith “felt she had a right to call the civil guard”. As the chronicler mentioned earlier, he argued that because she was a “window prostitute,” the words and gestures of her clients “should not be considered insults”. Obviously Edith disagreed with his version, and as did the passersby who backed her at the time of the assault and later testified on her behalf.

With her actions, Edith insisted upon behaving according to principles different from those expected by the men with whom prostitutes interacted. Like in many other cases, this difference –between what prostitutes did and what was expected of them—gave rise to many controversies. First, and to the Italians’ surprise, Edith was not as available as

47 On different notions of masculinity in the military, see Peter Beattie: *Conflicting Penile Codes: Modern Masculinity and Sodomy in the Brazilian Military 1860–1916*, in: Donna Guy/Daniel Balderston (eds.), *Sex and Sexuality in Latin America*, New York 1997, pp. 65–85.

48 Rio Nu, 29 April 1903.

49 It is worth comparing this view with men’s perceptions of female sexual availability in the context of deflorator trials. Caulfield argues that many men considered it only natural to have sex when the opportunity (a non-virgin woman) appeared. Caulfield: *In Defense of Honor*, ch. 4.

50 National Archive, Rio de Janeiro, OI-2370, 5ª Pretoria, José Tarantino and others, 1910. Fabiane Popinigis analysed diverse male leisure and work experiences using similar trials in *Proletários de casaca. Trabalhadores do Comércio Carioca, 1850–1911*, Campinas 2007, pp. 169–240.

she might have seemed. Second, and to the attorney's surprise, a prostitute felt she had a right to call the police to defend herself from a man's assault. Police officers – who played very well the role of executioners when evicting window prostitutes from their homes and limiting their exhibition – became crucial allies at other times, especially when the only way women had to defend themselves from aggression was to create a scandal. Mainly, women like Edith felt they had a right to certain choices. This led them to develop complex relations with other groups of workers, marked by controversy but also by their shared experience as part of the working class.

Prostitutes and Neighbours: Through the (Looking) Window

Prostitutes' windows were an important site of the controversy in policing the sex trade. Those 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.⁵¹

Windows also had a central role in the relationship established between prostitutes and various groups of neighbours. However, as in this case, 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.”

51 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 2002.

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.”⁵² 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.”⁵³ 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 city centre 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 room 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 centre 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.⁵⁴ 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, their owners 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 shopkeepers also knew her because she owned a deli and

52 Statements transcribed in *O Paiz*, 22 May 1896, p. 2 and in *O Paiz*, 15 May 1896, p. 2.

53 *O Paiz*, 21 May 1896, p. 2.

54 Lilian Fessler Vaz quotes a 1906 study which revealed that the rental for a room in a boarding house was between 20 and 25 réis, and in a tenement house between 50 and 60 réis. 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, Rio de Janeiro 1985, p. 197.

another boarding house where she also had male boarders.⁵⁵ The Portuguese lady *María 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.⁵⁶ Clearly, these statements about women's lives could be suspect, since witnesses for the defence uttered them, when those women were accused of exploiting their tenants for prostitution. However, the fact that "honest" men would testify on their behalf is in itself significant. It speaks 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.⁵⁷

Part of the explanation for this coexistence may rest with the shopkeepers' 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.⁵⁸ 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."⁵⁹ 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

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

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

57 These trials for pimping are further analysed in Schettini: *Prostitutes and the law*.

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

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

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 city centre, 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.⁶⁰ 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 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.⁶¹

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.⁶² It was not long before one grabbed a *violao* (guitar), always accompanied by a *cavaquinho* (similar to a ukulele). 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.

60 See Sueann Caulfield: *The Birth of Mangue: Race, Nation, and the Politics of Prostitution in Rio de Janeiro, 1850–1942*, in: Donna Guy/Daniel Balderston (eds.), *Sex and Sexualities*, New York 1997, pp. 86–100. See also Schettini: *Que Tenhas Teu Corpo*, pp. 83–88.

61 Rio Nu, October 30, 1907; 9 November 1912; 25 May 1916. See also Orestes Barbosa: *Bambambã*, Rio de Janeiro 1993, p. 91 (originally published in 1922).

62 Rio Nu, 16 November 1910, 19 November 1910 and 7 December 1910.

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 regulatory stance, 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.

Cristiana Schettini is a CONICET researcher (National Scientific and Technical Research Council of Argentina) at the Interdisciplinary Institute of Gender Studies (IIEGE – UBA), and a Professor at the National University of San Martín, also in Argentina. Her book *Que Tenhas Teu Corpo”: uma história social da prostituição no Rio de Janeiro das primeiras décadas republicanas* (Rio de Janeiro, 2006), won the National Archive Prize of research in Brazil.