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A HABSBURG LEGACY: SEX AND SOCIAL POLITICS IN VENEZIA GIULIA AND SLOVENIA BETWEEN THE WORLD WARS

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ABSTRACT

The governments of the newly formed and expanded states of Habsburg Central Europe began remaking society in formerly imperial spaces following Austria-Hungary's defeat in 1918. Austria-Hungary's demise as a geopolitical unit did not mean the disappearance of its administrative and juridical apparatus, some of which functioned well into the interwar era. Because bureaucratic transition did not necessarily parallel political transition, there was often no immediate, dramatic change in the regulation of prostitution—or the treatment of prostitutes and women assumed to be prostitutes—in these states. Some officials/police maintained that prostitution was a "necessary evil," and sought its continued regulation, while others sought its abolition. This article analyzes continuity and change in the treatment of prostitutes in prewar/wartime Cisleithanian Austria and postwar Venezia Giulia and Slovenia. Neighboring provinces under the Habsburg Monarchy, Italy occupied the former in late 1918, while the latter became part of Yugoslavia.

Keywords: First World War, Habsburg Monarchy, Maribor, military, prostitution, Slovenia, Trieste, venereal disease, Venezia Giulia

UN'EREDITÀ ASBURGICA: SESSO E POLITICHE SOCIALI NELLA VENEZIA GIULIA E IN SLOVENIA TRA LE DUE GUERRE MONDIALI

SINTESI

Dopo la sconfitta dell'Austria-Ungheria nel 1918, i governi degli Stati espansi di nuova formazione dell'Europa centrale asburgica cominciarono a ridisegnare la società negli spazi un tempo imperiali. La scomparsa dell'Austria-Ungheria come unità geopolitica non significò la scomparsa dei suoi apparati amministrativi e giuridici, alcuni dei quali funzionarono fino all'epoca interbellica. Poiché la transizione burocratica non andava necessariamente di pari passo con quella politica, spesso in questi Stati non si verificarono cambiamenti immediati e radicali nella regolamentazione della prostituzione o nel trattamento delle prostitute e delle donne che venivano ritenute come tali. Alcuni funzionari/poliziotti sostenevano che la prostituzione era un "male necessario" e cercavano di continuare a regolamentarla, mentre altri cercavano di abolirla. Questo articolo analizza la continuità e il cambiamento nel trattamento delle prostitute nell'Austria Cisleitania del periodo prebellico/bellico e nella Venezia Giulia e Slovenia del dopoguerra. Province confinanti sotto la monarchia asburgica, l'Italia occupò la prima alla fine del 1918, mentre la seconda divenne parte della Jugoslavia.

Parole chiave: Prima guerra mondiale, Monarchia asburgica, Maribor, esercito, prostituzione, Slovenia, Trieste, malattie veneree, Venezia Giulia

INTRODUCTION[1]

The empire was dead, long live the empire? In the liminal period between the 11 November 1918 Armistice on the Western Front and the first Treaty of Rapallo two years later, many governments in the newly formed and expanded states of Habsburg Central Europe began the complicated task of remaking their societies in formerly imperial spaces. Diplomatic, economic, legal, and political historians have long considered wars and revolutions to be key historical ruptures. But even as Austria-Hungary disappeared as a political entity, parts of it lived on, administratively, juridically, and socially/morally.[2]

There was often no immediate, dramatic change in the regulation of prostitution—or in the treatment of prostitutes and women assumed to be prostitutes—in the newly created and/or expanded nation-states, formed from the defunct multi-national Monarchy beginning in late autumn 1918. Moreover, some of these "nation-states" were in reality "mini-multinational states," which would have important implications for attitudes toward commercial sex between the wars. Across the former Habsburg lands, some officials sought to continue regulating prostitution. We can only speculate on the reasons why: Regulation of prostitution remained a popular policy, reflecting the long-held belief that prostitution was a "necessary evil," owing to men's physical needs, and that it helped channel some men's baser needs away from the bourgeois marriage bed. The continuing regulation of prostitution may also have owed to bureaucratic inertia or the tenacity of ideas about women's sexuality, among other things. European responses to prostitution after the first heady days and months of independence varied but were almost all closely interlinked with new laws on venereal disease (hereafter VD, today designated sexually transmitted infections) and public health, owing to heightened awareness of the problem in the wake of the war. VD rates had skyrocketed during wartime and did not drop immediately after 1918.[3] In some places, responses also owed to greater feminist-abolitionist interventions and to the growing influence of eugenic-racial ideas.[4] Postwar legislation still incorporated various forms of control, which reflected social concerns about and attitudes toward sexuality, particularly female, even as changes in sexual behavior and morality that had begun before 1914 persisted and deepened. This was the case in the southern territories of defeated Austria-Hungary that became part of interwar Italy and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (from 1929, Yugoslavia, which I use in this text) owing to the provisions of the Paris Peace Conference and subsequent treaties, which are the geographic focus of this article. Sometimes, as in Slovenia, brothels were soon closed while in others, like Italy, brothels remained open, and the government continued to tolerate prostitution.

The European-wide tension between police and physicians over who should oversee the regulation of prostitution—and how—that began around the fin de siècle also influenced prostitution and public hygiene policies in the late Habsburg Monarchy and the successor states. Employing a variety of archival and other contemporaneous sources, this article analyzes continuity and change in attitudes toward prostitutes, registered and clandestine (women not registered with police), from the late imperial era through the early interwar period. It also examines their treatment for venereal disease in Slovenia and Venezia Giulia (the Adriatic "New Provinces,"[5] those formerly Habsburg lands that came under Italian military rule at the war's end).

Unlike Italy, where the so-called Cavour Regulation of February 1860 was extended to unified Italy by 1871, creating a centralized, nationwide practice for regulating prostitution (Gibson, 1999, 27–34), in Austria regulation had remained both outside the law and decentralized until the Monarchy's dissolution in 1918. While prostitution was tolerated throughout the dual Monarchy, Austria and Hungary each had their own system of regulation as did Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.[6] Local police had jurisdiction over commercial sex across the Monarchy. Regulations varied by locality but were driven by government, military, and popular concerns about public morals and public health, as well as about the effectiveness of the armed forces.

1 I would like to thank—and profusely—Director Nina Gostenčnik and Reading Room Head Leopold Mikec Avberšek of the Regional Archives Maribor for kindly providing me the material on the incident at Maribor discussed here. I also thank Melissa Bokovoy, Kate Densford, Maura Hametz, Lisa Kirschenbaum, Andrea Orzoff, Jennifer Rodgers, and Rok Stergar for reading earlier versions of this article.

2 On maintaining regional liberties in formerly Habsburg regions to smooth transition to Italian sovereignty see Hametz (2005, 18–19). For a good overview on the topic, see Egry (2022, 81–102).

3 In Vienna, the former imperial capital, VD rates began to drop only in 1922 (Wingfield, 2019, 110). VD rates in newly constituted Poland continued to climb after 1918, with the Polish-Soviet War of 1919–1921 prompting a new wave of the disease (Stauter-Halsted, 2015, 324).

4 See for example Cassata (2011) chapter 2, *Eugenics and Dysgenics of War*, and chapter 3, *Regenerating Italy (1919–1924)*.

5 Imperial Austria's Adriatic provinces had been the Austrian Littoral (from 1861, it was divided into the Free City of Trieste, Istria, and Gorizia and Gradisca, which had their own administrations and assemblies, but were all subject to the governor in Trieste) and Dalmatia.

6 The regulations for prostitution in Croatia after the 1868 *Nagodba* (the Croatian–Hungarian settlement governing Croatia's political status within the Kingdom of Hungary), and in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which the Habsburg military occupied in 1878, and annexed in 1908, were independent of, but paralleled, the practices in Austria and Hungary (Filipović, 2014, 145; Kasumović, 2018, 45–46, 48).

In contrast to Italy and some other European countries, which before 1914 had instituted versions of neo-regulation, which offered professionalizing physicians greater authority over the medical supervision of prostitutes concerning VD at the expense of the vice police, there had been no such development in the Habsburg Monarchy. In fact, there had been little discussion of neo-regulation, demonstrating the persistence of Austria-Hungary's traditional treatment of prostitution as a "necessary evil" and its supervision by police. But after 1918, newly founded and existing states evinced growing interest in the health of their citizens, expanding their welfare programs. In some countries this expansion ran parallel with the adoption of neo-regulationist policies.

Concerns about public morality did not fade even as war and revolution in central and eastern Europe slowly ground to a halt and the Monarchy was dissolved. Austrian—and formerly Austrian—civilians still expended great energy denouncing one another for immoral behavior, especially illicit sex.[7] In many post-Habsburg regions, clandestine and regulated prostitution remained an important option for economic survival among working class women in the first postwar years. At the same time, police officials in the successor states, some of whom were holdovers from the Monarchy, continued to monitor regulated prostitutes and to employ methods of stemming clandestine prostitution similar to those used during wartime.[8] Across the former Monarchy, police, sometimes joined by the military, continued to target those women who lingered in low-end coffeehouses, pubs, or on certain dark streets and in alleys. They arrested women and girls—many young and unemployed, but also the occasional skilled worker—whom they caught in flagrante, had them examined for venereal disease, and forced those who were infected to report to the hospital immediately for treatment (Brunner, 1922, 91; Stauter-Halsted, 2015, 214–219; Wingfield, 2017, 247; Wingfield, 2019, 109–110). Sometimes police forced these women to register as prostitutes. Sometimes they expelled those who had *Heimatrecht/pertinency* elsewhere, after having ascertained their municipality of registration.[9] These deportations might now be across international borders.

Throughout the successor states, as exemplified by the provinces discussed in this article, new governments experimented with civilian-military cooperation to address prostitution. Specifically, local police worked closely with the military, which had been concerned about its soldiers and VD throughout the war. Military intervention into prostitution persisted into the early interwar era in the New Provinces and Slovenia, representing an important historical continuity with the Monarchy (ASTs, CGCVG; Wingfield, 2017, 227–229). Elsewhere in the former Monarchy, the local garrison and political administration cooperated on vice-police inspection of local brothels after 1918 in postwar Reichenberg/Liberec, Czechoslovakia (Wingfield, 2017, 248). The Habsburg military had been interested in public morals and public health only as far as they affected its soldiers' ability to fight. Venereal disease resulted in loss of manpower, and the "cure" (abatement of symptoms) was both expensive and time consuming. Civilian-military collaboration on the surveillance of prostitutes and women suspected of being prostitutes intensified in the successor states after 1918, because the new authorities were concerned about the restoration and maintenance of bourgeois social order in the wake of war and, sometimes, revolution. They were also concerned about building and maintaining strong "national" states. Interwar militaries, like the Habsburg military before them, remained obsessed with venereal disease, which weakened their fighting forces (Wingfield, 2017, 227–229, 248). And like the Habsburg-era police raids, the interwar police/milia raids continued to target those women they assumed were illicitly engaging in paid sex. They ignored the men with to whom these women were alleged to have sold their bodies. In both the Habsburg Monarchy and its successor states, local police and national militaries identified, arrested, and forcibly tested women suspected of prostitution; they focused on women, not men, as the source of venereal disease and its consequent disruption. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. Or, perhaps, not very much *change*.

COMMERCIAL SEX IN VENEZIA GIULIA

Italian military occupied Trieste in the immediate wake of the armistice on 4 November 1918. Shortly thereafter it began occupying the territories in the former Austrian Littoral (Küstenland) and Dalmatia that were promised to Italy by the Treaty of London. In November 1920, the first Treaty of Rapallo settled the new Yugoslav-Italian border, affirming Fiume's status as an international

7 I have discussed the wartime and postwar treatment of prostitution and VD in Habsburg Central Europe in chapter 7, "Morals and Morale during the Great War," and the epilogue of my book, *The World of Prostitution in Habsburg Central Europe* (Wingfield, 2017).

8 In the Austrian scheme of regulation, police rather than statutory criteria governed prostitution. Prostitution was illegal, but the police were not obliged to apply criminal law to those women who registered with them. Regulation occurred at the local level, so there was variation within provinces as well as between them. How—even, if—prostitution was to be tolerated was a local decision. Women who placed themselves under police supervision had to submit to weekly, sometimes, bi-weekly vaginal examinations for venereal disease and to obey other restrictions. Clandestine prostitutes, who constituted the vast majority of women who engaged in commercial sex on a regular or intermittent basis, did not register with the vice police.

9 See discussion of non-resident clandestine prostitutes' precarious situation in early postwar Fiume, today, Rijeka, in a recent analysis of Heimatrecht/pertinency, which municipality was responsible for providing individual registered there their social benefits (Reill et al., 2022).

city and awarding Trieste, Istria, Gorizia-Gradisca, and the western part of Carniola as well as Zara and several Dalmatian islands to Italy (Bucarelli & Zaccaria, 2020). Venezia Giulia, whose capital was Trieste, was subject to the General Secretary of Civil Affairs under the Supreme Command of the Army until the Ministry for the New Provinces was established in July 1919.

The regulation of prostitution in the New Provinces constitutes a little-known example of continuity from the rule of imperial Austria to that of interwar Italy. In the New Provinces, the Italian government simply maintained much Habsburg-era regulation and civil legislation rather than adopting the neo-regulatory approach common in other Italian lands. Although before 1914, the Habsburg surveillance of registered and clandestine prostitutes had primarily focused on protecting the bourgeois family, it expanded during wartime to the defense of the military. The governments of rump Austria and the New Provinces remained focused on the wellbeing of the military after 1918.

The rest of Italy would shortly move away from neo-regulation, however. As historian Victoria de Grazia has explained, soon after Benito Mussolini seized power in October 1922, his fascist government employed new public security laws in their efforts to remove illicit sexuality from public space (de Grazia, 1992, 44). Mussolini overhauled first the health system in 1923 and then the entire legal system at the end of the 1920s. In practice this meant abandoning the neo-regulationist system that had been in place for several decades. Brothel and independent prostitutes across Italy as in the New Provinces, were soon issued health books, which contained the record of their regular vaginal examinations for VD.

Multi-ethnic Trieste, the fourth most populous city in the Habsburg Monarchy, and by far the largest of the cities in the New Provinces, was the focus of much of the Italian army's attention to commercial sex and venereal disease. From the very outset of the occupation, Italian military officials analyzed commercial sex above all in the context of their soldiers' health. Indeed, the military's correspondence with the relevant provincial health officials in Venezia Giulia included reports on prophylactic measures for venereal disease in relation to prostitution in Trieste, as well as provisions for the functioning of brothels in the city.

A flurry of correspondence beginning in November 1918 among the military, police, and the Venezia Giulia provincial health office epitomizes the postwar discussion in Trieste about the relationship between prostitution and the spread of venereal disease that highlighted ongoing concern about the spread of VD in the military. Authorities evaluated the city's brothels in terms of hygiene, cleanliness, and supervision, reflecting assumptions about the military's need for regulated prostitution, also in times of occupation and demobilization. An 11 November report observed that the number of brothels operating in Trieste had dropped to twenty at the war's end. This decline reflected the relatively limited number of clients the women had served during four years of mobilization of most able-bodied men. Although the Triestine brothels could house a total of 200 women, the report noted that they had only 130 residents, "mainly Hungarians and Slavs" (ASTs, CGCVG, Oggetto = Relazione sulla profilassi celtica in rapporto con la prostituzione nella Citta' di Trieste Prostituzione Ufficiale, 23. 11. 1919).

The correspondence from late 1918 described the deleterious conditions in several of the city's brothels, some of which were meant to be used by the military. Many brothels had already been in bad condition even before the war. Now some were dirty or the rooms were too small; while others lacked running water, toilets, and sufficient light. While some brothels could be brought up to acceptable standards, the report stated, others should simply be promptly shuttered. Indeed, in December 1918, the police had ordered five brothels be closed immediately.

But local women soon began requesting to open or reopen various Trieste brothels, which promised them a livelihood. Permission to open/reopen was often contingent on bringing existing brothels up to their hygienic and safety standards, including installing electric or gas lighting and running water, or sometimes simply refurbishing them. Owing to the presence of Italian troops in the New Provinces, there were also proposals to open brothels to service the military, even brothels meant solely for the military. The report (*cf.* infra) recommended that the ten-bedroom brothel at Via del Sale, 8, "perhaps the best of the brothels [in Trieste]" for officers' use, and one of the largest brothels, a sixteen-room establishment located on Via Altana, for that of the rank and file (ASTs, CGCVG (1919-1922), Gabinetto 24, 23/11/1918).

Employing Habsburg-era language, officials described the brothel as a "necessity," because of the large number of troops stationed in the vicinity. Trieste was not, however, the only city in the New Provinces where there were plans to open brothels above all to serve the military. Applications to open brothels exclusively for the military came from across the newly Italian northeast Adriatic. They included a proposal from December 1918 for a brothel in Gorizia, some 46 kilometers north of Trieste, suitable exclusively for the use of officers. A similar request in March 1919 to open a brothel in Rovigno, a town of some 11,000 people, in what is today, Rovinj, Croatia, in a building specifically designed for commercial sex was couched in the same terms that had been so common in imperial Austria: "morality" and "decency," as well as hygiene and preventing clandestine prostitution

In immediate postwar Trieste, the vice police (Section III of the Police) undertook surveillance of clandestine prostitutes with "zeal and profit." The language of surveillance was more aligned with the coercive imperial Austrian practices rather than with the somewhat more liberal neo-regulatory practices of voluntary treatment still in place elsewhere in Italy (Gibson, 1999, 151–206). As

had the Habsburg vice police before and during the First World War, so now the Triestine vice police apprehended women suspected of practicing clandestine prostitution in bars, cafés, dance halls, low-end restaurants, and the like. Many of these women, police asserted, suffered from VD. In late December 1919, Aldo Marziani,[10] the physician in charge of the prevention of venereal disease (*Il Medico incaricato della profilassi celtica*), informed the health department of the General Civilian Commission (*Commissariato Generale Civile*) that for the past several months, police had subjected an average of one hundred women per month to venereal disease examinations. While the police had sent most of these women to the hospital because they suffered from contagious venereal disease, those women whose VD symptoms were latent were treated on an out-patient basis. However, Marziani complained, the previous month, there had been such a lack of surveillance that only thirteen women had been examined for venereal disease. The deleterious effect of this lack of surveillance and apprehension of alleged clandestine prostitutes and failure to test them for VD was clear from the increased number of civilian and military patients treated at outpatient clinics for VD. Marziani's solution to the problem was the even more rigorous surveillance of women thought to be engaging in clandestine prostitution, because VD was, he asserted, so prevalent in Trieste (ASTs, CGCVG, Atti di gabinetto, Marziani, 20. 12. 1919). The language in Marziani's report, which postdates return to civilian rule, is that of control. He notes that women were being examined because they were "suspected" of clandestine prostitution and "sent" to the hospital. His assertion indicates that the treatment of suspected prostitutes with respect to medical examinations was one that deprived them of agency.

Not only the Triestine vice police, but also the military in numero us towns and cities elsewhere in the New Provinces continued to focus on clandestine prostitutes, the women who had been the source of so much concern as sources of VD during wartime.[11] The military played an active role in seeking out the clandestine prostitutes whom they believed were continuing to infect soldiers. When these women lacked local or provincial *Heimatrecht*, they were expelled to their municipality of origin (ASTs, CGCVG, Gabinetto 23, File 17 – Prostituzione, 30. 1. 1919).

Idria (today, Idrija, Slovenia), a small town about 56 kilometers northeast of Trieste and home to the largest mercury mine in Europe, exemplifies both the close cooperation between Italian military and civilian authorities under military rule, and the unexpected complications that could arise in the battle against clandestine prostitution. In addition to migrant laborers, Idria's postwar population included Italian soldiers newly stationed there. In early May 1919, the Civil Commissioner of Idria announced a decision to compile a list of all clandestine prostitutes in municipalities across the region. One member of the local police force, a 27-year-veteran and holdover from the Habsburg Monarchy, made such a list of women in Idria and surrounding areas. Despite the confidentiality with which the police were meant to act, word of this list, and the names on it, got out. Two young women wrote to complain about their names being included on the list.

The Civil Commissioner reported the contretemps to the Venezia Giulia's Office of Civil Affairs in Trieste (*Governatorato della Venezia Giulia, Ufficio Affari Civili-Gabinetto Trieste*). His detailed report from 27 June 1919 makes it clear both how seriously the military took the issue and just how difficult it was in a small town to keep such juicy information secret from the gossips who worked at city hall. The report raised more questions than it answered, one of which was whether a certain Captain Bruno, who had been extraordinary commissioner for the municipality of Idria, was responsible for the leak, an accusation Bruno denied. Correspondence dated 6 June described the two young women in question as aways having had reserved and serious demeanors. A report by a local police official (Tenenza) in Idria who subsequently investigated the women described them very differently, however. He characterized the two, who hailed from working-class families (their fathers were employed in the mine), as being of dubious morality. Indeed, the official claimed that the young women had had "overly familiar relationships" with Austrian soldiers formerly stationed there and now were apparently having similar relationships with Italian soldiers, especially some officers (ASTs, CGCVG, 24, 6. 6. 1919 & 27. 6. 1919).

Elsewhere in Venezia Giulia, attempts to stem clandestine prostitution, and thus, the spread of venereal disease, attracted less attention. Reports from Cisleithanian Austria's former chief naval port, Pola (today, Pula in Croatia), in southern Istria show that throughout the 1920s, the police regularly arrested young women and girls, most of whom hailed from that city or elsewhere in Istria and who were described in the records as clandestine prostitutes, for "reasons of morality" (violating prostitution regulations). What the records do not show is any success at limiting numbers of clandestine prostitutes or stemming venereal disease (DAP, 1927).

In the postwar New Provinces, the police continued to regulate prostitution as they/their predecessors had under the Monarchy. Sometimes aided by the military in the early days of the occupation, the police searched out women they considered clandestine prostitutes. They suspected the same kinds of women and found

10 Marziani's first name does not appear on any of the archival documents I have seen, but a specialist of this name worked in Trieste during this time.

11 When delegates to an international Congress for Military Medicine shortly after the war called for vigorous campaign against the widespread problem of venereal disease in the army, they cited the need to stem its spread in the civilian population to keep it out of the military (Anti-Venereal Campaign, 1920, 547–548).

them in similar places: younger, poor, under-, or unemployed, in low-end cafes, restaurants, and taverns, or on the street. They found them because clandestine prostitution still offered working class women means—if a poor one—of supporting themselves, especially during the economic and social disruption that followed the war.

TALES OF A MARIBOR BROTHEL

In the wake of the First World War, the government in newly formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes did not immediately move to unify the state's patchwork legal landscape, and some forms of regulated prostitution continued to be permitted. Most Austrian criminal legislation remained valid in formerly Habsburg parts of the country, and prostitution was regulated, until a new penal code was introduced in 1929 in parallel with the royal dictatorship. It replaced the earlier local and regional prostitution regulations. Thus, between 1929 and 1934, regulated prostitution was abolished, and prostitution criminalized (Petrungaro, 2019, 125–126; 2021, 42; 2022, 178).

Although the Habsburg policy of tolerated prostitution initially predominated in Slovenia, provincial representatives precipitously—and, according to Maribor General Hospital physician Ivan Matko, without consulting the medical specialists or the police whom he considered the most competent authorities on regulation—moved to close all brothels on its territory in March 1919 (Matko, 1919, 669). A 19 March 1919 directive from the Slovenian provincial government and Department of Interior informed the police commission in Maribor, formerly Marburg, a large predominantly German-speaking city in southern Styria close to the Austrian border, that the provincial government in Ljubljana decided to close all brothels in its territory with immediate effect. This directive foresaw the expulsion from the province of those brothel-based prostitutes (presumably those women lacking *Heimatrecht* in Slovenia) who did not plan to stop engaging in commercial sex and take up a respectable form of employment. The local police were to control very strictly those prostitutes who were permitted to stay in Slovenia, treating them on the basis of the provisions of legislation from 25 May 1885, the so-called "Vagabond" Law of the Austrian Criminal Code, specifically referring to Paragraph 6, which concerned being sent to a *Zwangsarbeitanstalt* (forced labor institution). As had long been the practice across Austria-Hungary, police were to make every effort to root out clandestine prostitution. With this goal in mind, they were to patrol the streets rigorously, as well as all suspicious inns, cafes, and drinking establishments that sold cheap schnaps. The central authorities in Ljubljana further expected the police to provide reports on both the shuttering of the brothels and plans for controlling clandestine prostitution within fourteen days. Maribor authorities originally complied with this directive.[12]

Some of the Maribor police and other local authorities appear to have subscribed to several traditional bourgeois Austrian notions about male sexuality, public health, and prostitutes that influenced their views on the regulation of prostitution. They believed that men, in this case, soldiers, needed sex; and that commercial sex was best controlled in the confines of a tolerated brothel, where the women who sold their bodies were placed under medical surveillance for VD. Late that summer, local police chose to contravene the provincial government's decree. They had support from the head of the surgical department at the Maribor hospital who noted explicitly in a 21 August letter that brothels were needed in a town like Maribor that had such a large military (and worker) population. On 27 August 1919, a local police decree permitted the temporary opening of a brothel, which police asserted would be under strict control. Based on Habsburg regulations, Maribor's regulations included the traditional twice weekly vaginal examination of prostitutes, with the city bearing the cost of this medical service. Other requirements included appropriate ventilation and cleanliness of clothing. Moreover, prostitutes and their clients were strictly forbidden to drink alcohol on the premises. Failure to follow the rules, police officials threatened, would result in severe penalties, up to and including the immediate revocation of the brothel permit.

Maribor's tumultuous early postwar history (Friš et al., 2020), which accounted for the large military population, perhaps had something to do with decision to reopen the brothel. Maribor had been under military occupation/authority since 23 November 1918 when Slovene volunteer forces seized control of the city and declared it part of what would become the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Following unification with Serbia on 1 December 1918, Serbian troops began arriving in Maribor. It had been the site of "Bloody Sunday," an uprising in protest of the city's inclusion in Yugoslavia in January 1919, and a local military uprising in July 1919. The nearby border with Austria was often closed owing to smuggling and was otherwise difficult to cross.

The military's presence in Maribor was reflected in brothel requirements, which included planned entrances on separate streets for soldiers and civilians. Moreover, local authorities envisioned a military patrol to keep order in the building. The brothel regulations were translated into Croatian, German, Serbian, and Slovenian, reflecting the different languages that prospective clients might speak. Posted in the halls and rooms throughout the building, they stipulated that without exception, every visitor was to be examined immediately upon entering the brothel to confirm his sexual "health." Before leaving, the client was to disinfect himself following intercourse

12 Specifics on the entire Maribor brothel saga can be found in PAM, SI_PAM/0005, AŠ 514, spis 528.

with a prostitute. We can assume that sexual "health" is a reference to being free of venereal disease symptoms. The expectation that a client would disinfect himself after intercourse with the prostitute was one of several requirements that recalled provisions from the former Monarchy.

It should be no surprise that some of the Maribor regulations were reminiscent of those in imperial Austrian brothels. The correspondence does not indicate who was to confirm that male visitors were "sexually healthy," a problem that authorities in late imperial Austria came up against when such inspection was proposed in the wake of the scandalous 1906 trial of Viennese brothel keeper, Regine Riehl. Who would be willing undertake this task? Physicians were unlikely to; among those suggested were older women, possibly former prostitutes (Wingfield, 2017, 103–104). Moreover, regulated prostitutes and clients had long been provided post-coital prophylaxis in many imperial Austrian brothels. The use of prophylaxis had become more common and more important during wartime (Grošelj, 2006, 462; Knežević, 2011, 329), sometimes based on the earlier experiences of brothels in Pola.

On 7 September, shortly after the Maribor brothel had been issued its permit, the internal affairs department of the provincial government sent a missive to Maribor authorities unbraiding them for overriding the regional government. Under the aegis of the Health Department for Slovenia and Istria,[13] and with the consent of the local police superintendent, but against the unanimous decision of the provincial government, read the document, the city had opened a brothel. Indeed, the provincial government accused Maribor officials of acting "completely on their own," failing to ask permission. The Ljubljana government thus forced the brothel's closure and demanded a written apology from the Maribor authorities. Austrian criminal legislation would, however, remain in force in Slovenia until the passage of Yugoslavia's new constitution in 1929.

Why did the Maribor city fathers choose to act against the provincial government's edict on prostitution? Why did the provincial government want to end regulation? In the immediate postwar period, during the time of formation of new governments, there was more space for local authorities to act/attempt to act in ways they considered appropriate. While we may never know these men's intentions, it is worth noting that like many Habsburg police officials and other bureaucrats before them, some obviously believed that registered prostitutes in tolerated brothels offered the safest source of commercial sex. They also may have had the habit of acting with more autonomy, given that in the Habsburg Monarchy, regulation of prostitution had been in the hands of local authorities. Moreover, according to Matko, the rise in VD cases following the initial closing of local brothels confirmed this belief (Matko, 1919, 669).[14] Safe outlets for commercial sex were an important consideration in a city with a large military presence.

THE BATTLE AGAINST VENEREAL DISEASE

The interwar period saw new "solutions" to an old problem, venereal disease. Despite the formation of the new states, many attitudes had not changed: Bureaucratic transition did not necessarily parallel political transition. Shortly after the war's end, however, Austria and its successor states began adopting new and varied solutions to the vexed problem of venereal disease. At the same time, many post-Habsburg Central European governments and their vice police evinced similar concerns about prostitutes as the source of venereal disease as had their predecessors. This owed both to continuity in attitudes toward class, gender, and sexuality, and to the rise in national-racial rhetoric about "strange, unknown, in part racially foreign and hostile peoples," who were afflicted with "all possible venereal diseases," that had helped increasingly to set prostitutes apart as Other in Austria-Hungary during wartime (Veress, 1916, 333). The successor-state governments drew upon Austria-Hungary's wartime experiences in the connections they made among public hygiene, prostitution, venereal disease, and military strength. It was commonly accepted that the experience of the war had demonstrated that venereal disease was spread primarily through extramarital relations and prostitutes were still popularly condemned as the main culprits (Wingfield, 2017, 250–251).

During the war, Austro-Hungarian military physicians had warned of the threat the invading Russian army posed to its citizens and soldiers the occupied eastern provinces of Bukovina and Galicia. They alleged that contagious diseases, including venereal infections, were rampant in the tsarist army because of the Russian military's abject lack of medical services. The Austrian government sought to resolve the problem beginning in 1918 by employing sanitary surveillance for returning soldiers and civilian refugees from Bukovina and Galicia, which had changed hands several times during the war. After 1917, soldiers returning from Russian POW camps were to be interned at one of 524 border stations established along the Eastern Front, where they would undergo medical examination in order to avert epidemics and limit the spread of venereal disease. They were also checked for their political health, that is, their continued loyalty to the Habsburg Monarchy (Zaharia, 2017, 292). The strict sanitary surveillance at border stations was meant to prevent these men from eluding the control and bringing disease back into their families (Weindling, 2000, 114).

13 The use of Istria in the Health Department's name was surely aspirational because Istria went to Italy under the terms of the Treaty of Rapallo.

14 Some of the details in Matko's account do not precisely parallel the information from the city archives, but the pro-regulation attitude of relevant local officials is clear in both.

Syphilis and gonorrhea both continued to pose significant challenges to public health. The former continued to be blamed for stillbirths and the latter for causing blindness and sterility; both were thus a threat to future generations. Certainly, natalism was a concern for the former belligerents across Europe owing to wartime population losses.[15] In Yugoslavia, venereal disease, thought to have been spread during the war by occupying Habsburg troops and afterward by returning soldiers, continued to spread rapidly after 1918. This may have been one of the reasons the Yugoslav government moved so quickly in late 1921 and early 1922 to open clinics to treat VD (Petrungaro, 2019, 129; Grošelj, 2006, 463).

Both the postwar Italian and Yugoslav governments used repatriation stations. Those the Italian government had opened along the borders in late 1919 employed "intensified supervision" to examine soldiers for a variety of diseases as well as their political leanings. Among other things, it required former Habsburg soldiers returning to the New Provinces from "infected countries," by which they meant above all Galicia and elsewhere in newly reconstituting, Poland, Russia, to be checked for lice (ASTs, CGCVG Atti di Gabinetto, Intendenza Generale, Commissione Ispettiva di profilassi, 30 January 1919). The Yugoslav government, as Branka Grošelj has written, fearing the spread of venereal disease in the wake of the disintegration of the Habsburg army, and that former female military employees might also be carriers, issued an order on 13 November 1919 that obliged these women, including nurses, to be subjected to the same kind of medical examination as male soldiers. But it was not only women associated with the military who were feared as possible carriers of VD. Indeed, according to the medical association every second woman in Slovenia's capital, Ljubljana, between the ages of twenty and forty had venereal disease, and thus proposed premarital medical examinations. The *Društvo za čuvanje narodnega zdravja v Sloveniji* (Slovenian Society for the Protection of National Health) established outpatient clinics for "fallen girls" to staunch the spread of VD (Grošelj, 2006, 462).

As Stefano Petrungaro has pointed out, health authorities believed that VD posed a threat to the foundations of the Yugoslav project and weakened the future of Yugoslav society, which was increasingly conceived in terms of race and eugenics (Petrungaro, 2019, 123). As elsewhere in Europe, social medicine as it developed in Yugoslavia between the wars altered the relationships among physicians and state authorities, including the police, as physicians seized ever more control over supervision of prostitution. Medical confrontations did not result in one unified discourse about the efficacy of abolishing/regulating prostitution for purposes of health and morals. Rather there were competing discourses, as the reopening of the Maribor brothel demonstrates (Petrungaro, 2022, 171).

Following at least a decade of attacks on Yugoslavia's convoluted system of prostitution regulation, prostitution would be totally abolished 1 January 1930, when Yugoslavia's modern, unified legal system came into practice. It both closed brothels and criminalized prostitution. Petrungaro demonstrates that new paradigms of public health had emerged, which resulted in the introduction of a new radical abolitionist system between the beginning of Yugoslavia's authoritarian monarchy in 1929, and 1934. The *Zakon o suzbijanju spolnih bolesti i prostitucije* (Law on the Suppression of Venereal Diseases and Prostitution), came into force in August 1934, in the wake of the revised penal code.

Democratic successor-state Czechoslovakia was among the countries the Yugoslav government looked to in designing its new law. In Czechoslovakia solutions to prostitution had been subsumed under the pressing need to eradicate venereal disease in the immediate postwar period. Pressed by female abolitionists, the Czechoslovak parliament passed Law No. 241, *O potírání pohlavních nemocí* (Combating sexually transmitted diseases), on 11 July 1922 (241/1922 Sb. - Beck-online), which had soon met pushback from advocates of regulation.[16] They claimed that the abolition of prostitution neither got rid of prostitution nor stopped the spread of VD (Wingfield, 2017, 252). Although both the Czechoslovak and the Yugoslav laws were in some ways gender neutral, they contained paragraphs that dealt specifically with female prostitution, which was abolished in all forms and regulation canceled. Moreover, both laws introduced free, universal, and compulsory treatment for venereal disease, but it was mandatory for physicians to report anonymously cases of the disease and transmission (Petrungaro, 2021, 42–43).

The public attention to prostitution, the moral panic, even, that began in late imperial Austria persisted in the Habsburg successor states—anxiety about venereal disease and public hygiene, as well as public morals—yet with a modern inflection. While long-held prejudices about sexuality continued to shape the prostitution debate, international and domestic feminist activism contributed to the development of new stances toward women's social rights and gender social equality, some of which were reflected in changing attitudes toward and interwar legislation on prostitution and venereal disease. This was certainly the case in Yugoslavia, where feminist movements flourished, although women would not be enfranchised until 1945.[17] The issue of how to treat most effectively and limit venereal disease remained of con-

15 The literature on pronatalism between the wars is large. For Italy, cf. Forucci (2010), and Saraceno (1994).

16 Abolitionist Czechoslovak National Socialist parliamentary deputies Luisa Landová-Štychová and Fráňa Zemínová led an earlier attempt to close brothels and abolish prostitution in September 1919. It failed.

17 Ženski pokret was the most important feminist journal in interwar Yugoslavia. On feminists and other Yugoslav women's organizations, cf. de Haan, Daskalova & Loutfi (2006); Kardum (2020, 223–230); and Lilly & Bokovoy (2003, 91–96).

cern worldwide during the interwar era and through the Second World War. In 1932, the general assembly of the Paris-based *Union Internationale contre le Péril Vénérien* (International Union against Venereal Diseases) issued the results of a broad international survey comparing the results of the voluntary treatment system and the system of compulsory treatment of venereal diseases. Although many national governments had expanded their scope to include infectious males, the female prostitute remained the primary focus of the questionnaire.

Eugenics, which drew on prewar and wartime scientific understandings and practices, became an ever-more dominant discourse in Habsburg Central Europe between the wars. The connections among public hygiene, which was sometimes analyzed in terms of "racial health," prostitution, venereal disease, and military strength were increasingly made after 1918. Owing to concerns about their viability, emphasis on racial degeneration became more pronounced in Austria and many of the successor states between the wars (McEwen, 2010, 170). The battle against prostitution and VD were closely linked in Yugoslavia as elsewhere in Habsburg Central Europe, not least because, as the Minister of Health stressed, VD affected the health of future generations.

Prostitution was not dangerous only to military readiness but indeed to the nation/state. Disease and degeneration were no longer just biological; they were also "national." Those people who suffered from venereal disease—and those who were considered responsible for infecting them—were increasingly regarded as potential enemies of the state in the racially saturated sexual politics of the interwar era. Slovenian anthropologist and eugenicist Niko Županič named VD, together with alcoholism, moral and medical decadence, and others, in his list of "plagues" that were destroying the (Slovene) nation in a 1921 article in *Slovenski narod* (Polajnar, 2009, 131). In the nationally mixed successor states of Habsburg Central Europe, and that was most of them, the prostitute—and the brothel keeper—could be, in addition to a social outlier, both a sexual and a racial one, indeed, a national threat.[18] As historian Maria Bucur has argued about Romania after 1918, an ethnically Hungarian prostitute in nationally mixed Transylvania was viewed as a eugenic threat to ethnic Romanian men, while an ethnic Romanian prostitute posed a dysgenic threat only if she infected a Romanian man with venereal disease (Bucur, 2007, 337–338; 349).

The police treatment of two brothel keepers in Trieste in the late 1920s offers examples of the treatment of those perceived racial and social outliers in Mussolini's Italy. When Trieste resident Giovanna Sopotnich appealed the closing of her brothel at Via Pescheria, 7 for violating police regulations, her perceived racial/ethnic infractions received as much attention as her moral ones. While her husband was alleged to have spent the night in the brothel and the prostitutes in her employ to have used cocaine and provided it to clients, she was described as "having Slavic sentiments and being opposed to the [Italian] regime," and accused of banking all her earnings in neighboring (Slavic) Yugoslavia (ASTs, PT, Gabinetto, busta 172).[19] In another incident, Triestine police ordered Rosa Bastianetto's brothel at Via S. Filippo, 5 permanently closed because the cards advertising her brothel incorporated an Italian national tricolor in the upper right corner, an apparent affront to "order and morality." She appealed to get the penalty lessened. Calmer heads appear to have prevailed and it was suggested that the brothel's operation merely be suspended for a specific period of time (ASTs, PT, Gabinetto, busta 172). These incidents reflect the continued disdain and suspicion with which commercial sex—and nationally different Slavs—were met in that particular part of ethnically mixed Italy; perhaps, even, that those involved somehow stood outside the nation.

CONCLUSION

Women were identified as the problem in terms of commercial sex between the wars, but how the successor states interpreted the significance and assigned the penalties changed with the shift to increasing centralization, even authoritarianism. Moreover, the growing nationalization of identity would have important implications not only for prostitutes, but also for any suspect woman who was allegedly *leichtsinnig* (foolish/frivolous) or *arbeitsscheu* (work shy). Such identities might have earned her the designation "asocial" and a stint in a reform school or expulsion from a town or province before the First World War. While prostitution laws changed in much of Habsburg Central Europe over the course of the interwar period, popular attitudes, developed over decades, about what kind of women sold sex, had not. The fascists condemned prostitutes as preying on the weakness of Italian men. Petrungaro has pointed out the growing centrality of prostitutes' "asociability" owing to her "work shyness" for some interwar Yugoslav police, jurists, and physicians in their concerns about these women (Petrungaro, 2022, 171–172). During the authoritarian/fascist era, a designation as "asocial" could cause far more serious repercussions because women—especially those who escaped social control and were caught selling their bodies for sex—still remained outside, and might be excluded from, larger society. In northeastern Italy, this, too, was a legacy of Habsburg regulation, one that continued throughout the interwar era, and beyond.

18 On the national threat that prostitutes and venereal disease were considered to pose elsewhere in Central Europe, see Stauter-Halsted (2017, 320–322).

19 See Hametz's article, The State of Uncertainty: Anxious Italians in the Upper Adriatic, 1918–1924, in this issue of Annales as well as (2001, 559–574), for discussion of Italian anti-Slavic attitudes in Trieste in general.

HABSBURŠKA DEDIŠČINA: SPOLNOST IN SOCIALNE POLITIKE V JULIJSKI KRAJINI IN SLOVENIJI MED SVETOVNIMA VOJNAMA

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POVZETEK

Članek analizira kontinuiteto in spremembe v obravnavi prostitutk v predvojni/vojni Cislajtanski Avstriji ter povojni Julijski krajini in Sloveniji. Sosednji pokrajini pod Habsburško monarhijo je Italija zasedla konec leta 1918, medtem ko je druga postala del Jugoslavije. Po porazu Avstro-Ogrske leta 1918 so vlade novoustanovljenih in razširjenih držav habsburške srednje Evrope začele preoblikovati družbo na nekdanjih imperialnih območjih. Propad Avstro-Ogrske kot geopolitične enote ni pomenil izginotja njenega upravnega in pravnega aparata, ki je deloma deloval še v medvojnem obdobju. Birokratska tranzicija ni nujno potekala vzporedno s politično tranzicijo, zato v teh državah pogosto ni prišlo do takojšnjih, dramatičnih sprememb pri urejanju prostitucije ali obravnavi prostitutk in žensk, za katere so domnevali, da so prostitutke. Nekateri uradniki/policijski uslužbenci so trdili, da je prostitucija »nujno zlo« in si prizadevali za njeno nadaljnje reguliranje, drugi pa so si prizadevali za njeno ukinitev v novoustanovljenih in/ali razširjenih nacionalnih državah, ki so nastale iz propadle večnacionalne Monarhije. Nekatere od njih so bile v resnici „mini večnacionalne države", kar je pomembno vplivalo na odnos do trgovine s spolnimi uslugami med vojnama. Napetosti med policijo in zdravniki glede tega, kdo naj nadzoruje urejanje prostitucije – in kako –, ki so se začele okoli fin de siècla, so vplivale tudi na politiko prostitucije in javne higiene v pozni Habsburški monarhiji in državah naslednicah. Med vojnama so bile ženske opredeljene kot problem v smislu trgovine s spolnimi uslugami, vendar se je s prehodom k vse večji centralizaciji in celo avtoritarnosti spremenilo to, kakšen pomen so države naslednice pripisovale problemu ter kako so določale kazni.

Ključne besede: Slovenija, Trst, prva svetovna vojna, Habsburška monarhija, Maribor, vojska, prostitucija, spolno prenosljive bolezni, Julijska krajina

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