To Denounce or Defend? Public Participation in the Policing of Prostitution in Late Imperial Russia

Siobhán Hearne

In August 1911, three men wrote to the Riga authorities denouncing a young peasant woman, Galiuta Rozovskaia, as a "clandestine prostitute" (*tainaia prostitutka*). They claimed that Rozovskaia had infected several men with venereal diseases and begged for her to be "brought under lawful governance" immediately.[1] The "governance" cited was the Russian empire's system for the regulation of prostitution (1843-1917), under which female prostitutes were required to register with the police and attend weekly gynecological examinations. Regulation rigidly defined prostitution as a transaction between a female prostitute and a male client. Like other official attempts to regulate prostitution in various European states and their colonies, the Russian system served to reinforce the "assumptions of a patriarchal and heteronormative society" whilst ignoring the well-established male sex trade of the late imperial period.[2] Russia's Ministry of Internal Affairs implemented regulation with the official aim of preventing the spread of venereal diseases, yet additional rules for registered prostitutes targeted their movement, visibility and behavior.

Russian society was in flux at the turn of the 20th century. Rapid industrialization and urbanization in the late 19th century transformed the appearance of cities and exacerbated social problems like poverty, overcrowding, and prostitution. As increasing

[1] Latvijas Valsts Vēstures Arhīvs (LVVA), f. 51 (Riga city police) apr. 1, l. 23539, lp. 528.
[2] Philip Howell, David Beckingham and Francesca Moore, "Managed Zones for Sex Workers in Liverpool: Contemporary Proposals, Victorian Parallels", *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 33, 2 (2008), 234. On male same-sex prostitution in pre-revolutionary Russia, see Dan Healey, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia: The Regulation of Sexual and Gender Dissent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 33-40; Dan Healey, "Masculine Purity and "Gentlemen's Mischief": Sexual Exchange and Prostitution Between Russian Men, 1861-1941", *Slavic Review,* 60, 2 (2002): 233-65.

numbers of unmarried young women migrated from rural settlements to work as domestic servants, laundresses, seamstresses, and industrial workers, more and more single women lived an isolated existence on low wages, outside the direct control of their families.[3] Discussions of the modern urban experience in the popular press mediated on the themes of disease, debauchery and moral decay, paying particular attention to the detrimental impact of these "modern ills" on women.[4] Prostitution was at the meeting point of anxieties regarding gender, morality and disease. Lower-class women were more frequently imagined as prostitutes because of their unstable economic situations and assumptions about their naivety, "loose" morality and vulnerability to seduction. Upper-class courtesans and "promiscuous" society ladies were berated in the press for having a corrupting influence on poorer women, as writers claimed that seamstresses and shop clerks registered as prostitutes in an attempt to replicate the glamorous lifestyles of their social superiors.[5]

Russia's foray into the state regulation of female prostitution has garnered interest from social and cultural historians for a number of years. Pioneering studies published in the 1980s and 1990s offer vivid analyses of how prostitution became a political issue at the turn of the 20th century, and focus on the multifaceted perspectives of educated and elite observers.[6] Recent research has firmly placed prostitution within wider labor histories of the late imperial period and offered insight into how registered women were counted,

[3] Unmarried female factory workers, unlike their male counterparts, were not normally hired from their districts in large groups and therefore did not form the same eating or sleeping *arteli* as men. See chapter four in Rose Glickman, *Russian Factory Women: Workplace and Society, 1880-1914* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1986), 105-55.
[4] Mark Steinberg, *Petersburg Fin-de-Siècle* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 179-97.
[5] Abby M. Schrader, "Market Pleasures and Prostitution in St Petersburg" in *Russian History Through the Senses: From 1700 to the Present,* eds., Matthew P. Romaniello and Tricia Starks (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 84-85.
[6] Richard Stites, "Prostitute and Society in Pre-Revolutionary Russia", *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas,* 31, 2 (1983): 348-64; Laurie Bernstein, *Sonia's Daughters: Prostitutes and Their Regulation in Imperial Russia* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995).

categorized and observed by those in authority.[7] Fascinating evidence of female same-sex relations in tsarist brothels has also been uncovered, which has helped to queer the history of Russian regulation.[8] This article seeks to uncover the elusive voices of women registered as prostitutes, their clients and urban dwellers to examine the regulation system from the "bottom up", rather than focusing on the dominant discourse of state and medical professionals.[9] Drawing on petitions sent to the authorities by residents of St Petersburg and Riga between 1900 and 1916, it will explore the rhetorical strategies employed by urban residents in their requests for women to be registered onto, or removed from, the police lists of prostitutes.

In recent years, historians of imperial Russia and the Soviet Union have increasingly turned their attention to petitions sent to the authorities to interrogate the performative aspect of letter writing and the complicated relationship between subject/citizen and state.[10] Examinations of substantial volumes of divorce petitions and religious

[7] Barbara A. Engel, "St Petersburg Prostitutes in the Late Nineteenth Century: A Personal and Social Profile", *Russian Review,* 48, 1 (1989): 21-44; Barbara A. Engel, *Between the Fields and the City: Women, Work and Family in Russia, 1861-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 166-97. Russian historians have mined central and provincial archives and produced detailed histories of the social composition of registered prostitutes and the geographies of prostitution within urban spaces: Natalia B. Lebina and Mikhail V. Shkarovskii, *Prostitutsiia v Peterburge (40-egg XIX v. -40e gg. XX v*) (Moscow: Progress Akademiia, 1994); Svetlana Iu. Malysheva, *"Professionalki", "Arfistki", "Liubitel'nitsy": Publichnye Doma i Prostitutki v Kazani vo Vtoroi Polovine XIX – Nachale XX veka* (Kazan': Kazanskii Gosudarstvennyi Universitet, 2014).

[8] Healey, *Homosexual Desire,* 51-54; Laura Engelstein, "Lesbian Vignettes: A Russian Triptych from the 1890s", *Signs* 15:4 (199), 821-24.

[9] This article is based on research conducted for my Ph.D thesis, in which I analyse how prostitutes, their clients, and wider urban communities experienced, and resisted, the policing of prostitution, see Siobhán Hearne, '"Female Prostitution in Urban Russia, 1900-1917" (Ph.D diss., University of Nottingham, 2017). My approach is in line with three recently published studies on the history of prostitution, Julia Laite, *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens: Commercial Sex in London 1885-1960* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Keely Stauter-Halstead, *The Devil's Chain: Prostitution and Social Control in Partitioned Poland* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2015) and Nancy M. Wingfield, *The World of Prostitution in Late Imperial Austria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[10] Much of this scholarship on the late imperial period has focused on letters sent to the authorities during the flashpoints of war and revolution: Andrew Verner, "Discursive Strategies in the 1905 Revolution: Peasant Petitions from Vladimir Province", *Russian Review,* 54, 1 (1995): 65-90; Emily M. Pyle, "Peasant Strategies for Obtaining State Aid: A Study of Petitions During World War I", *Russian History,* 24, 1-2 (1997): 41-64; Sarah Badcock, "Women, Protest and Revolution: Soldiers' Wives in Russia During 1917", *International Journal of Social History,* 49 (2004): 47-70. With the exception of Joshua Sanborn, "Conscription, Correspondence and Politics in Late Imperial Russia", *Russian History,* 24, 1/2 (1997): 27-40. On writing to the authorities in the Soviet period, see Shelia Fitzpatrick, "Supplicants and Citizens:

denunciations from the late imperial period have provided valuable insight into how lower-class people experienced and articulated their understandings of Russia's confrontation with modernity.[11]

Petitions are useful for exploring attitudes to sexuality and morality during this period of significant social and economic upheaval. When clients, registered prostitutes, or urban residents wrote to the authorities, they entered into a performance, invoking official discourses, roleplaying particular characters and embellishing their stories to propel those in power to act on their behalf.[12] When petitioning for a woman's removal from the police lists, city dwellers exploited stereotypes about the vulnerability of young peasant migrant women to elicit sympathy.[13] Registered prostitutes drew on discourses of legality to challenge the illegal application of regulation policy. An interrogation of these rhetorical techniques shows the multifaceted ways in which urban dwellers actively sought engagement with the state.[14] Despite ample evidence for the inefficiency of the

Public Letter-Writing in Soviet Russia in the 1930s", *Slavic Review,* 55, 1 (1996): 78-105; Shelia Fitzpatrick, "Signals From Below: Soviet Letters of Denunciation of the 1930s", *Journal of Modern History,* 68, 4 (1996): 831-66; Vladimir A. Kozlov, "Denunciation and its Functions in Soviet Governance: A Study of Denunciations and Their Bureaucratic Handling from Soviet Police Archives, 1944-1953", *Journal of Modern History,* 68, 4 (1996): 867-98 Golfo Alexopoulos, "The Ritual Lament: a Narrative of Appeal in the 1920s and 1930s", *Russian History,* 24, 1/2 (1997): 117-29; Matthew E. Lenoe, "Letter-Writing and the State: Reader Correspondence as a Source for Early Soviet History", *Cahiers de Monde Russe,* 40, 1-2 (1999): 139-69.

[11] Jeffrey Burds, "A Culture of Denunciation: Peasant Labor Migration and Religious Anathematization in Rural Russia, 1860-1905", *Journal of Modern History,* 68, 4, (1996): 786-818; Barbara A. Engel, *Breaking the Ties That Bound: the Politics of Marital Strife in Late Imperial Russia* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2011).

[12] James Scott defines this as a "public transcript" which is performed by "those subject to elaborate and systematic forms of social subordination", James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 2. Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Polity, 1987).

[13] This rhetorical strategy is explored in Engel, *Breaking the Ties That Bound,* 132; Orlando Figes, "The Russian Revolution of 1917 and Its Language in the Village", *Russian Review,* 56, 3 (1997): 323-45; Pyle, "Peasant Strategies".

[14] This theme has been explored in detail by historians of Russian rural society, see Jane Burbank, *Russian Peasants Go to Court: Legal Culture in the Countryside, 1905-1917* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004); Corrine Gaudin, *Ruling Peasants: Village and State in Late Imperial Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois Press, 2007); Aaron Retish, *Russia's Peasants in Revolution and Civil War: Citizenship, Identity, and the Creation of the Soviet State, 1914-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Verner, "Discursive Strategies"; Pyle, "Peasant Strategies". Additionally, Joshua Sanborn has examined the

late imperial government in the implementation of its own policy, ordinary people regarded the act of petitioning as an effective method for voicing grievances and expected their concerns to be taken seriously.[15]

This article draws on 15 denunciations and 25 defense letters mainly found in the Central State Historical Archive of St Petersburg and the Latvian State Historical Archive. The majority of letters were sent by urban residents to the medical-police committees of St Petersburg and Riga, but two letters from other regions will also be drawn upon. Both St Petersburg and Riga had large numbers of registered prostitutes, with 2844 and 882 women respectively.[16] It is highly likely that more women worked as prostitutes without registering with the police, as municipal authorities often did not have the funding or staff to keep track of all women selling sex. At the turn of the century, the empire's police force numbered just 47,866 men for a population of almost 127 million.[17] Even in St Petersburg, where the number of patrolmen was closest to the "ideal" ratio of 1:400 inhabitants, 5 out of every 9 police posts in the city were unmanned in 1904.[18] In 1915, Riga's medical-police committee employed just two patrolmen for the detection of unregistered prostitutes.[19] Due to staff shortages, law enforcement in Riga and St

relationship between subject and state in petitions regarding compulsory military service, see Sanborn, "Conscription, Correspondence and Politics".

[15] Sarah Badcock, *A Prison Without Walls? Eastern Siberian Exile in the Last Years of Tsarism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Eric Lohr, *Russian Citizenship: From Empire to Soviet Union* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 90-95; Theodore R. Weeks, "Russification: Word and Practice, 1863-1914", *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society,* 148, 2 (2004): 471-89.

[16] Glavnoe Upravlenie po Delam Mestnogo Khoziaistva*, Vrachebnoi-Politseiskii Nadzor za Gorodskoi Prostitutsiei* (St Petersburg: V. Bezobrazov and Co., 1910), 61. The 1899 report of the St Petersburg medical-police committee revealed that there were brothels located in all nine districts of the city, Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF), f. 564 (Personal *fond* of Antoly Fedorovich Koni), op. 1, d. 4287, l. 4. In their 1901 report, the Riga medical-police committee remarked that there were brothels on almost every city street, LVVA, f. 51, apr. 1, l. 23477, lp. 4.

[17] Neil Weissman, "Regular Police in Tsarist Russia, 1900-1914", *Russian Review,* 44, 1 (1985), 47.

[18] Ibid, 48.

[19] LVVA, f. 51, apr. 1, l. 23559, lp. 2. This was also the case in Revel' (Tallinn), EAA, 30.6.3628, lk. 6

Petersburg took denunciations from the public seriously and sent patrolmen to investigate the woman in question.

Due to the fragmented nature of the source material, we cannot know how representative these letters were, or whether the authorities chose to preserve every single petition that they received. Assessing whether petitioning to denounce or defend was a common practice is also difficult given the limited number of surviving letters, although a handful of similar letters are preserved in archives in other corners of the former Russian empire.[20] Individuals' relationships with the authorities and the regulation system varied markedly, so it is important not to make sweeping generalizations based on this survival material. As Daniel Field has noted, the vast number of lower-class people who did not write to the authorities are lost to historians, leaving us with "dossiers, not inferences or generalizations".[21] The 40 letters under consideration have been selected from a wider sample as they illustrate multiple forms of interaction and resistance by urban residents, either referencing public health, morality, honor, and rights.[22]

Letters of denunciation

For the good of public health

In their denunciation letters, prostitutes' clients voiced their concerns about public health, a highly politicized topic that received substantial attention in official, medical and

[20] For example at the National Archives of Estonia (Rahvusarhiiv, EAA): EAA.633.1.33, lk. 11; EAA.31.2.6123, lk. 6; EAA.31.2.4326, lk. 19; EAA.330.1.1398, lk. 178; EAA.330.1.1651, lk. 130. At the State Archive of Arkhangel'sk Oblast': GAAO, f. 37, op. 1t2, d. 3914, l. 37, 129.
[21] Daniel Field, *Rebels in the Name of the Tsar* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 26.
[22] The St Petersburg letters are drawn from two *dela* in the *fond* of the St Petersburg medical-police committee regarding the surveillance of women who were not yet under medical-police supervision, Tsentral'nyi Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Arkhiv Sankt-Peterburga (TsGIASPb) f. 593, op. 1, d. 643 (1905) and d. 645 (1909). Combined, these *dela* number over 900 pages and include many more denunciation letters and petitions. Unfortunately, similar files for other years do not exist. The Riga letters are drawn from seven *lietas* in the *fonds* of the Riga city police, and these files similarly contain hundreds of petitions. These files are only available for the years 1900, 1901, 1906-07, 1911, 1915 and 1916, so we can assume that the letters for the missing years have not survived.

philanthropic discourse in the late imperial period. Tension increased between physicians and the government as the calls of medical professionals to establish adequate sanitary infrastructure in the empire's rapidly expanding towns and cities fell on the deaf ears of tsarist bureaucrats.[23] Dedicated commissions were established under the authority of the Russian Society for the Preservation of Public Health to investigate the detrimental impact of poor nutrition, inadequate housing, alcoholism, and prostitution on the physical and moral health of the population.

The impact of venereal diseases on moral and physical wellbeing was high on the agenda for those interested in public health. For Russian intellectuals and their European counterparts, venereal diseases were symbolic of the widespread degeneration brought about by the social and economic upheaval of modernization.[24] In 1897, hundreds of doctors, government officials, and civil servants met in St Petersburg to discuss measures to combat epidemic syphilis at the first Russian congress dedicated specifically to the cause.[25] Articles in the medical press insisted that venereal diseases were widespread. Statistical surveys from 1911 claimed that syphilis accounted for 10 per cent of all registered diseases across the Russian empire, and that almost half of men in the Russian military had a venereal infection.[26] Cures for various venereal diseases peppered the pages of the popular press in the early 1900s.[27]

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[23] Susan Gross Solomon and John F. Hutchinson, "The Problem of Health Reform in Russia" in *Health and Society in Revolutionary Russia,* ed. Susan Gross Solomon and John F. Hutchinson (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), ix.

[24] Laura Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle Russia* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992),168-70. For the perspectives of elites across Europe in the same period, see the many excellent essays in Roger Davidson and Lesley A. Hall, eds., *Sex, Sin and Suffering: Venereal Disease and Europe Society Since 1870* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).

[25] For a report on the congress by the Minister of Internal Affairs, Ivan Goremykin, see GARF, f. 543 (Manuscript collection from Tsarskoe Selo Palace) op. 1, d. 440.

[26] "Otchet o Sostoianii Narodnogo Zdraviia i Organizatsiia Vrachebno Pomoshchi v Rossii za 1911 god", *Russkii Zhurnal Kozhnikh i Venericheskikh Boleznei* (*RZhKVB*) 11-12 (1913), 412; "Otchet o Sanitarnom Sostoianii Russkoi Armii za 1911', *RZhKVB* 11-12 (1913), 420-24.

[27] Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness,* 208-209.

The imperial state's attempts to improve public health by reducing rates of venereal infection predominantly targeted the lower classes and were suffused with elements of social control. Over 90 per cent of women registered as prostitutes hailed from the lower classes, and just 3 per cent were listed as from the nobility, merchant or clergy estates.[28] Wealthier women most likely bribed the police to avoid their names appearing on the police lists and to evade their medical examinations.[29] Therefore, lower-class women bore the brunt of surveillance for disease transmission, although certain groups of lower-class men were also the subjects of medical intervention. Sailors at the Baltic port of Libava (now Liepāja, Latvia) were required to undergo weekly medical examinations to prevent the spread of venereal infection, although this policy was not rolled out across the entire Imperial Navy.[30] Groups of male industrial workers in Khar'kov, St Petersburg, and Moscow were obliged to test clear for venereal diseases before starting work or in order to secure the return of their internal passports at the end of their employment.[31] In 1899, physicians in the capital inspected the genitals of 345,107 male industrial workers to ensure that they were not infected with syphilis.[32] Initiatives to control the spread of venereal diseases never targeted upper-class men.

The regulation system emphasized the infectious potential of registered prostitutes. The one-sided nature of the medical examinations reinforced the perception that female bodies and behavior required surveillance in order to protect public health, an idea that attracted significant criticism from registered women, public health professionals and

[28] A. Dubrovskii, *Prostitutsiia v Rossiiskoi Imperii po Obsledovaniiu 1-go Avgusta 1889 goda* (St Petersburg, 1890), 36-39.
[29] Bernstein, *Sonia's Daughters,* 94.
[30] Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Voenno-Morskogo Flota (RGAVMF) f. 408 (Administration of the Imperial Navy's Health Department), op. 1, d. 2236, l. 53.
[31] Siobhan Hearne, "Sex on the Front: Prostitution and Venereal Disease in Russia's First World War", *Revolutionary Russia,* 30, 1 (2017), 109; Anna Mazanik, "Sanitation, Urban Environment and the Politics of Public Health in Late Imperial Moscow", (Ph.D diss., Central European University, 2015), 88-89.
[32] GARF, f. 564, op. 1, d. 4287, l. 3.

charitable organizations in the early 20th century.[33] When the system was established in the 1840s, registered prostitutes were required to attend medical examinations once a week, which increased to twice weekly in 1903.[34] The results of these examinations were recorded on a "medical ticket" (*meditsinskii bilet*), which became a registered prostitute's main form of identification. In contrast, prostitutes' clients were largely absent from the rules of regulation. One rule explained that prostitutes "had the right to inspect the genitals and underwear of visitors" to protect themselves from infection, but the extent to which this happened in practice is questionable.[35]

It is highly likely that men who regularly paid for sex would have transmitted venereal infections, given that disease was widespread amongst registered prostitutes. In 1909, 36 per cent of all prostitutes working across European Russia were infected with a venereal disease and almost half of the women registered on the St Petersburg police lists had syphilis.[36] Due to inadequate funding and facilities, the medical examinations provided for registered prostitutes were often rushed and completely ineffective, which meant that physicians frequently missed signs of infection. In 1901 the physician hired by the Libava medical-police committee had just two minutes to examine the mouth, throat, vulva, anus, and urethra of each woman on the city's police lists.[37] Given the frequency of infection for registered women, who in theory had regular access to medical

[33] Bernstein, *Sonia's Daughters,* 49-50, 239-40; "Prostitutes' Petition", trans. Laurie Bernstein, in *Russian Women, 1698-1917: Experience and Expression, An Anthology of Sources,* eds., Robin Bisha, Jehanne M. Gheith, Christine Holden and William G. Wagner, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 138-40. Prominent physicians and administrators often blamed lower-class migrant men for contracting a venereal disease in the city and then infecting their families on their return to the countryside. Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness,* 187, 204-6.
[34] Bernstein, *Sonia's Daughters,* 21; TsGIASPb, f. 569 (St Petersburg municipal government and police) op. 18, d. 4, l. 33.
[35] TsGIASPb, f. 569, op. 18, d. 4, l. 33.
[36] *Vrachebnoi-Politseiskii Nadzor,* 58-59. The St Petersburg statistics refer to women working in lower-class brothels. Just 14 per cent of women working in first class brothels had syphilis. Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Arkhiv (RGIA) f. 1298 (Administration of the Chief Medical Inspector), op. 1, d. 1730, l. 58.
[37] RGAVMF, f. 408, op. 1, d. 940, l. 12; RGAVMF, f. 408, op. 1, d. 1581, l. 25, 218.

treatment, it is reasonable to assume that unregistered prostitutes experienced similar, or even greater, levels of infection.

In their letters, prostitutes' clients drew on medical and popular anxieties regarding the impact of venereal diseases on public health, as well as official discourse advocating social control to prevent the circulation of infection. In line with regulation policy, their conceptions of public health were distinctly androcentric, as they used their own, or other men's, infections as evidence of the apparent danger that unregistered women posed to society. They did not express concern for the woman believed to be diseased, nor share the concerns of many physicians regarding the link between syphilis, miscarriage, infant mortality and childhood impairment.[38] Clients' lack of culpability for the spread of infection runs as an undercurrent throughout their letters. Most of the time they were open about the fact that they had engaged in sexual intercourse with the women they were denouncing, yet they still presented themselves as passive recipients of disease. Framing their personal concerns as general societal interests, they emphasized the supposed grave danger that unregistered women posed to public health and social order.[39]

A typical example of this petitioning technique can be found in the following anonymous letter sent to the St Petersburg police in April 1909. The denouncer accused a woman known as Lipa of secretly working as a prostitute. Lipa allegedly solicited men on Nevskii Prospekt in the evenings, and could often be found in the Café de Paris in the basement

[38] Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness,* 184.
[39] Shelia Fitzpatrick and Robert Gellately highlight this as a key feature of denunciation practices in modern European history. Shelia Fitzpatrick and Robert Gellately, "Introduction to the Practices of Denunciation in Modern European History", *Journal of Modern History,* 68, 4 Practices of Denunciation in Modern European History, 1789-1989 (1996), 747.

of the *Passazh* shopping arcade, a nexus of legal and clandestine prostitution in popular imagination.[40] The letter read:

> After spending one night with her during Holy Week, on the second day I became ill and the doctor confirmed that I had chancroid. I most humbly beg you to prevent this person from spreading her infection among inhabitants, and bring her under medical examination.[41]

By signing himself off as "the victim" (*postradavshii*), the petitioner positioned himself as passive in relation to the alleged prostitute. He admitted to paying for sex during Holy Week; a period in the Orthodox calendar when sexual intercourse should technically be avoided, but conversely when demand for commercial sex expanded considerably.[42] In his employment of deferential language, he also framed himself as passive in relation to the authorities by begging the state to act on his behalf. This narrative of male passivity corresponds to the inherent patriarchy of regulation where only the inspection of female bodies was deemed necessary to prevent the transmission of infection. By "humbly" begging the authorities for assistance, the petitioner helped to reinforce the inherent paternalism of the tsarist state. In late imperial Russia, interactions between those in authority and the lower classes, be it through taxation practices, social assistance, or military discipline, combined strict regulation and custodial care, rendering much of the

[40] On the association of the *Passazh* center and "debauchery" in panoramic literature see Schrader, "Market Pleasures and Prostitution", 67-94.
[41] TsGIASPb, f. 593 (St Petersburg medical-police committee) op. 1, d. 645, l. 71.
[42] Eve Levin, *Sex and Society in the World of the Orthodox Slavs, 900-1700* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989), 163. On increased demand during major Orthodox holidays, see Maria Pokrovskaia, "Prostitution and Alcoholism" in *Russian Women, 1698-1917,* 360; EAA, 54.1.64, lk. 9-10; RGIA, f. 1298, op. 1, d. 1730, l. 15.

population poor, defenseless, and dependent on the Tsar.[43] The petitioner's roleplaying of the deferential individual seeking state assistance demonstrates how subjects of the empire "availed themselves of autocratic ideology" in order to achieve their own ends.[44]

By emphasizing the danger posed by Lipa to the inhabitants (*obyvatel'*) of St Petersburg, the petitioner drew on official discourses used to justify regulation, in which unregistered prostitutes were cast as deliberately subversive vectors of disease.[45] This image was far removed from the complex lived experiences of many women who worked as unregistered prostitutes. In the late imperial period, most registered prostitutes hailed from the lower classes and it is likely that unregistered women followed this demographic trend.[46] As the only work available for lower-class women was low paid and often seasonal, women may have worked sporadically as prostitutes to supplement inadequate wages or during periods of unemployment. Women may have also chosen to work outside the regulation system in order to circumvent the residency restrictions and to avoid attending the compulsory medical examinations. By stereotyping the clandestine prostitute as a malicious threat to wider society, petitioners helped to justify the regulation system and legitimize police intervention into the lives of women deemed to be suspicious, like Lipa.

[43] Elise Kimerling Wirtschafter, *From Serf to Russian Soldier* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014) 96; Yanni Kotsonis, *State of Obligation: Taxes and Citizenship in the Russian Empire and the Early Soviet Republic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 54.
[44] Verner, "Discursive Strategies", 69.
[45] Delegates at the 1897 Congress for the Discussion of Measures Against Syphilis agreed that registered and clandestine prostitutes were the main sources of syphilis in towns and cities, GARF, f. 543, op. 1, d. 440, l. 2.
[46] Peasant women dominated the police lists in an empire-wide survey of prostitution in 1889. They comprised 50 per cent of registered women, and a further 35 per cent were lower-class townswomen. Dubrovskii, *Prostitutsiia,* 36-37. In surveys conducted by philanthropic organizations on the eve of the First World War, peasants made up 80 per cent of registered women in St Petersburg. Bernstein, *Sonia's Daughters,* 93-98.

Most denunciation letters were not anonymous as there were no legal consequences for men who knowingly visited unregistered prostitutes. Stepan Fedoseev wrote to the medical-police committee from his bed at Alafuzov hospital in April 1909, stating that Anna Frolova, a lower-class migrant, was a clandestine prostitute who had infected him with chancroid.[47] Another man, who signed himself off as Gubskii, sent a petition to the St Petersburg Mayor on 25 June 1904 to denounce Iuliia Shelkova, a woman that he had met at the Apollo concert hall. Gubskii claimed that he had gone back to Shelkova's apartment and contracted a disease from one of the many unregistered prostitutes who were apparently working there.[48] He positioned himself as a dutiful subject of the tsarist state, explaining that he had even checked with the address office (*adresnyi stol'*) to ensure that he had the correct address of the woman he was denouncing. "I do not want to pursue this in court", he wrote, "but often cadets and even Lyceum students (*litseistov*) go [to Shelkova's]".[49] The image of elite students "slumming" with diseased unregistered prostitutes would have evoked grave concern or disgust on the part of the medical-police committee, particularly as the rapid urbanization of the late nineteenth century heightened anxieties about the increased contact between the lower classes and their social superiors.[50] Elite observers bemoaned the greater visibility of "uncivilized" lower-class culture in city space and rhapsodized about how prostitutes blurred class boundaries by disguising themselves as respectable society women following the

[47] TsGIASPb, f. 593, op. 1, d. 645, l. 2.
[48] TsGIASPb, f. 593, op. 1, d. 643, l. 293.
[49] Lyceum were higher education institutions for boys from aristocratic families, established to train future personnel for higher civil service posts. On the Tsarskoe Selo Lyceum (transferred to St Petersburg in 1844) see Allen A. Sinel, "The Socialization of the Russian Bureaucratic Elite, 1811-1917: Life at the Tsarskoe Selo Lyceum and the School of Jurisprudence", *Russian History,* 3, 1 (1976): 1-31.
[50] The practice of "slumming", as in the intrusion of middle-class or elite individuals into lower-class spaces, has been explored by historians of other international contexts. For example, Chad Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 205.

increased availability of ready-to-wear clothing.[51] Tapping into these fears allowed the denouncer to emphasize the alleged danger that Shelkova posed to public health and respectability.

Following denunciations, the St Petersburg medical-police patrolmen conducted secret surveillance on the women in question for confirmation of her involvement in commercial sex. However, they looked for evidence of inappropriate or "promiscuous" behavior, rather than confirmation of disease transmission, which suggests that the St Petersburg authorities used regulation as a method for monitoring the behavior of lower-class women. After receiving Gubskii's denunciation, patrolmen conducted surveillance on Shelkova's apartment and found two "suspicious" peasant migrants, Iuliana Sudokovich and Elizaveta Moroz'ko. The two women "dressed very decently and went to entertainment venues in the evening, returning sometimes around three or four in the morning with men".[52] Both women were invited to appear in front of the medical-police committee, so it is likely that they were either registered as prostitutes or moved away to avoid further police harassment.[53]

Letter writers often claimed that the woman in question had infected more than one individual to add weight to their denunciation. On 23 January 1909, two men denounced 20-year-old peasant migrant Paulina Rysisha to the St Petersburg medical-police

[51] For an examination of the encounter between elite and popular cultures during a period of mass rural-to-urban migration see Daniel R. Brower, *The Russian City Between Tradition and Modernity, 1850-1900* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990). Neuberger examines moral panic about hooliganism in the turn-of-the-century boulevard press. Joan Neuberger, *Hooliganism: Crime, Culture and Power in St Petersburg, 1900-1914* (London and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 125. On prostitutes blurring class lines, see Schrader, "Market Pleasures", 79-80.
[52] TsGIASPb, f. 593, op. 1, d. 643, l. 294.
[53] Ibid, l. 298, 301. Medical-police committees invited, rather than forced, women to appear as the State Senate forbade the registration of women as prostitutes without their consent in 1892, Bernstein, *Sonia's Daughters,* 37. Despite this, forced registration was a widespread practice.

committee on the basis that she had infected them both.[54] In the same month, Varvara Zhilina, an 18-year-old peasant from Iaroslavl' province living in the capital, was denounced as a clandestine prostitute by two separate petitioners.[55] On 5 April 1909, Akim Lavrem'ev claimed that Anna Ivanova had infected both himself and another Petersburg resident with syphilis.[56] In a particularly dramatic case from May 1905, a man denounced an Englishwoman called Lucy Bloom (*Lutsii Blum*) as a spy who deliberately infected men with venereal diseases to sabotage Russia's efforts during the Russo-Japanese War.[57]

These men must have been aware that police surveillance would follow their denunciations, during which women would be under strict scrutiny to ensure that they adhered to societal norms of female behavior. Leaving the house late at night or engaging in extramarital sex was often enough evidence for medical-police committees to invite women to enroll themselves onto the police lists. Patrolmen were under constant pressure to register women believed to working outside the legal parameters of regulation, and often regional authorities used the number of "clandestines" detained as evidence of the rigor of their local medical-police committees. In Libava in 1908, the Police Chief praised the medical-police committee for increased their annual arrests of clandestine prostitutes by almost 400 per cent.[58] After receiving the letters against

[54] In order to open a brothel, prospective madams had to apply for licenses from their local authorities. TsGIASPb, f. 593, op. 1, d. 645, l. 14.
[55] Ibid, l. 42, 44.
[56] Ibid, l. 77.
[57] TsGIASPb, f. 593, op. 1, d. 643, l. 411. By spring 1905, Russia had already suffered humiliating defeats and lost thousands of men, armaments and the entirety of southern Manchuria. At the Battle of Mukden alone (20 February – 10 March 1905) 90,000 Russian soldiers were killed, wounded, or taken prisoner, Bruce W. Menning, *Bayonets Before Bullets: The Imperial Russian Army, 1861-1914* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 194. Therefore, the denunciation could also link with more general xenophobic sentiments characteristic of this period of conflict.
[58] RGAVMF, f. 408, op. 1, d. 1581, ll. 108-9. Clandestine prostitution was policed particularly rigorously in Libava, perhaps due to the city's commercial and military ports. The Riga medical-police committee arrested the same number of "clandestines" in 1914, yet Riga's urban population was roughly seven times larger than Libava's. LVVA, f. 51, apr. 1, l. 23557, lp. 394.

Rysisha, Zhilina, Ivanova and Bloom, St Petersburg medical-police patrolmen reported that there was no evidence of "debauchery" (*razvrat*) uncovered during their secret surveillance, which suggests that the intended function of these denunciations was to tarnish these women's reputations.[59] Petitioners disguised their personal grievances by drawing on public health concerns and the well-peddled stereotype of the dangerous clandestine prostitute.

The unofficial morality police

Despite "prostitute" being a legal category with corresponding rights, moral condemnation permeated official discussions of prostitution. Regulatory legislation used "prostitute" and "woman engaged in debauchery" (*zhenshchina zanimaiushchaiasia razvratom*) interchangeably. This vocabulary reveals the inherent tensions of sanctioning commercial sex in a society where the state, the Church and local communities rigidly promoted sexual intercourse within marriage as the norm. In the countryside, chastity was the ideal for both sexes, but in reality families and wider communities policed women's pre-marital and extramarital sexual behavior more stringently through ritualized shaming.[60] The ideal of sex within marriage was also promoted outside rural communities, as "consensual unions", that is, two unmarried partners living together, were strongly condemned by both educated society and other lower-class people in urban centers.[61] Through regulation, the tsarist authorities attempted to limit the visibility of prostitutes to safeguard public morality. Registered women were forbidden

[59] TsGIASPb, f. 593, op. 1, d. 645, l. 16, 57, 78; TsGIASPb, f. 593, op. 1, d. 643, l. 412.
[60] Engel, *Between the Fields and the City,* 8-9. Young men targeted young girls who had illegitimate children. Practices included the defacing of her parents' property or public defamation of character through the loud singing of mocking songs and rhymes. Christine D. Worobec, "Masculinity in Late-Imperial Russian Peasant Society" in *Russian Masculinities in History and Culture,* eds., Barbara Evans Clements, Rebecca Friedman and Dan Healey (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 83-84.
[61] Engel, *Between the Fields and the City,* 163-64.

from "obscenely" appearing in the windows of their apartments, disturbing and "enticing" passers-by on the streets, walking together in public places, and even sitting in the stalls at the theatre.[62] Brothels were to be located at least 320 meters away from religious institutions and madams were forbidden from opening their establishments on holy days or before the weekly Sunday liturgy, although they often broke the rules.[63] The classification of prostitution as immoral allowed the authorities to categorize female behavior in binary terms, separating "debauched" prostitutes from other "honest" women. The St Petersburg and Riga medical-police committees often conflated "promiscuous" sexual behavior with commercial sex. Evidence of multiple sexual partners or frequent socializing with men could be used to justify the need to bring a woman under medical supervision.

Denunciations were an outlet for expressing disapproval of a woman's behavior. Letter writers often eschewed economic justifications for prostitution, and instead perpetuated stereotypes regarding the "loose" morals of lower-class women. These ideas were widely reinforced by members of the medical community, who emphasized that lower-class women were the antithesis of their "passive and morally irreproachable" social superiors: capable of sexual license and responsible for the spread of venereal diseases.[64] In addition, the booming pornographic postcard industry made the bodies of lower-class women available for public consumption, and their reputation in these publications helped to reinforce the perception that they were "insatiable and constantly ready for sex".[65] As the vast majority of denunciations were directed against migrants, these letters

[62] TsGIASPb, f. 569, op. 18, d. 4, l. 33. In the capital, prostitutes were forbidden from living in various central locations, such as Nevskii, Liteinyi, Vladimirskii, Voznesenskii and Izmailovskii *prospekti,* and the entire first and second parts of the Admiralteiskii district. TsGIASPb, f. 593, op. 1, d. 601, l. 11.
[63] TsGIASPb, f. 569, op. 18, d. 4, l. 34.
[64] Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness,* 186-87.
[65] Alison Rowley, *Open Letters: Russian Popular Culture and the Picture Postcard, 1880-1922* (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 117.

reveal widespread concern regarding the links between modernization, urbanization, migration, and the moral corruption of women.[66] The boulevard press was filled with "typical" stories of the downfall of naïve newly-arrived peasants following their seduction by the "mirage" of the big city and all it offered.[67] Journalists fed popular anxieties regarding the degeneration of moral values in the city, reporting in lurid detail about the decadent women who patrolled the streets actively pursuing men and presenting vivid descriptions of the apparent "sexual bacchanalia" of the age.[68] Therefore, the denunciation of women as clandestine prostitutes was a moralizing tool for policing the behavior of migrants who had become "spoiled" by the excesses of city life.[69]

It is difficult to deduce the identity of those who wrote to the authorities to draw attention to "inappropriate" female behavior. Such petitioners were more likely to remain anonymous and usually did not mention having sexual intercourse with the woman in question, unlike the clients who complained about contracting infection in the previous section. From their use of personal pronouns, we can infer that the vast majority of denouncers were men. Some appear to have been former partners, clients, employers, family members or neighbors seeking revenge, and others reflect a more abstract desire to police women's behavior. Whatever their relationship to the subjects of their denunciation, the theme of deception runs throughout this correspondence. Petitioners fused personal grievances with wider societal interests, stressing that "clandestines" blurred the binary between "honest" women and prostitutes, and that they would be

[66] Out of the 15 denunciation letters referenced in this article, 13 were directed against women who had been born outside the city.
[67] Mark Steinberg provides an example of this trope in the opening of his essay, Mark Steinberg, "Feeling Modern on the Russian Street: From Desire to Despair" in *The Routledge History Handbook of Gender and the Urban Experience,* ed. Deborah Simonton (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 374-84.
[68] Steinberg, *Petersburg,* 179-97; Healey, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia*, 33-34.
[69] In Burds' study of late 19th and early 20th-century religious denunciations written by peasants in villages around Moscow, 90 per cent were directed against migrant workers. Burds, "A Culture of Denunciation", 790.

indistinguishable from the rest of the female population had it not been for their valuable input. In calling on the authorities to intervene, denouncers availed themselves of the legal options available to them, which speaks to the wider historiographical notion of the development of legal consciousness amongst Russia's lower classes in the final decades of tsarist rule.[70]

In certain denunciations, the language used suggests that the letter was influenced by personal grievances. On 7 March 1905, an anonymous man wrote to the St Petersburg medical-police committee to draw their attention to Evdokiia Cherepanova, a 22-year-old peasant migrant from Arkhangel'sk province:

> I have the honor to inform the committee that on Aleksandr-Nevskii Prospekt, in house number 4, lives a woman who is secretly engaging in prostitution in Nikolaev station. I, the writer of the petition, accidentally found my way to her, and as it turns out she has a venereal disease […] When she is not having sex, she lives in an apartment under the guise of a seamstress. She is medium height, dressed in a velvet jacket and a wide-brimmed winter hat.[71]

We can assume that this man was a client by his reference to contracting a venereal infection and emphasis on his lack of culpability. He foregrounded Cherepanova's apparent double deception in his letter. First, she was well dressed and had another "respectable" job, so was likely to slip under the radar of the medical-police committee. Second, by referring to her expensive fashionable clothing, he suggested that

[70] Burbank, *Russian Peasants Go to Court;* Verner, "Discursive Strategies"; Pyle, "Peasant Strategies".
[71] Nikolaev station is now Moskovskii station. TsGIASPb, f. 593, op. 1, d. 643, l. 79.

Cherepanova was blurring the boundaries of social class, drawing on the popular trope of the naïve and poorly paid seamstress or saleswoman who turned to prostitution in order to replicate the coveted lives and outfits of her upper-class customers.[72] In highlighting Cherepanova's deception, the petitioner further stressed the supposedly insidious threat that clandestine prostitutes posed to the public and the service he provided the tsarist authorities in exposing them. In a similar case, the Riga medical-police committee received an anonymous letter in March 1901 denouncing Stanislava Siricheva. The denouncer gave detailed information about Siricheva's place of residence and claimed that she sold sex at "all of the hotels in Riga" while working under the guise of a singer at the Eldorado Restaurant.[73] It is impossible to know whether these women had been selling sex sporadically or whether this information had been fabricated. When the medical-police investigated Cherepanova, they found that she had abruptly left St Petersburg on 30 March, potentially in an attempt to avoid medical-police harassment.[74] Conversely, Siricheva proved her innocence by sending the authorities a medical certificate signed by a doctor, which confirmed that she was free from venereal infection.[75]

Another anonymous denunciation letter from a railroad worker in Riga utilized similar discourses of deception and also hinted at a personal grudge. Writing in September 1900, the petitioner rebuked Varvara Morozova for rising above her station and making "big money" working as a clandestine prostitute, and called for her to be registered by the police so that her "earnings would decrease".[76] The letter spanned two pages and went

[72] 'Khoziaki – Svodni' and 'Mezhdu Masterskoi i Pritonom', *Golos Portnogo,* 1-2 (1910): 8-10. Christine Ruane, "Clothes Shopping in Imperial Russia: The Development of a Consumer Culture", *Journal of Social History,* 28, 4 (1995), 773; Bernstein, *Sonia's Daughters,* 118.
[73] LVVA, f. 51, apr. 1, l. 23471, lp. 373.
[74] TsGIASPb, f. 593, op. 1, d. 643, l. 82.
[75] LVVA, f. 51, apr. 1, l. 23471, lp. 374.
[76] LVVA, f. 51, apr. 1, l. 23466, lp. 406.

into detail about Morozova's life and employment history, which suggests that the petitioner was either a friend, relative, former employer or perhaps had previously been in a relationship with Morozova. The petitioner claimed that Morozova had worked as a domestic servant and had formerly been registered as a prostitute, but was now working clandestinely under the guise of a fruit seller. "She is so cunningly engaged in prostitution that it can be difficult to catch her", he wrote, exploiting the stereotype of the clandestine prostitute as the deceptive and subversive saboteur.[77] Riga's medical-police committee investigated Morozova and found her at the city's train station, selling fruit at her stand from 8am until 8pm, even on Sundays.[78] The petitioner's explicit desire to chasten Morozova by decreasing her earnings and seeing her registered onto the police lists suggests that there were personal motivations behind the denunciation. As the regulation system centered on monitoring women for the benefit of wider society, it empowered disgruntled individuals to disguise their attempts at revenge as expressions of dutiful concern for public health or morality. The evidence required to summon a woman for a medical-police committee hearing was limited, so denunciations had the potential to seriously disrupt a woman's life, forcing her to either register as a prostitute or relocate to avoid police harassment.

Denunciations on the grounds of morality offered resentful husbands the opportunity to publicly rebuke their wives' behavior. In 1905, Osip Kurochkin denounced his wife Anastasiia because she refused to live with him and had sexual intercourse with other men.[79] When the committee investigated Anastasiia, they found that Osip had physically abused her and that she now lived with Iakov Golin, a baker who supported her

[77] Ibid, lp. 408.
[78] Ibid, lp. 407.
[79] TsGIASPb, f. 593, op. 1, d. 643, l. 664.

financially.[80] However, Anastasiia's engagement in extramarital sex was enough to mark her as a potential prostitute and keep her on the radar of the medical-police, as two months later, the committee asked for a further report on Anastasiia's behavior and occupation.[81]

Other denunciation letters indicate a more general desire to chastise "inappropriate" female behavior by encouraging state intervention into the lives of accused women. Anna Stolbova was denounced to the St Petersburg medical-police committee in March 1905 when her neighbor spotted her arriving home in the early hours of the morning.[82] Nadezdha Mitrofanova was accused of clandestine prostitution in May 1905 on the grounds that a man stayed at her apartment on Wednesdays, Saturdays and occasionally on Mondays.[83] The committee later found that this mystery man was in fact her partner, rather than client.[84] Women also petitioned the authorities to draw attention to improper conduct, although they wrote far less frequently than men.[85] On 30 January 1909, Katerina Dode denounced Anna Baruzdina and Mariia Trufanova, both 30-year-old peasant migrants, to the St Petersburg medical-police committee. In an exaggerated petition, Dode claimed that she could not even pass through the courtyard outside her apartment building as entire naval crews and drunken soldiers loitered there waiting for the two women.[86] When patrolmen conducted their investigation, they found that

[80] Ibid, l. 665.
[81] Ibid, l. 663.
[82] TsGIASPb, f. 593, op. 1, d. 643, l. 401a.
[83] Ibid, l. 692.
[84] Ibid, l. 689.
[85] Out of the 15 denunciation letters that this article draws on, only 1 petitioner identified themselves as female.
[86] TsGIASPb, f. 593, op. 1, d. 645, l. 89.

Baruzdina and Trufanova were both domestic servants and not engaged in clandestine prostitution.[87]

The regulation system reinforced the idea that wider society needed to police female behavior to protect public health and morality. Given the chronic staff shortages in the late imperial police force, municipal authorities relied on yardmen and night watchmen to inform on, and sometimes even detain, suspected criminals.[88] In a similar way, local medical-police committees encouraged yardmen, watchmen, and homeowners to act as informants to either vouch for or condemn women accused of working as unregistered prostitutes.[89] In Riga in 1916, when the medical-police accused 32-year-old laundress Liudviga Kusen of clandestine prostitution, they interviewed the yardman of her building. Although he had only worked there for two months, he had apparently been "troubled" by her "strange way of life":

> Almost no day has passed when soldiers do not come to see her, sometimes even several at once. Her statement that the soldiers are bringing her laundry is not credible, as I have never seen her washing clothes or hanging them out to dry.[90]

A medical-police patrolman used the yardman's statement to make a case against Kusen, and his claims were apparently "strengthened by rumors" heard in the local area. Although neither the patrolman nor the yardman had actually witnessed her having sexual intercourse with soldiers, the fact that they had *not* seen her doing laundry was

[87] Ibid, l. 101, 102.
[88] Weissman, "Regular Police in Tsarist Russia", 49; Yardmen (*dvorniki*) were groundskeepers for apartment buildings. They were "traditionally valuable police informants" who were able to keep the authorities abreast of the comings and goings in each building. Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *Crime and Punishment in the Russian Revolution: Mob Justice and Police in Petrograd* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 36.
[89] LVVA, f. 51, apr. 1, l. 23555, lp. 346.
[90] LVVA, f. 51, apr. 1, l. 23559, lp. 370.

sufficient evidence of her involvement in clandestine prostitution. Like denouncers, those who working in apartment buildings served to buttress the patriarchal authority of the tsarist state by providing the authorities with a network to supervise women deemed to be suspicious.

Letters of defense

Urban residents and registered prostitutes wrote to protest against the actions of their local medical-police committees, and this section examines correspondence of this nature in Riga in the early 1900s. The two groups wrote to the police for different reasons. Urban residents predominantly wrote to defend female honor and called for women to be removed from the police lists. Like denouncers, they exploited stereotypes about gender and social class to elicit specific responses from their readers, drawing on popular discourses about the vulnerability of young female peasant migrants.[91] They also polarized female behavior, stressing how the subjects of their petitions had been wrongly identified as prostitutes when they were in fact "decent" women. On the other hand, those who self-identified as prostitutes wrote to defend their legal rights and protest against police corruption. This correspondence reveals how registered prostitutes and urban dwellers referenced broader public discussions when corresponding with the authorities, which further demonstrates the multiple forms of interaction and resistance between those "above" and "below".

In the name of female honor

[91] This rhetorical strategy is explored in Engel, *Breaking the Ties That Bound,* 132; Pyle, "Peasant Strategies"; Figes, "The Russian Revolution of 1917".

One of the most controversial practices of regulation was the enrollment of women onto the police lists without their consent. In 1892, the State Senate ruled that all women inscribed onto the police lists had to do so voluntarily and officially forbade forced registration.[92] Local medical-police committees often did not respect this rule and there is ample evidence to suggest that corruption and extortion were both central to the regulation system. For example, the Chief Medical Inspector directed local authorities to specific laws so that they could prosecute women who did not wish to "submit to regulation" as criminals.[93] The Governor of Lifliand stated that medical-police committees within his province had the right to register women "with their consent or against their will, if there was compelling evidence" in 1910.[94] In Riga, the police force acknowledged that forced registration was a problem. In 1915, the Police Chief received countless complaints about the "unauthorized" registration of women as prostitutes in the city. He warned police officers that they should be careful with their accusations to prevent "offending female modesty".[95]

Tsarist Russia was largely a patriarchal honor-based society. Russian society had a long legal tradition that allowed individuals from across the social spectrum to contest unfairly damaged reputations, either through the courts or petitioning practices.[96] Sexual propriety was fundamentally important to constructions of female integrity and defending the reputations of wives, partners and daughters was a key component of masculine honor.[97] Therefore, the classification of a woman as a "debauched" prostitute

[92] Bernstein, *Sonia's Daughters,* 37.
[93] In this instance, the Chief Medical Inspector advised the Military Governor of Primorskii *oblast'* to prosecute these women under Article 44 of the Statute of Punishment, updated in December 1909. RGIA, f. 1298, op. 1, d. 1730, l. 33, 65.
[94] Ibid, l. 102.
[95] LVVA, f. 51, apr. 1, l. 23555, lp. 346.
[96] Worobec, "Masculinity in Late-Imperial Russian Peasant Society", 89.
[97] Nancy Shields Kollmann, "What's Love Got to Do With it? Changing Models of Masculinity in Muscovite and Petrine Russia" in *Russian Masculinities*, 21.

had negative implications for the reputations of the men in her life. These rigid ideas classified female honor as something to be protected, which reinforced the perception that women required constant custodial care and supervision by either individual men or the state.

Petitioners who protested against forced registration used the language of despotism and individual rights to express concern regarding violations of honor. Drawing on critiques of despotism voiced by various commentators across the social spectrum during this period, these petitioners focused on the destructive impact of police corruption on women's lives.[98] Those who wrote in this way drew on popular stereotypes of female vulnerability to emphasize how the arbitrary actions of medical-police patrolmen had disastrous consequences for the women in question. When petitioners employed this rhetorical technique, they forced the reader of the petition in an active role. By inverting the power relationship between themselves and the authorities, petitioners placed a "burden of conscience" on the recipient and implored them to act.[99]

A petition written by Emiliia Verter to the Riga medical-police committee in 1900 typifies this rhetorical technique. Verter wrote that on one night in June, medical-police patrolmen had stormed into the inn where she was staying at with a friend at midnight,

[98] Doctors, journalists, writers and jurists complained about how the "social and political problem" of despotism contributed to a variety of social ills, namely widespread prostitution, alcoholism and poverty. Susan K. Morrissey, *Suicide and the Body Politic in Imperial Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 269. In her study on murder, Louise McReynolds argues that the "persistence of autocracy" colored Russian legal and criminological debates in the late imperial period, Louise McReynolds, *Murder Most Russian: True Crime and Punishment in Late Imperial Russia* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2013), 52. Barbara Engel argues that the word "despot" came into broad usage in marital prescriptive literature and by witnesses in provincial courts to condemn the "unrestrained or illegitimate exercise and subordination of another's 'free will' by rulers, parents, and husbands", Engel, *Breaking the Ties that Bound,* 169-70.

[99] Golfo Alexoupoulos comments that this is a key feature of the ritual lament. This rhetorical technique was widely used in the 1920s and 1930s by those denied political and economic rights in their appeals to the Soviet government. Alexopoulos, "The Ritual Lament: a Narrative of Appeal". Emily Pyle also identifies the use of this technique by peasants who begged for aid in the First World War, Pyle, "Peasant Strategies", 49.

confiscated her passport and registered her as a prostitute without her consent.[100] Verter employed judicial language to propel the recipient of her petition into action, questioning, "is it legal to do this to an old widow who has fully-grown children?"[101] She invoked official and popular discourse about the importance of upholding female morality, stating that she had three "gentlemen" who could vouch for her character and that the situation must be resolved because she had "her honor to protect".[102] Verter ended her petition with a final plea for sympathy: "as a woman, I do not want to hurt myself, but the law has". In a similar way, Charlotte Steinberg wrote to the Riga Police Chief about the harassment of her niece, Elena Vannag. In May 1901, Vannag, who worked in a shop, was "grabbed by agents on the street", arrested and then forced to appear in front of the medical-police committee.[103] Steinberg claimed that medical-police patrolmen had harassed Vannag and her employer so forcefully that she lost her job and left the city. Patrolmen had allegedly "condemned her [niece] to an immoral life" and deprived her of the opportunity to become an archetype of appropriate womanhood: "an honest worker, a bride, a married woman or a mother".

In highlighting how female honor could be "ruined" by men in positions of relative power, these two petitioners linked their criticisms of police corruption with the wider anti-procurement discourses of the early 20th century. Fear over so-called "white slavery", or in Russian the "trade in women" (*torgovliia zhenshchinami*), reached a crescendo across Europe and North America at the turn of the century, following the publication of British journalist William Stead's exposé on child prostitution in Victorian London "The Maiden

[100] LVVA, f. 51, apr. 1, l. 23466, lp. 128.
[101] Jane Burbank richly demonstrates how lower-class people who sought assistance from the law were aware of their rights and argues that Russia's legal system, although inefficient, "expanded the discourse on social being", Burbank, *Russian Peasants Go to Court*, 43-48.
[102] LVVA, f. 51, apr. 1, l. 23466, lp. 130.
[103] Ibid, lp. 666.

Tribute to Modern Babylon" in 1885.[104] Across Europe and North America, narratives of white slavery followed the same formula: the perpetrator, often typecast as a Jewish man, ensnared a young woman in a seemingly everyday situation and precipitated her "downfall" from innocence.[105] Verter and Steinberg's petitions mirror this formula, but with the medical-police playing the role of the perpetrator. The petitioners claimed that, like "white slavers", medical-police patrolmen had destroyed the otherwise peaceful lives of these women and called their honor and respectability into question, factors which could have forced them into prostitution. Their criticisms helped to highlight the destructive potential of police corruption, drawing on wider concerns about procurement.

Petitioners also exploited tropes about the vulnerability of young female peasant migrants to secure a woman's removal from the police lists. In July 1900, Rudolf Trednek wrote to the Riga Police Chief regarding his cousin Elizaveta, who had travelled from the countryside to work in Riga.[106] Elizaveta was presented as a "typical" victim of industrialization and urbanization in order to elicit sympathy.[107] After arriving in Riga fresh from the countryside, in her "youth and inexperience" she had apparently become acquainted with "debauched girls" and "plunged deeper and deeper" into a dissolute life.

[104] While in other international contexts "white slavery" referred to the trafficking of women abroad for the purposes of prostitution, in Russia, the definition of the "trade in women" was much broader, encompassing a wide range of activities from forced prostitution to the recruitment of brothel workers. On responses to the international crime of "white slavery" in eastern Europe see Bernstein, *Sonia's Daughters,* 146-61; Stauter-Halstead, *The Devil's Chain*, 117-36; Nancy M. Wingfield, "Destination: Alexandria, Buenos Aires, Constantinople: 'White Slavers' in Late Imperial Austria", *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 20, 2 (2011): 291-311; Philippa Hetherington, "Victims of the Social Temperament: Prostitution, Migration and the Traffic in Women from Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union, 1885-1935"' (Ph.D diss., Harvard University, 2014).

[105] Discussions of the "trade in women" were an outlet for wider antisemitic prejudices in various international contexts. Bernstein, *Sonia's Daughters,* 161-62; Brian Donovan, *White Slave Crusades: Race, Gender and Anti-vice Activism, 1887-1917* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 18; Elisa Camiscioli, *Reproducing the French Race: Immigration, Intimacy and Embodiment in the Early Twentieth Century* (Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2009), 101.

[106] LVVA, f. 51, apr. 1, l. 23466, lp. 137.

[107] Steinberg, "Feeling Modern on the Russian Street", 374.

Apparently, her parents were completely unaware of the fate of their "unfortunate daughter". Trednek attempted to flatter the Police Chief by elevating his role to that of savior, reminding him that "the matter of salvation was in [his] hands". He also promised to personally vouch for Elizaveta's future morality by bringing her back into the "circle of relatives" so that she could leave her former life behind.

An assurance that petitioners were willing to personally vouch for a woman's behavior was common in letters of this kind, which suggests that petitioners exploited the idea that women required male custodial care, or that they even bought into the idea themselves. When Karl Stranke petitioned to ensure Mariia Zabak's removal from the police lists in June 1900, he promised to ensure that she would "never again even think to lead this kind of life".[108] In August 1900, two men wrote to the Riga Police Chief on the same day regarding the forced registration of their fiancées, asking for the two women to be released "into [their] care", echoing official and popular ideas regarding women's constant need for male supervision.[109] In January 1900, Iakov Robson wrote to request the removal of his girlfriend Berta Maudeks from the Riga police lists and employed similar rhetorical techniques. He assured the authorities that he was Maudeks' only sexual partner, and that he would inform the police immediately if her behavior became "scandalous", or if she ended their relationship.[110] It is impossible to know whether this assurance was merely a written proclamation of civic duty with the intention of establishing an alliance with the authorities to ensure a favorable outcome for Maudeks, or whether it reflected a genuine perception of the need to monitor female behavior. In

[108] LVVA, f. 51, apr. 1, l. 23466, lp. 3.
[109] Ibid, lp. 237, 238.
[110] LVVA, f. 51, apr. 1, l. 23471, lp. 361.

these cases, and many others, men used the privilege afforded by their gender to further legitimize a woman's request for removal.[111]

Petitioners also highlighted their social status to strengthen a woman's appeal for deregistration. In 1916, Luiza Gammerbek, a member of the urban elite, wrote to the Riga Police Chief on behalf of Nataliia Kal'nin, a peasant migrant who had served Gammerbek as a domestic servant for 14 years.[112] Gammerbek formulated her petition as a ritual lament, presenting Kal'nin's situation as cycle of misfortune.[113] Kal'nin had apparently been detained by the medical-police committee after they found her at home with two "unknown soldiers".[114] Following the arrest, a doctor examined Kal'nin and found that she was infected with a venereal disease. As the police identified Kal'nin as a "clandestine", she was now subject to deportation from Riga as part of state-led efforts to expel registered prostitutes from the city during the First World War.[115] Gammerbek implored the Police Chief to remove Kal'nin from the police lists and prevent her deportation as she was "in the service of a Riga merchant of the First Guild" who could vouch for her character if need be. At the end of her petition, Gammerbek stated that she would personally "take full responsibility for the future honest life of Kal'nin".[116] Although documents that pertain to the outcome of Gammerbek's petition have not

[111] Other examples that employ this technique include LVVA, f. 51, apr. 1, l. 23466, lp. 522, 523; LVVA, f. 51, apr. 1, l. 23477, lp. 274; LVVA, f. 51, apr. 1, l. 23575, lp. 36, 179, 600.
[112] Luiza described herself as a "hereditary honorable citizen" (*potomstvennaia pochetnaia grazhdanka*). For urban dwellers, this was a prestigious social category, usually awarded to wealthy or influential merchants (Alison K. Smith, "Honoured Citizens and the Creation of a Middle Class in Imperial Russia", *Slavic Review,* 76, 2 (2017): 327-349; Nicolas Spulber, *Russia's Economic Transitions: From Late Tsarism to the New Millennium* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003], 10).
[113] Golfo Alexopoulos identifies this as a common feature of the ritual lament, intended to elicit sympathy and present the person in question as powerless. Alexopoulos, "The Ritual Lament", 122.
[114] LVVA, f. 51, apr. 1, l. 23559, lp. 77.
[115] In October 1915 the Chief of the Armies of the Northern Front and Riga's Chief of Police issued an order expelling 296 registered prostitutes from the city. Hearne, "Sex on the Front", 107-108.
[116] LVVA, f. 51, apr. 1, l. 23559, lp. 78.

survived, it is highly likely that the Police Chief would have found it difficult to refuse the request of a woman of such high status in urban society.

In the name of legal rights

One of the greatest methodological challenges of writing the history of prostitution is the limited access to the voices of women who worked in the commercial sex industry. When petitioners wrote to secure a woman's removal from the police lists, they often drew on discourses of female vulnerability and defined their subject in opposition to the supposedly "debauched" prostitute. When women petitioned to request their own removal, they often expressed disgust for their profession and a desire to earn a living "honestly" or "decently".[117] We can never know whether these petitioners were writing in a specific language to elicit sympathy to achieve certain ends, or whether these women genuinely despised working as prostitutes. Nor are we able to know the complex myriad of choices and circumstances that may have led to a woman's name appearing on the police lists.

Despite this, there are several examples of registered prostitutes who challenged the authorities to fight for their rights. Under regulation, women who sold sex had to follow a series of rules that prohibited them from appearing within specific urban spaces and forbade them from taking clients while infected with venereal diseases, pregnant, or

[117] LVVA, f. 51, apr. 1, l. 23466, lp. 125, 240, 243, 370; LVVA, f. 51, apr. 1, l. 23539, lp. 681; LVVA, f. 51, apr. 1, l. 23575, lp. 621, 679. Perhaps these women included the phrase "honest work" as medical-police committees were legally obliged to help those women who wanted to "return to an honest way of life", TsGIASPb, f. 569, op. 18, d. 4, l. 32. The above examples are exclusively from women who lived in Riga. The format and language used in petitions for removal varied from place to place.

during menstruation.[118] If they followed the rules, registered women had the right to choose whether they worked in brothels or as independent prostitutes (known as *odinochki*) in hotels, furnished rooms, or at their apartments. They could also refuse to have sex with clients thought to be infected with venereal diseases. Women who worked in brothels had the right to free medical treatment and were entitled to leave the brothel at any time, even if they happened to be in arrears with their madam.

The authorities received petitions from registered prostitutes demanding that their right to choose their working location be maintained, which suggests that some registered women saw "prostitute" as an occupational identity with corresponding rights, rather than merely a slur for "promiscuous" women. On 7 July 1908, the Governor of Grodno province received a petition from a group of registered prostitutes working in the city of Brest. The petition ended with the signatures of 16 women, mirroring the petitioning style of peasants and urban workers who wrote to the Duma and other official institutions during the 1905 revolutions.[119] Certain groups of registered prostitutes would have been emboldened by the unionization movements of the revolutionary period, especially as thousands of representatives from other female-dominated professions, such as domestic service, took to the streets across the empire demanding better working conditions and pay between 1905 and 1907.[120] Registered prostitutes even went on strike in Vilnius and Iaroslavl' in 1905 to protest against the excessive reduction of their earnings by their brothel madams.[121] The 16 women in Brest identified themselves as

[118] TsGIASPb, f. 569, op. 18, d. 4, l. 33.
[119] This style is detailed in Ekaterina Betekhtina, "Afterword: Style in Lower-Class Writing in 1917" in *Voices of Revolution, 1917,* ed. Mark Steinberg (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 326-27 and Verner, "Discursive Strategies", 67.
[120] Rebecca Spagnolo, "Serving the Household, Asserting the Self: Urban Domestic Servant Activism, 1900-1917" in *The Human Tradition in Imperial Russia*, ed. Christine D. Worobec (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 148-49.
[121] "Zabastovka Prostitutok", *RZhKVB,* 2 (1905), 171; Emel'ian M. Iaroslavskii, 'Zabastovka Prostitutok', *Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia,* 6 (1922), 121-22.

independent prostitutes, and began their petition by reminding the Governor that they had always followed the rules by registering with the police and attending their weekly compulsory examinations.[122] Their grievances lay with the newly appointed Chief of Police for the city, Frimirman, who they claimed had tried to force them to work in state-licensed brothels. They expressed their outrage with a threat:

> This measure is pointless and tactless. It will cause widespread syphilis across the city and garrison. […] We are completely unwilling to become brothel prostitutes as the Police Chief wishes. We are on the streets with no specific occupation and no means to travel or live. We, and others like us, will be involuntarily forced to engage in illegal secret prostitution, which will have deplorable consequences.[123]

The 16 women drew on popular stereotypes of clandestine prostitutes as devious saboteurs and vector of disease, threatening the authorities with their destructive potential were their demands not met.[124] Their letter was a form of skilled blackmailing, as by claiming that they would be "involuntarily forced" into clandestine prostitution, the women pushed the recipient into an active position and positioned themselves as passive victims of circumstance. Drawing on judicial language, they reminded the Governor that Frimirman's actions were "illegal in relation to fundamental laws" and that there was "no legal basis" for this discrimination. The petition demonstrates how registered prostitutes used their knowledge of the system imposed upon them to further their own aims. These women demonstrated to the authorities that they were willing to work outside the law if

[122] GARF, f. 102 (Department of Police), op. 65, d. 40ch4, l. 1.
[123] Ibid, l. 2, 3.
[124] Verner shows that peasant petitioners contained veiled threats in their written interactions with the authorities, Verner, "Discursive Strategies", 70-71.

they were denied their preferred working location, referencing the official regulatory aim of safeguarding public and military health to strengthen their claim. Despite their best attempts, the Governor unsurprisingly sided with the Police Chief and the petition was dismissed as "undeserving of attention" in October 1908.[125] We can speculate that it was financially advantageous for the authorities to have more registered prostitutes working in brothels, given that brothel madams routinely paid dues, fines and bribes to the local police.

In another case, registered prostitutes threatened the authorities with the spread of disease to achieve different ends. On 10 February 1915, the Department of Police received a petition from two registered women living in Ekaterinoslav (now Dnipro), Marfa Ivanova and Nastiia Marfumia, complaining about recent brothel closures in the city. They lamented the closure of one particular establishment, the Shantan Apollo, which they argued had served as a "refuge" for prostitutes.[126] Since the closure of the brothel, the two "unfortunate fallen women" had been "forced to degrade [their] sinful bodies on the streets", which had caused widespread venereal infection across Ekaterinoslav. In adopting this language, the petitioners stressed the essential role of the brothel in protecting the public from witnessing their "degradation".[127] Although working in a brothel came with restrictions, these women may have favored a fixed working location, a regular stream of clients and the free medical treatment that their madam was legally obliged to provide.

To secure their preferred working location, Ivanova and Marfumia characterized themselves as fallen women, a popular trope in literature and social commentary. The

[125] GARF, f. 102, op. 65, d. 40ch4, l. 6.
[126] RGIA, f. 1298, op. 1, d. 2400, l. 11. This petition is touched on briefly in Bernstein, *Sonia's Daughters,* 188.
[127] RGIA, f. 1298, op. 1, d. 2400, l. 12.

fallen woman was usually a lower-class "unfortunate" forced into prostitution by circumstances beyond their control, who could potentially be "saved" by the intervention of her social superiors.[128] Rescuing fallen women from prostitution was a cause that united various observers from across the social spectrum, stemming from a reluctance to acknowledge the influence of individual choice in women's entry into commercial sex.[129] Ivanova and Marfumia exploited stereotypes about their gender and social status to achieve certain ends, augmenting "a portrait of female helplessness" in order to elicit sympathy.[130] Rather than referring to prostitution as their occupation, Ivanova and Marfumia presented themselves as "unfortunate" and "sinful", and implored the state to intervene on their behalf. Despite positioning themselves as passive victims, the women managed to include a veiled threat by referring to their infectious potential and the detrimental impact of their increased visibility on public morality.

In other instances, registered women reminded the Riga authorities of their legal obligation to provide them with the documents required for them to start work. In July 1900, Ella Friderin and Mariia Vestfas, petitioned the Riga medical-police committee to ask for their medical books so that they could "earn a piece of bread" as they currently had "nothing to support themselves".[131] In September of the same year, Feodosiia Leont'eva wrote to ask for her residency permit so that she could earn "a piece of vital bread".[132] By referencing their lack of sustenance, these women replicated the official

[128] Two examples that follow this trope are Sonia Marmeladova from Dosteovskii's *Crime and Punishment* (1866) and Katusha Maslova from Tolstoi's *Resurrection* (1899). George Sigel explores the stereotype in more detail in his essay, George Siegel, "The Fallen Woman in Russian Nineteenth-Century Literature" in *Harvard Slavic Studies,* vol. 5, ed. Horace G. Lunt (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 81-108.
[129] Bernstein, *Sonia's Daughters,* 189-91.
[130] Engel, *Breaking the Ties That Bound,* 49. Pyle suggests that peasants "role-played" different characters, when requesting state aid, as they were aware that local officials' decisions were based on subjective interpretations of criteria, Pyle, "Peasant Strategies", 60.
[131] Friderin and Vestfas claimed to have petitioned the committee twice already for the same reason, LVVA, f. 51, apr. 1, l. 23466, lp. 95.
[132] LVVA, f. 51, apr. 1, l. 23466, lp. 409.

discourses that defined eligibility for state aid to propel the medical-police committee into action.[133] The inefficiency of local authorities in arranging the registration and supervision of prostitutes forced some to work outside the legal parameters of regulation, something that these three women claimed they were unwilling to do.

Conclusion

The intersections of gender and class are fundamental considerations for studying Russia's state regulation of prostitution. Single lower-class women were vulnerable members of urban communities as their behavior was under constant scrutiny. Both denunciation practices and regulation policy served as state-approved techniques for bringing lower-class women under some form of patriarchal control. The denunciation of migrant women as clandestine prostitutes, even when there was clearly no evidence for their engagement in commercial sex, reveals how some individuals kicked back against the disruption of traditional gender and family roles by the processes of industrialization and modernization. When attempting to remove their names from the police lists, women constructed themselves as bastions of modesty and found a man, or a social superior, who was willing to vouch for their behavior. When registered prostitutes requested state intervention, they drew on the official discourses that typecast them as vectors of disease or fallen "unfortunates". Individuals constructed themselves as humble servants of the tsarist state and engaged in acts of skilled blackmailing to obtain specific outcomes.

The regulation system was not just about prostitution; instead it formed part of wider mechanisms to control and regulate lower-class female behavior. Prostitutes' clients

[133] The 1877 law for defining eligibility stated that those who "lacked their own means of subsistence" were able to claim state aid. Pyle argues that peasants petitioning for aid during the First World War borrowed the language from this legislation, which they may have heard from local scribes, to win favor with the authorities. Pyle, "Peasant Strategies", 50.

provided local authorities with an extra layer of informal policing as they denounced women who allegedly worked outside the legal parameters of the system. However, practices of forced registration and the illegal application of regulation policy were strongly opposed by individual women and urban communities. Overall, responses to the regulation system were complicated. Some urban residents enthusiastically aided the medical-police by denouncing women as "clandestines", whereas others wrote in defense of women they believed had been victimized by overzealous patrolmen. Registered women identified themselves as workers entitled to legal rights and "unfortunates" forced into an apparently immoral and revolting profession. This correspondence shows the sophisticated ways in which lower-class people communicated with the authorities. Whether positioning themselves as dutiful denouncers concerned with public health, enactors of patriarchal authority on the ground or as victims of injustice and discrimination, their points of reference in their petitions shifted in line with dominant official and popular discourses. Above all, the surviving petitions indicate that urban residents actively sought engagement with the Russian imperial state and expected those in authority to be held accountable for their actions.

University of Nottingham,
University Park,
Nottingham, NG7 2RD,
United Kingdom.
siobhan.hearne@nottingham.ac.uk