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## INTRODUCTION: BERLIN'S BOURGEOIS WHORES

In the winter of 1988, the women of Hydra organized a “Whores’ Ball” (*Hurenball*) in West Berlin. Hydra, a support organization founded in 1980 by prostitutes and their advocates, actively lobbies for sex workers’ civil rights and the elimination of the social and moral stigma attached to prostitution. The 1988 ball raised funds for Hydra’s social initiatives, including extensive outreach to economically disadvantaged prostitutes and heightened awareness of HIV/AIDS, but it also celebrated nearly a decade of the organization’s advocacy work in Berlin. Hydra’s organizing team envisioned “an intoxicating nighttime ball” in Berlin’s International Conference Center, featuring performances by the transvestite diva Georgette Dee and other renowned musical acts. Their twin goals of charity fundraising and lavish celebration resulted in a high ticket price for the event, and one of Berlin’s left-liberal daily newspapers, the *tageszeitung* (*taz*), complained that the cost of admission to the ball automatically excluded the majority of “poor whores” from attending. Despite their misgivings, a slew of Berlin journalists attended the ball, among them some from the *taz*. In their report on the ball, the *taz* writers expressed their disappointment with the disparity between what they had imagined the ball would be and what they actually observed: “A whores’ ball, that sounds like lace panties, like immorality, like sin, like scandal, brothel, and *Irma la Douce*.” But the ball they attended was, instead, “a proper event through and through” with “few garter belts,

no naked body parts, the majority of men in suits or tuxedos. Not a real whore to be found.” The women of Hydra, many of them self-identified “whores,” saw the *taz* article as a clear example of how, even in left-liberal circles, dominant clichés of prostitutes persist. If the journalists at the *taz* could not find poor, downtrodden victims at the whores’ ball, then they at least expected to see glamorous femmes fatales parading around in risqué lingerie. They wanted to experience Berlin’s famed sexual decadence for themselves, and instead they found proper women and articulate, “well-behaved intellectuals,” like the former prostitute turned detective novelist Pieke Biermann. In short, they found bourgeois whores. In their written reaction to the article in the *taz*, the women of Hydra, mimicking the shocked tone of the press and adding more than a hint of sarcasm, asked: “What will the world come to, if we can no longer tell who’s a whore and who isn’t?”<sup>1</sup>

This book is much like the whores’ ball, for it presents its readers with images of prostitutes in Berlin that defy common stereotypes of deviance and destitution. It does so, however, by examining debates on prostitution that took place up to a century before the women of Hydra organized their first ball. During the post-Bismarckian *Kaiserreich* (1890–1918) and the Weimar Republic (1918–33), prostitution became a central vehicle through which social activists, artists, and cultural critics negotiated gender and labor divisions in the modern metropolis. The diverse range of responses to prostitution that emerged from Wilhelmine and Weimar Berlin led to productive discussions about extramarital sexuality, women’s financial autonomy, and respectability. Some artists and writers who lived and worked in the German capital at the time were able to see beyond dichotomized images of prostitutes and envision them as something other than victims or villains. Granted, some of Berlin’s most iconic cultural texts serve up visions of female monstrosity and victimization that are impossible to erase from our index of images of prostitutes in the German capital; Alfred Döblin’s modernist masterpiece *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929) and George Grosz’s scathing visual portraits of metropolitan decadence and sexual murder spring immediately to mind. Without ignoring these images, this book shows that the ideas of prostitutes as rational workers and as elegant bourgeois “cocottes” (*Kokotten*) also surfaced and took hold during this period and give us a far more complex, differentiated picture of gender and sexuality in modern Berlin. My work disrupts the dichotomized reading of prostitutes as either victims or agents of destruction reproduced in existing scholarship, which, much like the *taz*’s article about the Whores’ Ball, perpetuates stereotypes of prostitutes and produces narratives laden with judgments that do an injustice to the very context they

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1. The episode of the whores’ ball is described and documented by the Prostituierten-Projekt Hydra (Prostitute Project Hydra) in *Beruf: Hure* [Occupation: Whore] (Hamburg: Galgenberg, 1988), 180–83. All translations from the German, unless otherwise stated, are mine. The *taz* article references the 1963 film *Irma la Douce*, a romantic comedy about a policeman who falls in love with a Parisian prostitute. Billy Wilder directed and Shirley MacLaine and Jack Lemmon starred in the film.

are describing. Analyses that view prostitution only through the restrictive, dual lens of destitution and sexual deviance lead to less nuanced readings of primary sources and hence to a larger-scale misreading of the intricacies of gender relations, sexuality, and desire in the specific urban context of Berlin and their representation in imaginative texts.

There is no doubt that prostitutes are paradoxical figures, for they can represent both the affirmation and the subversion of social structures. An institution that promotes sexual relations without emotional attachment, prostitution detaches love from sex. As public women who sell their bodies in a market dominated by male buyers, prostitutes seem to reinforce patriarchal capitalism, yet they can also be seen as exploited workers and potential revolutionaries. It is perhaps no surprise that Berlin, as one of the quintessential modern cities in early twentieth-century Europe, inspired incredibly rich discourses on prostitution—discourses that reflected the paradox inherent in prostitution but also discourses that transcended the usual clichés about prostitutes. Whereas certain authors treat prostitution as a symptom of a corrupt bourgeois economic order and exploitative gender relations, others use the discussion of prostitution to explore visions of alternative moralities or sexual countercultures, such as the free-love relationship, the “New Morality” articulated by feminist radicals, lesbian love, or various incarnations of the “New Woman.” Identifying cliché-defying figures such as the plucky working-class prostitute or the fashionable *Kokotte*, however, raises the same question posed—albeit tongue in cheek—by the women of Hydra: What happens when we can no longer distinguish between prostitutes and nonprostitutes? This is an issue raised repeatedly by the cultural texts and social phenomena I explore here. Without question, the proliferation of discourses on prostitution between 1890 and 1933 was inextricably linked to both the controversy surrounding, and the gradual acceptance of, the growing number of single working women living in Berlin. Most of the texts I examine blur the boundaries between prostitutes and other women in a way that challenges readers to interrogate existing structures of female sexuality, work, morality, and desire.

## Berlin, Berlin

Around the turn of the century and certainly during the Weimar years, the city of Berlin had a reputation for lawlessness and sexual licentiousness. Readers of this book will likely be familiar with the oft-cited depiction of Berlin as the “Whore of Babylon,” which gained cultural currency during this time and has proven its staying power. The aim of this book, however, is to call this seemingly neat analogy between the feminized and debauched German capital and a biblical whore into question and to explore instead the myriad meanings attributed to prostitutes and prostitution in the social debates and cultural texts of this specific time and place. As Judith R. Walkowitz has shown in her work on prostitution, female sexuality,

and moral panic in late Victorian London, cities in upheaval are, all too often, portrayed simply as sites of sexual danger and despair. In *City of Dreadful Delight*, Walkowitz “maps out a dense cultural grid” of “conflicting and overlapping representations of sexual danger” in London at the height of the panic surrounding the Whitechapel murders, and in the process, she uncovers “contiguous stories of sexual possibility and urban adventure” created by a new and “different set of social actors.”<sup>2</sup> Drawing inspiration from Walkowitz’s scholarship on London, I argue that similar dynamics of social tumult and possibility were at work in Berlin at the close of the nineteenth century—complex dynamics that are obscured by the apocalyptic image of Berlin as the “Whore of Babylon.” In order to challenge this particularly tenacious depiction of Berlin, it is important to consider what socio-economic, political, demographic, and cultural factors combined to make Berlin a unique focal point of the modern urban discourse on prostitution within Germany.

Named as the capital of the unified German nation in 1871, Berlin made a rapid transition from Prussian backwater to major industrial and cultural center. Between 1871 and 1905 Berlin’s population surged from 826,000 to over two million people in the city proper, making it the largest city in Germany and the fourth largest in Europe.<sup>3</sup> Its new status as a “world city” (*Weltstadt*) was based primarily on the industrial strength and technological innovation of companies like Borsig, Siemens, AEG, and AGFA. Large-scale factories employed many of the new immigrants from the eastern provinces of Pomerania and Silesia, who lived in overcrowded tenements in Berlin’s northern and eastern districts and who, because of rising disillusionment about their work and housing conditions, became a radicalized and politicized urban proletariat. Although their public political activity was significantly hampered by the antisocialist legislation pushed through the German parliament by Otto von Bismarck in 1878, the repeal of the law in 1890 saw them emerge with increased numbers and electoral support. In so-called Red Berlin, the workers’ protests found a sympathetic ear among the educated urban bourgeoisie, some of whom held prestigious academic positions at the Friedrich-Wilhelm University (today the Humboldt University), while others produced naturalist plays and novels that exposed the travails of the urban poor. As a site of sociopolitical organization and agitation, Berlin became the center of the “reform milieu,” consisting of men and women who cast a critical eye on the modern present and sought alternatives that they hoped would subsume modernity’s

2. Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 5, 18.

3. The population statistics given do not count the suburbs that would become part of “Groß-Berlin” in 1920. With those suburbs included, the population of greater Berlin in 1905 was nearly three million. See David Clay Large, *Berlin* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 9, 48; Andrew Lees, *Cities, Sin, and Social Reform in Imperial Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 2; see also Peter Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 12.

oppressive elements—capitalist exploitation, socioeconomic inequality, increasing alienation—under its emancipatory ones.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to being a city of immigrants and workers, Berlin was also a “city of women.” Lured by the possibility of greater financial and social autonomy, single women flocked to the capital by the thousands. Those from more humble backgrounds generally found work in the textile industry or domestic service, while bourgeois women pursued careers as teachers, social workers, and journalists. Women from a variety of class backgrounds took positions in Berlin’s burgeoning service industry, working as clerks in shops and offices throughout the city. In many cases, work brought with it increased mobility and a sense of financial independence that allowed women to take advantage of metropolitan consumer culture and mass entertainment. Berlin-based women writers became some of the best-selling authors of their time, female architects planned and built housing and training facilities for single working women, and female artists gained access to Berlin’s renowned Academy of Arts. Across the socioeconomic spectrum, however, women workers received less professional training, fewer opportunities for advancement, and significantly lower pay than their male counterparts.<sup>5</sup> Distressed by these inequities, women banded together and rallied support for increased educational and occupational opportunities, making Berlin the seat of the German women’s movement and its diverse factions. Tied as it was to concerns about both women’s labor and sexual morality, prostitution became a point of heated controversy within the early feminist movement.

Indeed it is no exaggeration to state that prostitution was one of the most discussed issues in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Germany. Despite the adage that defines prostitution as the “world’s oldest profession,” the rapid industrialization, the rise of modern capitalism, and the severing of traditional kinship ties that accompanied the growth of urban centers in western Europe and the United States during the nineteenth century resulted in a particularly modern

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4. On the urban reform milieu, see Lees, *Cities, Sin, and Social Reform*; and Kevin Repp, *Reformers, Critics, and the Paths of German Modernity: Anti-Politics and the Search for Alternatives, 1890–1914* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000). For a discussion of working-class influence on the urban progressivism of the bourgeoisie, see David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, eds., *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), especially 15–19, 148–49. On Berlin as a “red city,” see Large, *Berlin*, 40–45, 99–107; and Alexandra Richie, *Faust’s Metropolis: A History of Berlin* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1998), 153–87.

5. This sketch of women in imperial Berlin is drawn from a myriad of sources, including Carol Elizabeth Adams, *Women Clerks in Wilhelmine Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Ute Frevert, *Women in German History: From Bourgeois Emancipation to Sexual Liberation*, trans. Stuart McKinnon-Evans (Oxford: Berg, 1989); Stephanie Günther, *Weiblichkeitsentwürfe des Fin de Siècle* (Bonn: Bouvier, 2007); Despina Stratigakos, *A Women’s Berlin: Building the Modern City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008). The label “city of women” is still used today by broad-based organizations such as the Überparteiliche Fraueninitiative (Multi-partisan Women’s Initiative; ÜPFI) to portray Berlin’s vibrant and diverse feminist culture.

form of “large-scale, commercialized prostitution.”<sup>6</sup> As Germany’s largest metropolitan center, Berlin experienced the shift to modern prostitution most acutely, and by the close of the nineteenth century, the number of prostitutes working in the capital was estimated to be between 20,000 and 50,000.<sup>7</sup> The lack of precision in these statistics betrays the difficulty that Berlin authorities had enforcing the system of regulation officially instituted by the German state in 1871, a system that had been in effect in most cities and territories decades before unification but was implemented differently by each locality. Clause 361/6 of the Imperial Criminal Code provided the legal basis for regulationism and stated: “Any woman shall be punished with imprisonment who, having been placed under police control on account of professional prostitution, violates regulations adopted by the police for the protection of health, order, and decency, or any woman who engages in prostitution for pay without having been placed under such control.”<sup>8</sup>

Clause 361/6 criminalized only those women who engaged in prostitution without being registered with a branch of the local police known as the *Sittenpolizei* (morals police or vice squad). Once registered, they were subject to regular compulsory medical exams, and their domiciles, clothing, and public actions were placed under surveillance by the vice squad. The regulation system, however, could not successfully prevent clandestine or “occasional prostitution” (*Gelegenheitsprostitution*), and each city took its own approach to the enforcement of regulations, with Berlin being notoriously lax. In her recent study of German prostitution regulation and its reform during the Weimar years, Julia Roos emphasizes the vast differences

6. Elizabeth Bernstein, *Temporarily Yours: Intimacy, Authenticity, and the Commerce of Sex* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 23. See also Timothy J. Gilfoyle, “Prostitutes in History: From Parables of Pornography to Metaphors of Modernity,” *American Historical Review* 104 (February 1999): 119; Victoria Harris, *Selling Sex in the Reich: Prostitutes in German Society, 1914–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 9–11.

7. See Richard J. Evans, *Tales from the German Underworld* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 198; Abraham Flexner, *Prostitution in Europe* (New York: Century, 1914), 143; Robert Hessen, *Die Prostitution in Deutschland* (Munich: Albert Langen, 1910), 27.

8. On Clause 361/6 see Flexner, *Prostitution in Europe*, 113. See also Julia Bruggemann, “Prostitution, Sexuality, and Gender Roles in Imperial Germany: Hamburg, A Case Study,” in *Genealogies of Identity: Interdisciplinary Readings on Sex and Sexuality*, ed. Margaret Sönsner Breen and Fiona Peters (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 22–23; Harris, *Selling Sex in the Reich*, 10; and Julia Roos, *Weimar through the Lens of Gender: Prostitution Reform, Women’s Emancipation, and German Democracy, 1919–33* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 22. I use Roos’s translation of the law.

Prostitution during this period was defined exclusively as female prostitution; male prostitution was criminalized under §175 of the penal code, which declared male homosexuality to be an illegal act. Male prostitutes do not fit within the scope of my book, for the discourses of gender, sexuality, and criminality that apply to them are decidedly different from those involving female prostitutes, especially during the periods in history that I analyze. For recent work on male prostitution and its tenuous relationship with male homosexuality, see Martin Lücke, “Beschmutzte Utopien: Subkulturelle Räume, begehrte Körper und sexuelle Identitäten in belletristischen Texten über männliche Prostitution 1900–1933,” in *Verhandlungen im Zwielficht: Momente der Prostitution in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Sabine Grenz and Martin Lücke (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2006), 301–18; and David James Prickett, “Defining Identity via Homosexual Spaces: Locating the Male Homosexual in Weimar Berlin,” *Women in German Yearbook* 21 (2005): 134–61. For a perspective that compares the regulation of male prostitution in post–World War II Berlin with that in the Weimar years, see Jennifer Evans, “Bahnhof Boys: Policing Male Prostitution in Post-Nazi Berlin,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 12 (October 2003): 605–36.

in local policies regarding prostitution and notes the degree of autonomy that Berlin authorities granted prostitutes. Unlike Hamburg, which established an extensive network of police-monitored brothels and sought to isolate prostitution within specific streets and districts, Berlin allowed prostitutes to choose where to live and ply their trade. In spite of efforts by the municipal authorities to designate urban spaces that were legally off-limits to prostitutes, including schools, zoos, museums, churches, theaters, and sixty-three of Berlin's streets and squares, the majority of prostitutes circulated freely, turning supposedly restricted areas such as the Tiergarten, Potsdamer Platz, and Friedrichstrasse into some of the best-known areas of sex commerce in the city. At the beginning of the twentieth century, and most markedly in the 1920s, commercial entertainment venues such as vaudeville or variety theaters, dance halls, and *Nachtkafés* (night cafés) provided both career and occasional prostitutes with alternatives to the *Pension* (a type of brothel) or street, making it even more difficult for the vice squad to determine which female patrons of such venues were prostitutes and which were not. This constant evasion revealed just how untenable regulation was, and critics of the system repeatedly claimed that only about 10 percent of all prostitutes working in the city were actually registered. Roos's archival research, which documents 3,500 prostitutes registered in Berlin on the eve of the First World War, supports the claims of inefficacy leveled against the regulatory system by social reformers of the time.<sup>9</sup>

The city's critics—many of them non-Berliners—saw the pervasive presence of prostitutes on the streets and in the nighttime hot spots of Berlin as a clear sign of urban alienation and decline. In their eyes, modern Berlin became the mythical “Whore of Babylon,” a harbinger of impending doom whose erotic allure could only be read as destructive. As modernist art historians Hanne Bergius and Dorothy Rowe and literary scholars such as Isabelle Siemes and Nicola Behrmann have argued, the prostitute became a visual and poetic allegory for Berlin itself, used by artists and writers to express their discontent with metropolitan modernity.<sup>10</sup> This urban discontent is often described in strictly gendered terms. “In the works

9. Roos, *Weimar through the Lens of Gender*, 16–17, 63; statistics on the number of regulated prostitutes in Berlin appear on p. 17. On the case of Hamburg, see Bruggemann, “Prostitution, Sexuality, and Gender Roles”; and Harris, *Selling Sex in the Reich*, 30–34, 98–101. For the regulations placed on registered prostitutes in Berlin, see *Polizeiliche Vorschriften zur Sicherung der Gesundheit, der öffentlichen Ordnung und des öffentlichen Anstandes* (1913), Landesarchiv Berlin (LAB), HLA, B. Rep. 235–13 (Nachlaß Anna Pappritz). The same regulations are reprinted in Flexner, *Prostitution in Europe*, 415–18. On the small percentage of registered prostitutes, see, for example, Anna Pappritz, ed., *Einführung in das Studium der Prostitutionsfrage* (Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1919), 144–45.

10. Hanne Bergius, “Berlin als Hure Babylon,” in *Die Metropole: Industriekultur in Berlin im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Jochen Boberg, Tilman Fichter, and Eckhart Gillen (Berlin: Beck, 1986), 102–19; Dorothy Rowe, *Representing Berlin: Sexuality and the City in Imperial and Weimar Germany* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2003); Nicola Behrmann, “Sucht: Abgründiger Körper; Die Prostituierte als Medium der literarischen Moderne,” in Grenz and Lücke, *Verhandlungen im Zwielicht*, 223–35; Isabelle Siemes, *Die Prostituierte in der literarischen Moderne 1890–1933* (Düsseldorf: Hagemann, 2000), 285–93, 302–3. See also Beth Irwin Lewis, “Lustmord: Inside the Windows of the Metropolis,” in *Women in the Metropolis*, ed. Katharina von Ankm (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 202–32; and Maria Tatar, *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).



of male modernists,” the art historian Marsha Meskimmon claims, “images and descriptions of prostitutes . . . signified the fears and desires of the male subject faced with the commodification, urbanization and alienation of modernity.”<sup>11</sup> An aspect of modernity most often maligned through the artistic employment of the prostitute, scholars like Bergius, Meskimmon, and Rowe contend, was the rise of the “New Woman.” Practical, career-oriented and in no great rush to get married, the New Woman was blamed by progressive sex reformers and conservative nationalists alike for the breakdown of the family and the moral weakening of the German state. In the wake of the First World War, emancipated women appeared in public in even greater numbers, and their behavior and appearance caused a good deal of confusion. As Atina Grossmann describes the New Woman, she “bobbed her hair, smoked in public, shaved her legs, used makeup, indeed, presented herself in such a manner that it sometimes became difficult to distinguish the ‘honest women’ from the ‘whores.’”<sup>12</sup> Such confusion was particularly acute in the urban environment of Berlin, where women on their way to or from work walked the city streets unescorted, and where they also took advantage of metropolitan nightlife, frequenting spaces that were acknowledged markets for clandestine prostitution. Bergius, Meskimmon, and Rowe, among others, read texts or works of art that depict this confusion between “honest women” and “whores” as a deliberate conflation carried out to misogynist ends by men who fear and revile women’s emancipation. But such a reading, while convincing in some cases, relies on both a simplified interpretation of the prostitute as “a sexually voracious and devouring female,” to cite a common phrase from Rowe’s book, and a dichotomized view of gender.<sup>13</sup> It assumes that if men draw, paint, or write about prostitutes, they automatically do so with chauvinistic motives—with the intention of portraying female sexual deviance. By failing to closely examine how, by whom, and to what end images of prostitutes are conflated with those of other women, such an analysis ignores the richness of social and cultural discourses on prostitution and new womanhood produced in Berlin between 1890 and 1933.

## Urban Street Scenes and the Rise of the Cocotte

The realm of visual arts offers a stunning array of portraits of prostitutes walking the streets of turn-of-the-century and Weimar Berlin, and yet the attention of art scholars and museum curators tends to focus on the works of only a handful of male artists, most notably on the expressionist artists of the Brücke and on Otto Dix

11. Marsha Meskimmon, *We Weren't Modern Enough: Woman Artists and the Limits of German Modernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 27.

12. Atina Grossmann, “The New Woman and the Rationalization of Sexuality in Weimar Germany,” in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 156.

13. Rowe, *Representing Berlin*, 91.

and George Grosz. Until recently, the works of woman artists like Jeanne Mammen and of popular artists such as Heinrich Zille have been given short shrift, especially outside of Berlin, despite the fact that, at the time of their creation, these artists' works were widely distributed and viewed by their contemporaries.<sup>14</sup> In contrast to artists like Dix and Grosz, who created haunting and even horrifying portraits of prostitutes, displaying them as victims of grinding poverty or as diseased deviants, Mammen and Zille produced images of prostitutes that captured the rebellious and irreverent spirit of the capital city.

Heinrich Zille, Berlin's "one-of-a-kind chronicler" of the urban working-class *Milljöh* (Berlin dialect for "milieu"), drew a plump and defiant prostitute raising her fist in the air and struggling to wrestle free from the clutches of two Prussian vice squad officers for the cover of his 1908 collection *Kinder der Strasse: 100 Berliner Bilder* (Children of the Street: 100 Berlin Pictures).<sup>15</sup> Accompanied by cynically witty captions written in Berlin dialect, Zille's drawings were widely published in the satirical periodicals *Simplicissimus*, *Ulke*, and the *Lustige Blätter* and made him one of the most adored and admired artists of his time. In 1925, just one year after Zille's induction into the Prussian Academy of Arts, the satirist Kurt Tucholsky wrote of him: "Zille's soul is Berlin through and through: soft, sharp tongued, possibly with warm feet, and: everything's only half as bad as it seems. . . . Zille is amoral to the core. He doesn't judge, he draws. He doesn't condemn, he feels."<sup>16</sup> This non-judgmental perspective is evident in Zille's 1902 rendition of *Zwei Strassenmädchen* (Two Girls of the Street), which shows a pair of corpulent prostitutes strutting confidently along the city street. One of them reminisces about how she "used to run around with high-ranking politicians and barristers" (fig. 1). By portraying its subjects as mature women rather than "girls" and by dressing them in the humble clothing of the working class—not quite fitting the company of lawyers and

14. Museum culture in the United States is particularly fixated on the works of Dix, Grosz, and the artists of the Brücke. Consider the exhibitions that have been organized in New York City alone within recent years: *Glitter and Doom: German Portraits from the 1920s* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2006), which featured works by Otto Dix, George Grosz, and Christian Schad most prominently; *Kirchner and the Berlin Streets* (Museum of Modern Art, 2008); *Brücke: The Birth of Expressionism in Dresden and Berlin, 1905–1913* (Neue Galerie for German and Austrian Art, 2009); the Otto Dix retrospective (Neue Galerie, 2010); and *German Expressionism: The Graphic Impulse* (Museum of Modern Art, 2011), which is rife with images of prostitutes. To my knowledge, the only work by an art historian that analyzes representations of prostitutes by Mammen and Zille alongside those of Dix and Grosz is Rita Täuber, *Der häßliche Eros: Darstellungen zur Prostitution in der Malerei und Grafik 1855–1930* (Berlin: Mann, 1997). Meskimmon's study of women modernist artists and their depictions of prostitutes is also a valuable contribution to the field; see Meskimmon, *We Weren't Modern Enough*, 22–72. For a more extensive discussion of visual culture in Weimar Berlin and the works of Jeanne Mammen in particular, see chapter 3.

15. Heinrich Zille, *Kinder der Strasse: 100 Berliner Bilder* (1908; repr., Hannover: Sackelträger-Verlag, 1997). The quote is from Matthias Flügge, *H. Zille, Berliner Leben: Zeichnungen, Photographien und Druckgraphiken 1890–1914* (Berlin: Akademie der Künste; Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 2008), 1.

16. Kurt Tucholsky [Peter Panther], "Berlins Bester," in *Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Antje Bonitz, Dirk Grathoff, Michael Hepp, and Gerhard Kraiker, vol. 7, *Texte 1925*, ed. Bärbel Boldt and Andrea Spinger (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2002), 42–43.



**Figure 1.** Heinrich Zille, *Zwei Strassenmädchen* (Two Girls of the Street), 1902. Courtesy of Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe Kupferstichkabinett.

politicians—Zille’s etching creates the type of tension between image and written text that provokes a chuckle without a trace of ridicule. What Zille and his work exemplified for Tucholsky and for most of his admirers was the Berlin personality: a curious mixture of rebellion and compassion, of biting wit (the legendary Berliner

*Schnauze*) and gumption. The artist's matter-of-factness, coupled with skepticism of authority and traditional morals, allowed him to portray the urban street milieu without making prostitutes into poor, helpless victims or dangerous scoundrels.<sup>17</sup>

Although Zille was best known for his vibrant depictions of Berlin's working class, he captured the gamut of urban characters in his drawings and photographs, among them the fashionable cocottes that graced the busy promenades of the city center (fig. 2). The women's feather-plumed hats, elaborate fur-lined collars, and the cinched-in waists of their dresses—meant to accentuate their curves—offer visual clues about the meaning of *cocotte*. The term is derived from the French colloquial diminutive “little hen” and shares its root, *coq*, with the word *coquette* (literally, “little she-cock”), which was used already in seventeenth-century France to conjure images of pride, vanity, and lust but was not yet used as an explicit reference to prostitutes. Originally a term of endearment for children, *cocotte* became a word for “prostitute” only in the late 1860s, when it was used to identify the elegant prostitutes who strutted the streets of French cities. By blending the outward appearance and mannerisms of “respectable” womanhood with implicit sexual availability for a price, cocottes marketed themselves to a discerning bourgeois clientele eager to purchase “the illusion of seduction.”<sup>18</sup> The verbal play of *coquette* and *cocotte* is evident in the images of urban cocottes, images that blurred the lines between flirtatious, fashionable women and women for hire.

Particularly in Paris, cocottes were thought to be so ubiquitous that they became key tropes of late nineteenth-century urban modernity. In his book on artistic representations of Parisian social life and sexual mores in the works of French impressionists, T. J. Clark claims: “Modernity *was* made of dandies and *cocottes*, especially the latter.”<sup>19</sup> As Alain Corbin documents in his analysis of prostitution in France, the bourgeois demand for prostitutes increased significantly between the latter half of the nineteenth century and the First World War. Corbin attributes this increased demand to several factors, the first being the state of bourgeois marriage and its built-in sexual “double standard.” The double standard granted bourgeois men sexual license while it perpetuated a “cult of purity” for bourgeois women that made them sexually inaccessible before marriage and accessible primarily for reproductive purposes thereafter. Bourgeois men, who were marrying later in life in order to ensure financial security before marriage, were encouraged to seek satisfaction of their sexual desires elsewhere, ostensibly with prostitutes.

17. On the distinctive Berlin character, see Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret*, 30–33; Large, *Berlin*, xxvii; Richie, *Faust's Metropolis*, 157, 184–85.

18. T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers*, rev. ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 107.

19. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, 103, emphasis in original. For another analysis of prostitution in French impressionist paintings that pays close attention to changing social and sexual relations in late nineteenth-century Paris, albeit through the theoretical lens of psychoanalysis, see Charles Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 89–128, 157–99.



**Figure 2.** Heinrich Zille, *Zwei Kokotten* (Two Cocottes), n.d. Reprinted from Matthias Flügge, *H. Zille, Berliner Leben: Zeichnungen, Photographien und Druckgraphiken 1890–1914* (Berlin: Akademie der Künste; Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 2008).

Out of the perceived importance of men's work within bourgeois culture came the need for "more conspicuous forms of consumption" and the growing impetus for bourgeois men to purchase luxury wares with their earnings, even if those wares were women.<sup>20</sup>

Social and sexual dynamics comparable to those described by Clark and Corbin in reference to Paris were at work in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Berlin, and the elegant cocottes allowed their clients to maintain the facade of respectability while satisfying their physical desires. The urban chronicler Hans Ostwald, who made a lucrative writing career out of revealing every detail of Berlin's varied prostitution markets to his readers, stated that "the rise of the bourgeoisie gave birth to a commensurate form of prostitution," namely, one that would fulfill "the needs of a refined and bored, unsatisfied class."<sup>21</sup> A delicate balance was being struck in urban bourgeois culture between the urge for sexual adventure and the need to remain respectable, and this tenuous balance between titillation and restraint revealed a concomitant eroticization of the bourgeoisie and an "embourgeoisement" of prostitutes that was embodied by the figure of the cocotte. It is, therefore, not surprising that the French term *cocotte* was imported into German parlance around the turn of the century. Although the term *Kokette* was used already in eighteenth-century German literature to refer to a prostitute-like or "loose" and lustful woman, *Kokotte* was a virtually unused term in nineteenth-century Germany. However, the word *Kokotte*—and with it, the particular image of commodified sexuality it conjured—quite literally exploded onto the cultural scene in the first three decades of the twentieth century, particularly in the popular

20. Alain Corbin, *Women for Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 193–206. Timothy J. Gilfoyle makes a similar argument about the culture of bourgeois "sporting men" and the growing market for elegant prostitutes in nineteenth-century Manhattan in his book *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790–1920* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), 92–116, 157.

21. Hans Ostwald, *Das Berliner Dirnentum* (Leipzig: Fiedler, 1905–7), 2:73. Ostwald (1873–1940) is to Berlin's print culture what Zille is to the visual realm. His first book, the autobiographical novel *Vagabunden* (1900; repr., Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1980), established him as one of the first German writers to document sympathetically the lives of vagabonds, beggars, and prostitutes. His multi-volume studies of prostitution, the sexual underworld, and the demimonde (*Halbwelt*) in Berlin include the *Großstadt-Dokumente* (Berlin: Seeman, 1904–8), which he edited and partially authored; *Das Berliner Dirnentum*; and several versions of his *Kultur- und Sittengeschichte Berlins* (Berlin: Klemm, 1911, 1924, 1926). These studies tell of hierarchies among prostitutes, of secret terms and nicknames, and describe in great detail the many districts and locales in which readers could experience this world for themselves. Ostwald's books literally map out the world of Berlin prostitution by examining the history and demise of the brothel system, listing the streets and squares traversed by unregistered prostitutes, and providing narrative accounts of men's visits—including his own—to various dance halls and cafés, at which prostitutes were either employed or conspicuously present. Virtually forgotten until the 1990s, Ostwald's works are now enjoying a resurgence of popularity in the scholarly community and beyond, with reprints of his 1926 *Berliner Kultur- und Sittengeschichte* (Paderborn: Voltmedia, 2006) available in Berlin bookstores. See Evans, *Tales from the German Underworld*, 171–93; Peter Fritzsche, "Vagabond in the Fugitive City: Hans Ostwald, Imperial Berlin, and the *Großstadtdokumente*," *Journal of Contemporary History* 29 (1994): 385–402; Rowe, *Representing Berlin*, 90–122; Ralf Thies, *Ethnograph des dunklen Berlins: Hans Ostwald und die Großstadtdokumente 1904–1908* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2006).

print media.<sup>22</sup> Despite the prevalence of *Kokotten* in novels, magazines, and newspapers, as well as in emerging art forms such as cabaret songs, some of which I will document in the pages of this book, scholarly analyses of the cocotte in the modern German context have, until now, focused exclusively on the realm of visual arts. In fact the most heated debate about cocottes in German visual culture has revolved around a small set of iconic images: Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's Berlin street scenes from 1913–14.

This group of Kirchner's paintings, which were praised by Weimar-era art critics for their portrayal of the "modish elegance" and the dynamism of the city street, have in more recent scholarship been erroneously compared to the apocalyptic metropolitan visions of Ludwig Meidner, George Grosz, and Otto Dix. Dorothy Rowe, for example, claims that Kirchner's street scenes "betray the obvious agenda of sexual anxiety so prevalent" in works by Grosz and Dix.<sup>23</sup> Critics like Charles Haxthausen, Ian Buruma, and Suzanne Royal, however, have countered Rowe's view by arguing that neither the paintings nor the primary source material on Kirchner provide evidence of sexual anxiety toward or moral judgment of prostitutes or women in general. Instead, these art historians view Kirchner's works in the context of Berlin's fashion industry and its entertainment culture, areas of urban life that the artist also studied and depicted while living in the German capital. In so doing, these scholars point to the less overt forms of commodified female sexuality connected to the spheres of fashion and entertainment and direct viewers' attention to the "pervasive erotic ambiguity" of the street scenes and the cocottes at their center.<sup>24</sup>

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22. According to Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1854–1960), s.vv. "kokett" and "Kokette," a *Kokette* was not just lustful and vain; she could also be intentionally deceitful. The definitions of *Kokotte*, its French roots, and statistics on the usage of the word in German come from the *Digitales Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache*, a research initiative run by the Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, <http://www.dwds.de>. A Google word search for the terms *kokett* and *Kokotte* in German print media also shows a clear spike in usage of these words between 1900 and 1930. For the definition of *embourgeoisement* as a process by which respectability "spread to all classes of the population," see George Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (1985; repr., New York: Fertig, 1997), 182.

23. Curt Glaser, *Die Graphik der Neuzeit: Vom Anfang des XIX. Jahrhunderts bis zur Gegenwart* (Berlin, 1923), 540; trans. and quoted in Charles W. Haxthausen, "A New Beauty": Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's Images of Berlin," in *Berlin: Culture and Metropolis*, ed. Charles W. Haxthausen and Heidrun Suhr (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 61. Glaser was one of the preeminent art historians and critics of his time. For Rowe's readings of Kirchner's paintings, see *Representing Berlin*, 149–54, here 149.

24. Haxthausen, "A New Beauty," 80. See also Ian Buruma, "Desire in Berlin," review of *Kirchner and the Berlin Street*, by Deborah Wye, *New York Review of Books*, December 4, 2008, 19–20; and Suzanne Royal, "Fashion and Conflict: Kirchner's Representations of the Fashionably Dressed Woman in Berlin," in *Fashion and Transgression*, ed. Nancy J. Troy (Los Angeles: USC Fischer Gallery, 2003), 32–37. In her catalog for the recent exhibition of Kirchner's street scenes at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City, Deborah Wye suggests that Kirchner was intimately acquainted with the world of occasional or covert prostitution through his close relationship with Erna and Gerda Schilling, both of



**Figure 3.** Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Potsdamer Platz*, 1914. Courtesy of Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz Berlin. Photograph from Art Resource, New York.



Indeed the cocottes' elegant appearance and subtle gestures of sexual availability manipulate and confound traditional notions of respectability by making it difficult for men on the street, be they potential clients or vice squad officers, to distinguish between "upstanding" women and prostitutes. What keeps Kirchner's paintings so controversial among art historians is how they provoke viewers not merely to recognize these blurred boundaries between types of women but to contemplate the myriad social meanings of such a blurring. In his modern masterpiece *Potsdamer Platz* from 1914, the greenish, masklike faces of two slender cocottes and the geometric composition of the metropolitan backdrop turn the city square into a stage on which both grief and desire are performed (fig. 3). The cocotte in profile wears the black veil of a war widow, while her forward-facing companion unsettles viewers with her determined stance and direct gaze. In this painting, prostitutes are barometers of their social climate, adapting to the somber atmosphere of a nation newly at war and hinting at the existential precariousness that the First World War brought with it. As Rita Täuber notes, dressing as war widows was a clever strategy used by actual prostitutes in wartime Berlin "to conform to the changed face of the street but, at the same time, to attract more attention through the appealing combination of mourning clothes and makeup." On the other hand, Ian Buruma argues, the violence of war also produced real widows who turned to prostitution just to get by.<sup>25</sup> The blurring of lines between widows and cocottes, in the case of Kirchner's *Potsdamer Platz*, inspires critical contemplation of how desire and gender roles were altered by war and what strategies women used to survive it. As the Weimar social commentator Curt Moreck observed, the war caused a sharp rise in occasional prostitution, and "the female body became . . . an asset, from which women of all levels of society knew how to draw interest."<sup>26</sup>

The commodification of the female body is depicted in more explicit terms in Kirchner's street scene *Friedrichstrasse, Berlin*, also from 1914 (fig. 4). Named after the main shopping and entertainment thoroughfare in the Wilhelmine capital, the work presents the street itself as a destination and the cocottes as its main attraction. Kirchner's depiction of the cocottes is rife with "narrative complexity" that mixes danger with playfulness, and urban coolness with the heat of desire.<sup>27</sup> Like the images of the cocottes in *Potsdamer Platz*, the women's pallid skin and hollow eyes could be read as signs of illness, marking them as potential spreaders of venereal disease, yet their painted faces—red lips, rouged cheeks—could also be interpreted as signs of their strategic self-fashioning. Deborah Wye reads the cocottes' "strikingly assertive poses" as evocative of "a store window display" or "a fashion show

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whom were cabaret dancers in Berlin. Erna Schilling became Kirchner's lifelong companion. See Wye, *Kirchner and the Berlin Street*, exhibition catalog (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2008), 36, 43.

25. Täuber, *Der häßliche Eros*, 98. On the war widows, see Buruma, "Desire in Berlin," 20.

26. Curt Moreck [Konrad Haemmerling], "Die Erotik des Hinterlandes," in *Sittengeschichte des Weltkrieges*, ed. Magnus Hirschfeld (Leipzig: Verlag für Sexualwissenschaft Schneider & Co., 1930), 2:26.

27. Wye, *Kirchner and the Berlin Street*, 74.



**Figure 4.** Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Friedrichstrasse, Berlin*, 1914. Courtesy of Staatsgalerie Stuttgart. Photograph from Staatsgalerie Stuttgart.

runway,” and the seemingly endless string of male admirers stretching out behind them underscores their desirability.<sup>28</sup> Täuber likens the cocottes to “pied pipers” and thereby implies that their charms are impossible to resist. The men who are drawn to them are portrayed as a mass of consumers lacking subjectivity, a clear reversal of gender norms of the time, which tended to define the mass as feminine and the individual as masculine.<sup>29</sup> The phalanx of faceless men in bowler hats and black suits that stretches out behind the well-dressed cocottes in Kirchner’s *Friedrichstrasse* insinuates that there was a growing market for upscale prostitution in Berlin. Similar to works by French impressionist painters like Edgar Degas, Édouard Manet, and Henri Toulouse-Lautrec that depict coded gestures and erotically laden interactions between bourgeois gentlemen and the women who work in Parisian bars and entertainment venues, Kirchner’s street scenes reveal the connections between consumer culture, urban nightlife, and the eroticization of the bourgeoisie without the lurid revulsion that emanates from the postwar works of Dix and Grosz.<sup>30</sup> In the presence of so many potential customers, lined up as if in a crowded store, the elegant prostitutes’ commodity status is emphasized, but it is not condemned. Kirchner’s cocottes exemplify what I will refer to throughout this book as “self-conscious commodities,” women who accurately gauge men’s desires and project an image that appeals to those desires in order to reap financial benefits.<sup>31</sup>

Following Kirchner’s departure from the capital city in 1917, perhaps no other Berlin artist captured the “pervasive erotic ambiguity” that radiated through the city streets better than Jeanne Mammen. Mammen was a prolific and well-known artist who sketched and painted women in various scenes of metropolitan nightlife, the sexual underworld, and lesbian subcultures. Much like Zille, Mammen made a living by publishing her work in some of the era’s most popular illustrated magazines, including *Ullk*, *Uhu*, *Jugend*, and *Simplicissimus*. Her *Berlin Street Scene* (fig. 5), published in the October 1929 issue of *Ullk*, exemplifies the “unnerving multiplicity of meaning” that viewers can discover in Mammen’s work.<sup>32</sup> The

28. Wye, *Kirchner and the Berlin Street*, 75, 69. The same interpretation could be applied to Kirchner’s painting *Rote Kokotte* (1914).

29. Täuber, *Der häßliche Eros*, 97–98. On the gendering of mass culture as feminine, see Andreas Huyssen, “Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism’s Other,” in *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 44–64.

30. On the comparison of Kirchner with the French impressionists, see Haxthausen, “A New Beauty,” 73.

31. Although my work focuses on the “self-conscious commodity” (my term) as a model for women’s sexual and social behavior, I do not see it as a necessarily gender-specific term. In John Henry Mackay’s novel *Der Puppenjunge* (*The Hustler*, 1926), which also takes place in Berlin and features the shopping arcades of the Friedrichstrasse as a market for male prostitution, the young protagonist must recognize himself as a commodity and embrace that status before he can gain a position of power over his male customers.

32. Eva Züchner, “Langweilige Puppen: Jeanne Mammens Großstadt-Frauen,” in *Jeanne Mammen 1890–1976: Gemälde, Aquarelle, Zeichnungen* (Cologne: Wienand, 1997), 54.



**Figure 5.** Jeanne Mammen, *Berliner Strassenszene* (Berlin Street Scene), ca. 1929. Courtesy of Jeanne-Mammen-Stiftung. Copyright 2012 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

watercolor's composition, with its multiple focal points and diagonal axes, portrays both the dynamism of the streets and the distracted, splintered vision of the modern urban spectator. The first axis comes from the top left corner in the form of a beam of light cast from an open-air café, while the double-decker bus zooming across the right center of the artwork constitutes another axis. The third axis is the diagonal line of a low wall in the bottom center of the piece that separates the café patrons from the busy sidewalk. At the intersection of these three axes, standing still among the hustle and bustle of the street scene, are two men and two women who seem to be striking a deal. Whereas one of the women stands in hunched resignation, looking apathetic at best, the other holds her head high, casting a haughty, cool gaze in the men's direction. If she is a prostitute, then she is certainly a self-conscious commodity. Aligned as it is with the top of the stouter man's hat, the axis created by the light from the café emphasizes the direction of the man's gaze and hence of his studied appraisal of the women's bodies. This could be a spontaneous flirtation between four strangers, it could be an arranged meeting between acquaintances, but it could also be the negotiation of a price for an evening of pleasure. The meaning of this encounter is left open to the viewer.

Although the linear flow of the painting's axes draws the viewer's eye to the center of the street scene, the sides of Mammen's composition offer more compelling imagery. A large, buxom woman seated at a café table dominates the lower

left portion of the street scene and dwarfs her petite, bobbed-haired companion. The two women stare in opposite directions—one absentmindedly sips her drink while the other scrutinizes the many passersby, but their hands and knees touch, and the smaller woman's wispy fingers graze the corpulent woman's knee. There is some sort of intimacy between these two women, yet the nature of that intimacy remains unclear. Like the street scene itself, in which physical proximity does not necessarily translate into emotional connection, this coupling represents a curious tug-of-war between distance and closeness. Perhaps the most eye-catching figure in the entire street scene, however, is the coquettish woman at the far right. With her hand on her outthrust hip in a pose that emphasizes her posterior curves, she casts an almost taunting, jeering glance over her fur-bedecked shoulder. The pose, like the ruffled hem of her dress, is flirtatious, yet her eyes remain blank and narrow, and her lips are either slightly puckered or drawn into a sneer. Because she is simultaneously aggressive and coy, because she draws attention without conveying genuine affection, she is the visual embodiment of what I mean by "Berlin coquette." She is irreverent, urbane, and although there is clearly coldness in her gaze, there is also a sense of playfulness to this figure. Mammen's street scene presents viewers with the myriad forms that women's sexuality might take—heterosexual, lesbian, commodified—and leaves them open to interpretation and free of judgment.

### On Context and Complexity: Critical Approach and Structure

In *Berlin Coquette*, the prostitute functions as the starting point rather than the end point for critical readings of social phenomena and cultural texts. Rather than interpreting prostitution as a dead end within narratives of women's emancipation, as some scholars have, this book challenges assumptions that the prostitute's meaning is fixed and negatively encoded. The act of challenging entrenched assumptions about prostitutes within current scholarship is a key step toward formulating what Gayle Rubin calls a "radical theory of sex." Rubin's essay "Thinking Sex," which takes the historical long view in order to identify important similarities and differences between the sexual debates of the late nineteenth century and those of the final decades of the twentieth century, provides a fitting theoretical frame for my discussion of prostitution and its connection to the broader discourse on non-normative sexuality.<sup>33</sup> A radical theory of sex, according to Rubin, "must build rich descriptions of sexuality as it exists in society and history." To do so, it must free itself from "persistent features of thought about sex," prejudices that condemn certain sexual acts and thereby prevent the articulation of a critical, contextualized study of sexuality. The condemned acts are those that fall outside of what Rubin

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33. Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carole S. Vance (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 267–319.

calls “the charmed circle” of acceptable sexual behavior, which is defined as heterosexual, marital, monogamous, procreative, and confined to the private sphere. Relegated to the “outer limits” of sexual activity, prostitution is laden with negative value in a hierarchical approach to sex that is “less a sexology than a demonology.”<sup>34</sup> Only once we disentangle ourselves from this “demonology” of sex can we formulate a description of sexual behavior that reveals the various meanings ascribed to it in specific local and temporal contexts. Like Judith Walkowitz, Rubin argues that times of great anxiety surrounding sexuality are precisely the contexts in which “the domain of erotic life is, in effect, renegotiated.”<sup>35</sup> In imperial and Weimar Berlin, there was certainly no shortage of panic over the reported rise in rates of venereal infection, the “moral decline” of the city’s youth, the social mixing of classes in public spaces, and falling birth and marriage rates, and all of these things were, in the discourse of the time, connected to discussions of prostitution and its regulation. And yet, as I will show, prostitution was not simply defined by the oppressive regulatory measures or discourses of moral panic that sought to contain and control it. One of the primary aims of this study is to show how, in Wilhelmine and Weimar Berlin, discourses surrounding prostitution, its causes, and its possible alternatives led to frank, productive discussions about sexuality, ones that defied the double standard in order to contemplate potential nonmarital outlets for women’s desire. Such discussions allowed reformers and writers to envision new social and sexual identities for women, such as the flirtatious single woman, the unwed mother, the divorcee, the widow, and the lesbian. Put simply, prostitution played a central role in the renegotiation of erotic life.

To use Rubin’s work as a theoretical frame for this book entails a conscious (and cautious) application of what has been mistakenly called “prosex feminism” to the study of prostitution. I leave “prosex feminism” in quotation marks because this is a label that has been placed on Rubin’s work and does not properly capture the delicate balance that she and her other “prosex” colleagues strike between a critique of sexual oppression and an acknowledgment of desire. Finding space for pleasure, play, and desire within the discussion of commodified sexuality, and of women’s sexuality more broadly, does not ignore the existence of danger and violence within patriarchal heterosexual relations. This may be a difficult balance to strike, but to deny one side or the other is perilous.<sup>36</sup> For Rubin, prostitutes are both victims of moral stigmatization *and* “erotic dissidents” whose sale of sex for money reveals the gendered power dynamics of commercial sex and, at the same time, calls traditional structures of intimacy into question, thereby creating room for less

34. Rubin, “Thinking Sex,” 275, 281, 301.

35. In “Thinking Sex,” 267, Rubin cites Walkowitz’s work as a laudable example of “sex radical” scholarship. On the importance of local and temporal context, see Rubin, 277, 288.

36. This argument is made most convincingly by Carole S. Vance in her essay “Pleasure and Danger: Towards a Politics of Sexuality,” in Vance, *Pleasure and Danger*, 1–27. See also Rubin, “Thinking Sex,” 275.

traditional (extramarital, nonprocreative) expressions of desire.<sup>37</sup> While “prosex feminism” insists on attributing agency to prostitutes, it is a form of agency that is nuanced and problematized, much like my concept of the “self-conscious commodity.” Agency is, without a doubt, a crucial element in the recognition of prostitutes’ dignity as human beings and of their roles as social actors rather than victims. But as a term that has become ubiquitous within feminist scholarship in the last two decades, *agency* can also be applied too broadly or recklessly to the study of prostitution, as evidenced by Victoria Harris’s recent book, *Selling Sex in the Reich*. Although she presents compelling archival material, including police records on and interviews with prostitutes in Leipzig and Hamburg, Harris insists on a simplified form of agency that manifests itself as belligerence or lawlessness. She then goes on to perpetuate a dichotomized image of prostitutes as agents or victims. Based on relatively scant historical evidence, Harris makes sweeping claims about the antagonisms expressed toward prostitutes by feminists and sex reformers. By erroneously establishing direct ties between Weimar-era social reform programs and Nazi concentration camps, Harris ultimately attributes prostitutes’ victimization to those who first sought to help them and then, she claims, violently oppressed them.<sup>38</sup> In contrast, the following analysis sets itself apart from Harris’s study of prostitution in the German context in its exercise of restraint in regard to the attribution of agency to prostitutes, in its differentiated view of the social reform milieu, and in its temporal and localized focus on Berlin in the late imperial period and the Weimar Republic.

*Berlin Coquette* embeds close readings of literary and cultural texts within their sociohistorical context. Centrally informed by literary scholarship on the prostitute as a recurring motif in German and Austrian modernist drama, poetry, and prose, and by the work of historians on political debates concerning the legal and medical regulation of prostitution and the central role that regulation played in the German nation’s effort to promote public health and battle venereal disease, it draws the disciplines of social history and cultural studies more closely together than existing studies have done.<sup>39</sup> It does so by showing that cultural texts did not merely

37. Rubin, “Thinking Sex,” 287, 306. I use the term *extramarital* to mean “outside of marriage” and not as a synonym for *adulterous*, as most dictionaries define it. This is consistent with other scholarship on prostitution and sexuality; for example, see Gilfoyle, “Prostitutes in History,” 138.

38. Note one of the most egregious examples of Harris’s forced claims of historical continuity: “The social worker bent on ‘emancipating’ the prostitute from regulation in the early 1920s became the *same individual* responsible for sending her to a concentration camp.” Harris, *Selling Sex in the Reich*, 175, emphasis added. Harris offers only one historical example to support this sweeping claim.

39. For literary analyses of prostitution, see Eva Borst, *Über jede Scham erhaben: Das Problem der Prostitution im literarischen Werk von Else Jerusalem, Margarete Böhme und Ilse Frapan* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1993); Dietmar Schmidt, *Geschlecht unter Kontrolle: Prostitution und moderne Literatur* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach, 1998); Christiane Schönfeld, ed., *Commodities of Desire: The Prostitute in Modern German Literature* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 2000); Siemes, *Die Prostituierte in der literarischen Moderne*. For historical work on prostitution in imperial and Weimar Germany, see Lynn Abrams, “Prostitutes in Imperial Germany, 1870–1918: Working Girls or Social Outcasts?,” in *The*

reflect the social circumstances in which they were created; rather, they also often helped to shape popular opinion and influence social behavior. My interdisciplinary configuration of sources—archival documents, sociopolitical essays, popular novels, satirical plays, an erotic travel guide, moral histories (*Sittengeschichten*), visual images, and social hygiene films—makes it possible to chart changing attitudes toward prostitution and to show how they were connected to social shifts in the embattled areas of marriage, sexuality, work, and morality. Because of the range of texts and discourses this book explores, it calls for a heterogeneous theoretical approach, drawing from theories of sexuality and social power, respectability, space, gendered spectatorship, and feminist dramaturgy. This approach once again takes cues from Rubin, who cautions against applying a singular universalizing theory—Marxism, psychoanalysis, or feminism—to the analysis of sex and instead advocates an openness to “theoretical as well as sexual pluralism.”<sup>40</sup>

By examining the interconnectedness of the social and cultural realms as they relate to prostitution specifically and, more broadly construed, to issues of gender and sexuality, my book also draws methodological inspiration from what Kathleen Canning calls “relentless relationality.” A productive approach to gender history, Canning argues, is one that studies “both the social and the symbolic relations between the sexes, conjoining them where possible,” and highlights “a reciprocal relationship between ideologies and experiences of gender that were lived and assigned meaning differently by male and female actors.”<sup>41</sup> Plainly stated, this book explores two types of relationality: gender relations and the relationship between social reality and its representation in imaginative texts. Because of its focus on female prostitution, my analysis admittedly has more to say about women’s sexuality and gender roles than men’s, but it is built on the premise that men’s and women’s roles are mutually constitutive and that masculinity and femininity cannot be studied in isolation.<sup>42</sup> As I have argued above, gender alone did not necessarily dictate the shape or tone of the discourse on prostitution, and in social reform circles and urban spaces, there was just as much cross-gender collaboration as there was antagonism.

The discussion of prostitution in Wilhelmine and Weimar Berlin crossed disciplinary lines, just as it defied traditional boundaries drawn by class, gender, and confessional and political affiliation. The reform milieu, as Kevin Repp describes it,

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*German Underworld: Deviants and Outcasts in German History*, ed. Richard J. Evans (London: Routledge, 1988), 189–209; Bruggemann, “Prostitution, Sexuality, and Gender Roles”; Richard J. Evans, “Prostitution, State, and Society in Imperial Germany,” *Past and Present* 70 (February 1976): 106–29; Harris, *Selling Sex in the Reich*; and Roos, *Weimar through the Lens of Gender*.

40. Rubin, “Thinking Sex,” 309.

41. Kathleen Canning, *Gender History in Practice: Historical Perspectives on Bodies, Class, and Citizenship* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 62.

42. For recent examples of a relational approach to gender beyond Canning’s work, see Annette F. Timm and Joshua A. Sanborn, eds., *Gender, Sex, and the Shaping of Modern Europe: A History from the French Revolution to the Present Day* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), ix; and Erik N. Jensen, *Body by Weimar: Athletes, Gender, and German Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 9–10.



was a “tangled web of crisscrossing paths meeting at odd junctures in unexpected antagonisms and alliances.” With Berlin as the site of their web, the writers, artists, and reformers whose works I analyze forged various “intertwining relationships” in the city’s many periodicals, reform organizations, and social circles, ones that demonstrate the cross-fertilization between the social and cultural realms.<sup>43</sup> To give a few examples of the interconnections between the authors, thinkers, and artists whose works are featured in the coming chapters: both Georg Simmel and Helene Stöcker were regular contributors to the journal *Freie Bühne*, where Otto Erich Hartleben’s plays were reviewed and discussed; Hartleben was a member of the social reform group known as the Friedrichshagen Circle, as were Hans Ostwald and Magnus Hirschfeld; in the early Weimar Republic, Hirschfeld worked as a consultant and coauthor on Richard Oswald’s popular social hygiene films; Oswald’s films were critically reviewed by Kurt Tucholsky and Siegfried Kracauer; Kracauer was a former student of Simmel, as was Anna Pappritz. Pappritz and Hirschfeld worked, albeit in different organizations, directly with prostitutes and rallied for the deregulation and decriminalization of prostitution.

In addition to the cultural players, some of the women who appear in the pages of this book are prostitutes. Although they are admittedly few and far between, they are prostitutes who confounded abolitionist reformers like Pappritz with their unrepentant attitudes and self-definition as civil servants, prostitutes who banded together in the days of revolution that followed World War I to publish their own newspapers and form organizations like the Hilfsbund der Berliner Prostituierten (Auxiliary Club of Berlin Prostitutes), and prostitutes who petitioned the municipal government for protection against police harassment once prostitution was officially decriminalized under the Law to Combat Venereal Diseases (Reichsgesetz zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten, or RGBG) of 1927.<sup>44</sup> The social implications of the RGBG for both Weimar gender roles and prostitutes’ increased self-awareness and agency have been investigated with considerable acumen by Julia Roos, but what is missing from her excellent study is how these social changes were both reflected and expanded on in the cultural texts of their time. Without considering the sassy prostitutes’ songs (*Dirnenlieder*) that were performed on stages throughout Berlin, without contemplating the various forms of urban womanhood and the economies of desire at work in Jeanne Mammen’s watercolors, and without examining how popular novels by women authors gave legitimacy and agency to women who engage in various forms of commodified sexuality—from high-price

43. Repp, *Reformers, Critics*, 229, 260. For the cross-gender initiatives and the vast network of reform organizations in Berlin, see also Lees, *Cities, Sin, and Social Reform*, 300, 321.

44. See Roos, *Weimar through the Lens of Gender*, for an in-depth analysis of the RGBG, the debates leading up to its passage, the law’s repercussions, and the Nazi backlash against it. Roos also conducts a valuable scholarly analysis of the short-lived newspaper founded by prostitutes and their communist advocates in Hamburg, *Der Pranger* (The Pillory), a paper that was also widely distributed and read in Berlin (Roos, 79–84). On *Der Pranger*, see also Harris, *Selling Sex in the Reich*, 64–68.

prostitution to posing for nude advertisements—the complex interweaving of prostitution, new womanhood, and desire that took place in the German capital between 1890 and 1933 cannot be fully grasped.

This book begins by showing how the discussion of prostitution was mobilized to criticize bourgeois conjugality. Chapter 1 examines turn-of-the-century texts written by the socialist politician August Bebel, the urban sociologist Georg Simmel, and the bohemian playwright Otto Erich Hartleben that describe marriage and prostitution as mutually reinforcing institutions entrenched in a male-dominated capitalist economy. Although Bebel was confident that the triumph of socialism over bourgeois capitalism would automatically eradicate prostitution and revolutionize marriage, Hartleben and Simmel hesitated to predict the demise of either institution. The authors' occasional recourse to chauvinist or essentialist descriptions of women, descriptions that were integral parts of the very social and moral structures they were criticizing, reveals just how difficult it was to envision alternative structures of intimacy in Wilhelmine society. And yet, upon close reading, these texts pose subtle, tentative alternatives to marriage and prostitution, including the free-love relationship (Bebel, Hartleben), flirtation, and lesbianism (Simmel).

Chapter 2 looks at the role that debates on prostitution played in the formation of various radical bourgeois feminist camps at the turn of the century, from the abolitionist movement led by Anna Pappritz to the League for the Protection of Mothers headed by Helene Stöcker. In their campaigns to abolish the state regulation of prostitution, feminists such as Pappritz called attention to the dangers that men's rampant sexual desire posed to *all* women, and presented themselves as beacons of moral authority and as those most fit to "rescue" and "reeducate" prostitutes. The limits to Pappritz's charitable perspective, however, are revealed when she confronts registered prostitutes who describe themselves as workers providing a valuable service to the state. This chapter focuses on such confrontations—both real and imagined—between bourgeois feminists and prostitutes.

In both chapters 1 and 2, the varying perspectives on prostitution articulated by prominent figures in Berlin's reform milieu, most of them members of the left-liberal bourgeois intelligentsia, are brought to light in a way that reveals both their progressivism and its limits. During the Wilhelmine period, leftist political figures like Bebel and feminists such as Pappritz and Stöcker used prostitution as a polemic device to interrogate capitalism and patriarchy. Their initial interest in prostitutes did not signify a concern for the individual women's choices or motivations but rather relied on their categorization as "exploited" persons, as social victims of a corrupt socioeconomic order. Any sympathy for prostitutes themselves was thwarted by the reformers' utter contempt for prostitution as an institution. In its inability to distinguish between the individual and the institution, the turn-of-the-century social critique of prostitution was, more often than not, collapsed with a moral condemnation of prostitutes. Hence as much as they claimed to

distance themselves from pseudoscientific theories that defined prostitution in physiological or pathological terms, exemplified by Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero's theory of the "born prostitute," Richard von Krafft-Ebing's classification of prostitutes as nymphomaniacs, and Otto Weininger's outrageous assertion that all women were either mothers or prostitutes driven by an inherent urge to copulate, many of the writers I investigate slipped from a sociocritical into a pathological discussion of prostitution.<sup>45</sup> The very definition of female sexuality within German culture was heavily influenced by sexological texts like Krafft-Ebing's, which presented sexual passivity as "normal" and active expressions of desire as "abnormal" for women. With this context in mind, especially in the case of bourgeois feminists, the struggle for women's increased financial autonomy and social mobility often meant the denial of sexual desire.

To emphasize only the oppressive elements of social reform discourses on prostitution, however, would be to deny their complexity and their modernity. Respectability, a "distinct set of attitudes, discursive practices, moral assumptions" that had, since the advent of the nineteenth century, been based on proper manners, moral (i.e., sexual) virtue, and the strict demarcation of gender roles, remained "a central... part of the bourgeoisie's formation as a cultural as well as a social entity."<sup>46</sup> However, as the century drew to a close, the meaning of respectability became increasingly diffuse, and its association with a particular social class became less fixed. As the lines of propriety were drawn and redrawn by socialists, feminists, sexologists, cultural critics, artists, and writers in Wilhelmine and Weimar Berlin, the discussion of prostitution played a crucial role in the reconfiguration of respectability, just as the changing meanings of respectability helped, albeit slowly and gradually, to remove the moral stigma from prostitution. And where the texts of social reformers and intellectuals sometimes fell short, I show, literary and artistic works pushed the boundaries of what readers could envision in terms of social change. Chapter 2, for example, culminates in an analysis of Margarete Böhme's 1905 best-selling novel *Tagebuch einer Verlorenen* (Diary of a Lost Girl). Whereas the feminist writings I analyze use prostitution in their critical essays as a social irritant and an impetus for change, Böhme offers an individual portrait of a fallen daughter turned prostitute who is not simply a victim but an agent as well. The novel cleverly challenges the very definition of respectability by offering up the

45. Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero, *The Female Offender*, 1894, trans. William Ferrero (New York: D. Appleton, 1899); Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia sexualis*, 1886, trans. Franklin S. Klaf (New York: Stein and Day, 1965); Otto Weininger, *Geschlecht und Charakter: Eine prinzipielle Untersuchung* (Vienna: Braumüller, 1903); *Sex and Character: An Investigation of Fundamental Principles*, ed. Daniel Steuer, trans. Ladislaus Löb (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

46. Woodruff D. Smith, "Colonialism and the Culture of Respectability," in *Germany's Colonial Pasts*, ed. Eric Ames, Marcia Klotz, and Lora Wildenthal (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 5, 10. See also Smith's book-length study, *Consumption and the Making of Respectability, 1600–1800* (London: Routledge, 2002). Naturally, my discussion of respectability is also centrally informed by George Mosse's seminal study, *Nationalism and Sexuality*.

image of a sexual underworld that has a greater sense of kindness, charity, and community than polite, bourgeois society. The attribution of agency to a prostitute and the blurring of lines between prostitutes and respectable women are subtle gestures in Böhme's book that become more clearly expressed in works created in Weimar Berlin.

Images of prostitutes pervaded visual and popular culture in Weimar Berlin, and alongside the increased cultural currency of the prostitute came the ever-more-public presence of the post–World War I generation of bourgeois and petit bourgeois women. In their critical exploration of the blurred lines between prostitutes and New Women, chapters 3 and 4 show how the topic of prostitution provided a discursive space for certain artists and authors—many of whom were women—to contemplate various economies of desire, as well as the advantages and limitations of women's work. Chapter 3 delves into Weimar Berlin's legendary nightlife, but not in order to feed the popular myth of the city's sexual decadence. It explores instead the possible effects of increased public contact between men and women, as well as between young, single, working women and prostitutes, in various urban spaces—cinemas, cafés, cabarets, and streets. Chapter 4 looks more closely at the world of women's work, in particular white-collar jobs, in the social context of the late Weimar Republic. Just as they were linked to a critical contemplation of sexual power dynamics and desire, debates on prostitution provoked a closer examination of women's work, drawing attention to gendered pay inequities and to the social value—or lack thereof—placed on types of women's labor. By examining the conflation of white-collar women and prostitutes in two contemporary best sellers, Vicki Baum's *Menschen im Hotel* (Grand Hotel, 1929) and Irmgard Keun's *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* (The Artificial Silk Girl, 1932), I take issue with scholars who read prostitution in these novels as a simple trope for gendered exploitation. Throughout the book, my less polarized approach to gender, bolstered by readings of cultural criticism, popular films, cabaret songs, visual artworks, and mixed-media texts, helps me to distinguish between cultural works or social discourses that collapse prostitutes with other urban women to misogynist ends, those that emphasize the democratization of gender and the growing social acceptance of women's sexual desire and financial independence, and those that do a bit of both.

## Erasing the Stigma: A Brief Glance Ahead

In October 2001, the women of Hydra had a good reason to celebrate. The German federal parliament passed a petition supported by the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Green Party/Coalition 90 that effectively decriminalized prostitution and obliterated Paragraph 138 of German Civil Law Code (Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch, BGB), which, since 1901, had defined prostitution as a violation of public morality. The petition, which became law in January 2002, made prostitutes eligible for social welfare benefits such as health insurance, retirement funds,

unemployment benefits, and occupational retraining if they wish to leave the sex industry. It also declared the financial agreement between the prostitute and client to be a binding contract, subject to legal recourse if not fulfilled by the client. By officially removing the moral stigma (*Sittenwidrigkeit*) from prostitution, this law was the culmination of years of tireless lobbying on the part of prostitutes' rights groups like Berlin's Hydra. What rarely gets acknowledged in contemporary discussions of the law, however, is that it was nothing new for Berliners. In fact, the federal law is almost identical to a Berlin city ordinance passed in December 2000 by the Administrative Court (Verwaltungsgericht), and the court's decision was based on a series of surveys indicating that the majority of citizens polled supported both the social recognition and legal support of prostitutes.<sup>47</sup> Even in the 1980s, when other German cities like Munich and Hamburg were tightening controls on red-light districts and creating restricted zones (*Sperrbezirke*) that were off-limits to prostitutes, the West Berlin government refused to set such restrictions, and Berliners were also much less apt to vote for the forced registration and medical examination of prostitutes by health authorities than were other West Germans. As the women of Hydra proclaim, "We Berliners can count ourselves lucky."<sup>48</sup>

The passage of the Prostitutes' Law (Prostituierengesetz, or ProstG) of 2002 has been accompanied by a vibrant discourse on prostitutes and prostitution in the mainstream media, feminist publications, contemporary art exhibits, and novels. Feminist scholars writing in a special issue of the journal *beiträge zur feministischen theorie und praxis* devoted to prostitution decried the law's passage and contended that prostitution's legalization would result in greater incidences of sexual abuse of women by men. The liberal mainstream magazine *Der Spiegel* published an article entitled "Die bürgerlichen Huren" (The Bourgeois Whores) featuring interviews with several women from Hydra. A multimedia art exhibit *Sexwork: Art Myth Reality*, in the words of one of its organizers and contributing artists, challenged "the diminution of prostitutes to extreme typecasts" by offering differentiated artistic perspectives on sex work. And Sonia Rossi, a mathematics student from a "typical bourgeois family" in western Europe, hit the best-seller list with *Fucking Berlin* (2008), an autobiographical account of how she financed her university education by working in various clubs, massage parlors, and brothels throughout the city.<sup>49</sup>

47. For a summary of the legal debates and decisions that led up to the passage of the Law Regulating the Rights of Prostitutes, known by the federal government and discussed in the media in short as the Prostitutes' Law (ProstG), and in particular of the role played by the Administrative Court in Berlin, see Lorenz Böllinger and Gaby Temme, "Prostitution und Strafrecht—Bewegt sich doch etwas?," *Zeitschrift für Sexualforschung* 14 (December 2001): 336–48.

48. Hydra, *Beruf: Hure*, 175. See pp. 172, 210, and 213 for a comparison of prostitutes' rights in Berlin, Munich, and Hamburg.

49. "Prostitution," special issue, *Beiträge zur feministischen Theorie und Praxis* 58 (2001); see especially the opening editorial, pp. 5–10. Ralf Hoppe, "Die bürgerlichen Huren," *Der Spiegel*, August 27, 2001, 84–90. Judith Siegmund, "Prostitution—Was macht hier die Kunst?" / "Prostitution—Which Role Can Art Play?," in the exhibition catalog *Sexwork: Kunst Mythos Realität* (Heidelberg: Kehrer,

Loaded as it still may be with narratives of victimization and debauchery, the contemporary German debate centers on “professional prostitutes who are described as emancipated women, as independent mercantilists, or self-confident employees who constitute a representative average of the population, who are in control of their own decisions.”<sup>50</sup> The twenty-first-century discourse on prostitution clearly recalls the debates that took place in Wilhelmine and Weimar Berlin, but it still pales in comparison to the vibrancy of those earlier debates. Yet current scholarly discussion proceeds as if these historical antecedents did not exist. By tracing the origins of the “bourgeois whore” and other cliché-defying images of prostitutes back to these early debates, this book tells a story of prostitution in Berlin that might just be more “modern” than our own contemporary discussions of commodified sexuality.

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2007), 10; the exhibition ran from December 2006 through February 2007 at three different locations in Berlin. Sonia Rossi, *Fucking Berlin* (Berlin: Ullstein, 2008), 15.

50. Susanne Dodillet, “Cultural Clash on Prostitution: Debates on Prostitution in Germany and Sweden in the 1990s,” in Sönsen Breen and Peters, *Genealogies of Identity*, 41–42.