The Flapper and 'Chill-Mindedness':

The Urban Woman and Fertility in the 1920s.

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Introduction:
The 'cornerstone of womanhood'

" 'Woman! Isabelle scoffed. 'Why is child-bearing considered the corner-stone of womanhood? Having young? Cows do that. Women are good for other things…'" (Robert Herrick, *Together*, 1908)[1]

The 'New Woman' whose image was widespread at the turn of the twentieth century, heralding a cult of individualism fuelled by the spirit of Ibsen,[2] was widely denounced by contemporaries. Theodore Roosevelt in 1905 referred to"the woman of this type" as "one of the most unpleasant and unwholesome features of modern life."[3]

Isabelle Lane expressed the sentiments of the 'new' woman of Herrick's "great middle class," who in her eagerness for a 'large life' rejected "the process of nature for which the institution of marriage was primarily designed."[4] The flapper, the urban-based independent young woman of the 1920s, was also a phenomenon of the middle class. Though traceable to the earlier 'new woman,' she was no bohemian minority. In 1926 a German doctor observed that "women are fleeing Nora's doll's house not just in isolated cases but in battalions."[5] The flapper represented a repudiation of traditional femininity as her class had understood it. She was characterised by her counter-ideological rebellion against a prominent immediate concern of her social and political milieu: the need to raise the birth rate. The flapper was visible in the 'masculine' sphere of the city, conspicuously 'child-free,' at a moment when nations most needed women to display their healing, regenerative capacities: after the trauma of the Great War.

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[1] Robert Herrick, *Together*, New York: Macmillan, 1908, p. 392.
[2] The Norwegian playwright Henrik Johan Ibsen (1828-1906) was introduced to the 'woman question' during the 1870s by the novelist Camilla Collett. In 1880 his *A Doll's House* provoked international scandal for its depiction of the heroine Nora, who leaves her husband and domesticity to assert her right to live an independent existence outside the role of wife and mother. By the turn of the century the play had been translated into virtually every European language, and had been staged in major productions in London (1889) and Paris (1894), with Europe's leading actresses portraying Nora. See Susan Groag Bell and Karen Offen (eds.), *Women, the Family and Freedom: The Debate in Documents, Vol. II: 1880-1950*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983, p. 17.
[3] *Ibid.*, quoted p. 139.
[4] Herrick, *op.cit.*, pp. 190 and 93.

Zelda Fitzgerald, wife of the writer F. Scott Fitzgerald who chronicled the 1920s in *The Great Gatsby* and other novels, was the quintessential flapper. Zelda underwent an abortion in 1922, apparently with Scott's support, but later he expressed revulsion at his "son" having gone "down the toilet of the xxx Hotel after Dr. X – pills." He blamed the loss on what he termed the "chill-mindedness" of his wife.[6] Zelda went down in history as a woman with "no maternal feelings," as a *Time* review described her in 1970.[7]

The 'chill-mindedness' detected in Zelda and other flappers by their critics was a rejection of the paradigm of femininity associated with the renunciation of self and the nurture of others. The task of reproduction makes womanhood synonymous with sacrifice, a problem for feminists, who have long struggled with and challenged the correlation between the woman's 'natural' role of mother and her 'natural' subjection in the biological family.[8] It was in response to such a correlation that Friedrich Engels likened the relationship between man and wife to that of the bourgeois and proletariat, and Simone de Beauvoir later applied Hegel's master-slave parable to the relation between man and woman.[9]

An essentialist notion of woman as 'nurturer' perpetuates sexual inequality. Several prominent demographers believe that low fertility is an inevitable partner to growing equality between the sexes: they followed contemporary commentators in France, Germany, America and England who linked the 'woman question' to the decline in fertility.[10]

[5] Atina Grossmann, *Reforming Sex: The German Movement for Birth Control and Abortion Reform 1920-1950*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 3.
[6] Kendall Taylor, *Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald: Sometimes Madness is Wisdom*, Sydney: Flamingo (Harper Collins), 2001, p. 114.
[7] 'No So Tender Was the Night: *Zelda*, by Nancy Milford', *Time*, June 15 1970, p. 80.
[8] See Mary O'Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981. Shulamith Firestone argues that woman's reproductive biology accounts for her original and continued oppression, and that this has applied to all cultures and stages of history; the patriarchal family being only the most recent form of family to oppress the woman according to the logic of 'nature': *The Dialectic of Sex*, London: Paladin, 1970, pp. 73-5.
[9] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, translated by H. M. Parshley, New York: Vintage Books, 1989, pp. 64-5. For Hegel's study of independence and dependence of self-consciousness, or lordship and bondage, see his *The Phenomenology of Mind*, translated by J. B. Baillie, Second Edition, London: Allen and Unwin, 1931, pp. 229-40. For a detailed critique of de Beauvoir's reading of Hegel, see O'Brien, *op.cit.*, pp. 69-72; Friedrich Engels, *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, New York: International Publishers, 1972 (1884), p. 137.
[10] See, for example, Eva M. Bernhardt, 'Changing Family Ties, Women's Position, and Low Fertility' in N.Federici, K. Oppenheim Mason, and S. Sogner, (eds.), *Women's Position and Demographic Change*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993, p. 81.

The demographic transition, a process synonymous with modernisation and its attendant anxieties, by the beginning of the Great War had seen a steady decline in births in wealthy, industrialised nations.[11] Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the fertility of most European countries, and of the United States, was undergoing a sustained decline, led by the social and economic elite. Malthusian concerns about population – characterised by fear of *over*population and stress on resources – were by the 1870s a dead letter; [12] replaced by fears on a national level regarding manpower. Internationally, from the late nineteenth century, high fertility was perceived as a sign of national 'virility' and power.[13] Historians have tended to neglect the historicity of fertility decline, but as the authors of a recent study asserted, "demography is too important to be left to demographers."[14]

The war and postwar period saw an unprecedented degree of attention devoted by the state to issues of natality, as the discourses of nationalism and depopulation became conflated in the minds of politicians, demographers and pronatalists. Pronatalism, by definition, is the organised ideology of fear of depopulation.[15] Tamar Mayer has noted that when a nation is faced with internal and external pressures it polices and employs coercive means to control sexuality.[16] Michel Foucault described an "era of bio-power" characterised by the "administration of bodies and the calculated management of life."[17] The decade following the losses of World War I was a period of intense ferment in the area of control of population: the pronatalist and birth control movements were both examples of 'bio-power' in the modern world.

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[11] On the theory of the demographic transition see Michael S. Teitelbaum, *The British Fertility Decline: Demographic Transition in the Crucible of the Industrial Revolution*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, pp. 3-5; Angus McLaren, *Sexuality and Social Order: The Debate over the Fertility of Women and Workers in France*, 1770-1920, New York: Holmes and Meir, 1983, pp. 9-27, and Jean-Claude Chesnais, *The Demographic Transition*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992.

[12] Thomas Robert Malthus' hugely influential *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798) had stressed the need for population restraint. The Malthusian paradigm held sway until well into the nineteenth century, when growing awareness of fertility decline saw a rapid change of focus in the population question.

[13] Cornelie Usborne, 'Pregnancy is the woman's active service': pronatalism in Germany during the First World War' in Richard Wall and Jay Winter (eds.), *The Upheaval of War: Family, Work and Welfare in Europe, 1914-1918*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 407.

[14] John R. Gillis, Louise A. Tilly, and David Levine, 'Introduction: The Quiet Revolution' in John R. Gillis, Louise A. Tilly, and David Levine (eds.), *The European Experience of Declining Fertility, 1850-1970: The Quiet Revolution*, Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1992, p. 3.

[15] Marie-Monique Huss, 'Pronatalism in the Inter-war Period in France', *Journal of Contemporary History* 25: 1 (1990), p. 40.

[16] Tamar Mayer, 'Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Setting the Stage' in Tamar Mayer, *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation*, London: Routledge, 2000, p. 7.

They addressed the question of who should control reproduction – couples, or the state.

The first chapter of this study is concerned with how this natalist climate fostered an aversion to female individualism. Women's social duty, it was stressed, was to bear children for the nation. Anti-individualism is detected in discourse on the population problem, which rarely concerned itself with female individuals; in demographic and scientific/ medical discourse; and in legislation which revealed masculinist assumptions about woman's social role. The needs of the national community obliterated any question of female agency in matters pertaining to their own reproductive capacity. Moves to check depopulation were moves to bring women's fertility under state control.

Depopulation was conceived as a moral problem, by its association with the 'problem' of rising individualism.[18] Depopulation precipitated a fundamental clash of ideologies: individualism versus duty to the collective, 'egotism' versus sacrifice. In the post-Ibsen west, 'individualism' was a problem associated primarily with women. Demographers in the nineteenth century had contributed to this association of the new woman with selfish individualism. The French natalist and demographer Jacques Bertillon had observed in 1876 that "[French] wives are the least fertile" according to a marital fertility index that was the cornerstone of demographic studies because, he explained, "under the laws of society, only married women have been granted the privilege, or the *duty*, of producing children."[19] Statements like these revealed certain assumptions about woman's place and role in society, while reinforcing the pervasive conviction that women, in their selfish unwillingness to bear children – their *crisis du devoir maternel* – were responsible for depopulation.[20]

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[17] Foucault noted the development of demography as a tool of this bio-power, in the realm of population controls: *The History of Sexuality Volume I: The Will to Knowledge*, translated by Robert Hurley, London: Penguin, 1998, p. 140.

[18] Demographic theory stressed the concern of the urban bourgeoisie to advance their own self-interest over the interests of the nation as a primary cause of depopulation: see Joseph J. Spengler, *France Faces Depopulation*, Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1938, pp. 156-60, and Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilisation Without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917-1927*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, pp. 124-5.

[19] Bertillon calculated that for every 1000 married women aged between 15 and 50, 275 babies were born in Prussia, for example, compared to 173 in France: see J. H. Cole, '"There are Only Good Mothers": The Ideological Work of Women's Fertility in France before World War I,' *French Historical Studies* 19: 3 (1996), pp. 655-6.

[20] The natalist Gaston Rageot introduced the term 'crisis of maternal duty,' and said explicitly that "the drop in natality is principally attributable to the French woman": quoted in Roberts, *op.cit.*, p. 121-2. The possibility that women did not want to bear the pains of childbirth was expressed by

More thoughtful commentators recognised fertility decline as a consequence of significant cultural changes surrounding what both men and women expected from life. The editors of a recent work on fertility decline found it "impossible to separate biological from cultural production," because when people decide how many children to have, or decide not to reproduce themselves, they are simultaneously carving out their own identity in the world.[21] The traditional fertility behaviour that Alfred Naquet of the *Ligue de ré-génération humaine* described as "organic fatalism" could not survive alongside modernity.[22] The debate over depopulation was not merely a reflection of renewed nationalist spirit and concerns for manpower after the war, but was intertwined with social, political and cultural transformations, anxieties concerning which were increasingly attaching themselves to the New Woman.

The decline of a 'fatalistic' attitude towards individual fertility was associated with the rise of civilisation and the emergence of the 'modern' urban personality,[23] a theme which pervades the second chapter of this study. Writers attributed the spread of the desire to limit family size, the increased use of contraceptives, and the rise in abortions, to the urbanisation of the population. The massive shifts in population from the country to the city associated with the industrial revolution coincided – roughly – with the decline in fertility.[24] The doctrine of rational control of individual fertility (the right to control one's own life) preached by urban 'types' with their subversive prioritising of individual desires, was viewed in opposition to the more 'fatalistic' attitude of the country-dweller. The Princeton Fertility Project found that the size of a city bears a "consistent inverse relationship to the level of marital

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commentators: see Roberts, p. 121 and Lydia Kingsmill Commander, *The American Idea*, New York: Arno Press and the *New York Times*, 1972 (1907), pp. 152-6.

[21] Gillis *et.al.*, 'Introduction: The Quiet Revolution,' p. 8.

[22] Quoted in Cole, *op.cit.*, p. 661.

[23] 'Civilisation' theory in its various guises assumed that the modern 'mentality' made rational control of fertility inevitable, whereas the 'traditional' man would not have considered such control, as he viewed reproduction as an unalterable fact of existence. This influential idea, which saw changes in attitudes to childbearing in the nineteenth century as 'revolutionary,' was challenged by Angus McLaren, who argued that the 'Malthusian mentality' is in evidence throughout history and even prehistory, and that the modern contraceptive 'revolution' was a matter of an increase in the degree of control available and the percentage of the population employing these means of control. See his *A History of Contraception: From Antiquity to the Present Day*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1990, pp. 2-5.

[24] Ansley Coale and Susan Cotts Watkins (eds.), *The Decline of Fertility in Europe: The Revised Proceedings of a Conference on the Princeton European Fertility Project*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986, p. 234.

fertility."[25] The largest 'world cities' – London, Paris, Berlin and New York – were, in terms of fecundity, the enemies of the national community.[26]

Planning theory assumes that social processes are mirrored in spatial form. The 'two spheres' paradigm of the bourgeois cosmos decreed domestic lives for women, while men led public lives in the civic space of the city, returning to the home outside the city when their day's business was done.[27] Elizabeth Wilson, describing the urban woman as a 'sphinx' – suggesting inexplicability, inscrutability – describes a struggle waged over women's presence in urban space since the industrial revolution. Cities were not places for women, who were "an irruption in the city, a symptom of disorder, and a problem."[28] The twenties is a crucial period in the study of gender and urban space, because of the increased presence of hitherto respectable women in the streets of cities.

The cultural, social and economic conditions of the large city, where new moral and ethical conditions were at their most intense, offered women the opportunity to live a 'larger life' outside biological determinism.[29] In the 1920s, greater numbers of women were taking advantage of the potentialities of the city. An increase in female white-collar work during the war made young, single women more visible in cities, where they also inhabited space for the purposes of leisure and commerce.

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[25]Coale and Watkins, *op.cit.*, p. 254.

[26] The rise of the 'world-city,' in which Oswald Spengler envisaged people losing their national identities to become 'generic urbanites,' dramatised a confrontation of rational, individualistic society and the 'organic' community, symbolised in the rural-urban division. See Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, translated by Charles Francis Atkinson, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1939 (Vol. I 1918, Vol. II 1922), Vol. II, pp. 87-110. 'World-city' was the term used to describe large metropolises with international influence: the name itself implied the erasing of national characteristics within the urban space.

[27] The division between the home and civic space reflected and reinforced a definition of woman that aligned her with the sensuous, with feeling rather than reason and intellect, which were qualities associated with the man and public life. Genevieve Lloyd described this sexual division of mental labour: "Woman's task is to preserve the sphere of the intermingling of mind and body, to which the Man of Reason will repair for solace, warmth and relaxation. If he is to exercise the most exalted form of Reason, he must leave soft emotions and sensuousness behind; woman will keep them intact for him": *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy*, London: Routledge, 1984, p. 50.

[28] Elizabeth Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women*, California: University of California Press, 1995, pp. 16 and 9.

[29] The appeal to 'nature' to justify male domination, discussed above, in turn created the familiar classification of woman's destiny as biological event: see Helen Callaway, "The Most Essentially Female Function of All': Giving Birth' in Shirley Ardener (ed.), *Defining Females: The Nature of Women in Society*, New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1978, and Germaine Greer, *Sex and Destiny: The Politics of Human Fertility*, Melbourne: Secker and Warburg, 1984.

The apparent increase of female presence on the streets of cities was disturbing on a number of levels. The single woman working in the city had escaped patriarchal relations, and was not disciplined by motherhood. She was literally 'her own woman.' Adrienne Rich, writing in 1977, was frustrated by the lack of a satisfactory word to describe a woman who defines herself neither in relation to children nor to a man: a woman who is "self-identified, who has chosen herself."[30] Such a woman could not be conceived in a world which still defined women in terms of their duties to others. Chapter Two of this study considers the flapper as urban 'sphinx,' staging an actual and symbolic rebellion against the maternal role by her presence in the city. It considers the 'world-cities,' though the flapper was to be found throughout the urban West: the largest cities, it is suggested, offered women the 'largest life.'

This study is very much concerned with the blurring of lines between the lives of men and women and the spaces they occupied. The separation of sexuality from procreation, made possible by birth control and its diffusion, collapsed vital boundaries. In Emile Zola's novel *Fécondité* (1899), Dr. Boutan had warned that contraception opened up the possibility of a "sexual and ultimately social agency for women outside the conventional realm of motherhood."[31] The Neo-Malthusian movement was considered subversive because it had attempted to dismantle the social significance of woman's reproductive function. This was an extremely radical notion. Madeleine Pelletier argued in 1908 that, "It is obvious that women are not anatomically identical to men, but that is the individual's concern and has nothing to do with society."[32]

Modernity saw 'all that is solid melt into air' as Marshall Berman titled his classic work.[33] This was especially true with regard to the balance between the masculine and feminine principles. Mary Louise Roberts found in the case of France that the perceived collapse of distinctions between the sexes was a "primary referent" in cultural pessimism after the Great War.[34] The postwar period witnessed a crisis

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[30] Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, London: Virago, 1977, p. 249.
[31] Quoted in Cole, *op.cit.*, p. 641.
[32] *Ibid.*, p. 662.
[33] Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982.
[34] Roberts, *op.cit.*, p. 4.

concerning gender identity. The flapper seemed to arouse unacknowledged fears of cultural collapse due to her visible rejection of those hallmarks of womanhood that were inextricable from motherhood as constructed by men: altruism, domesticity, subservience.

The blurring of boundaries between the roles and behaviours of the sexes is an important theme of Chapter Three. The flapper wanted to be the comrade of men, to claim their freedoms and live on equal terms with them, and she dispensed with many of the conventions of femininity to do so. The flapper said less than her critics – she did not write great feminist manifestos. She 'spoke' with her style, and left records of her behaviour in imagery. The ideological importance of dress is assumed in this study. The flapper made a statement through fashion which was invested with political meaning. The ideal of 1900 in feminine dress, which emphasised secondary sexual characteristics, was completely eclipsed by 1920, relaced by straight, 'boyish' lines. Fashion attracted disproportionate attention in the period, as it was interpreted as a visual language expressing changes in gender relations.

The response to the flapper was heated, because her style and behaviour were read as a rejection of maternity. The flapper has been dismissed by much feminism and historiography as having no politically serious agenda. But she threatened traditional notions of female identity. Opposition to the flapper was informed by awareness of a decline in fertility, but the refusal of young women to bear children was a problem that went deeper than the threat of 'depopulation.' The flapper had embarked on an individualistic quest for a new way of being a woman. This required a rejection of the maternal capacity and the sphere – space – that went with it. In this natalist climate that demanded women be defined by their biological function, which was conceived as a social duty, the flapper embraced the 'anti-maternal' values associated with the city and modern life, in a strong assertion of her explicit, individual self-subsistence, her personhood.

Chapter 1

The price of woman is the child:

fertility decline, the nation, and duty.

"[a] country whose women do not know how to produce children is a country struck at its very heart." (Senator Léon Jénouvrier, France 1919)[1]

You're going to make a lovely little mother

You're going to make a bunch of cannonfodder

That's what your belly's for

And that's no news to you

And now do not squall

You're having a baby, that's all.

<div style="text-align: right;">(Bertolt Brecht, 1929)[2]</div>

Nineteenth-century scientific thought invested women with a crucial evolutionary role. Herbert Spencer warned in his *Principles of Biology* (1867) that women would lose their capacity for reproduction as they gained in self-sufficiency and individualism.[3] The continuance of the human race, in this view, depended upon female dependence and self-abnegation, which must be fostered at all costs. The "recredescence of primitive individualism" festering in the New Woman was blamed for the decline of the Victorian family and morality, the linchpin of which had been the 'Cult of True Womanhood' as Welter described it, a cult that saw womanhood defined by altruistic devotion to the service of another, *à la* Louisa May Alcott.[4] The cultivation of self-abnegation, sacrifice, duty – this was the woman's biologically determined evolutionary task. But by 1910 Margaret Deland would observe, "The

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[1] Quoted in Roberts, *op.cit.*, p. 120.

[2] Quoted in Atina Grossmann, 'Abortion and Economic Crisis: The 1931 Campaign against Paragraph 218' in Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossman, and Marion Kaplan (eds.), *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984, pp. 66-7.

[3] Quoted in David M. Kennedy, *Birth Control in America: the Career of Margaret Sanger*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970, p. 47.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 37; Barbara Welter, 'The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860', *American Quarterly* 18, (1966), pp. 151-174.

young woman of today is supplementing a certain old-fashioned word, *duty*, by two other words, "to myself.""[5]

By the time of the emergence of Ibsen's and Bernard Shaw's 'new woman' from the 1880s onwards, it was clear that women in 'developed' countries were having fewer children. Between 1850 and 1930 there was a near-universal decline in birth rates across Europe, by as much as 50 percent,[6] while the United States had experienced a steady decline since at least 1820 (figures 1 and 2).[7] The 'demographic transition' refers, in very general terms, to the shift from a traditional pattern of high birth rates offset by high mortality, to the modern pattern of low birth rates offset by low mortality.[8] It is usually conflated with urbanisation and industrialisation, the other great transformations of the period.
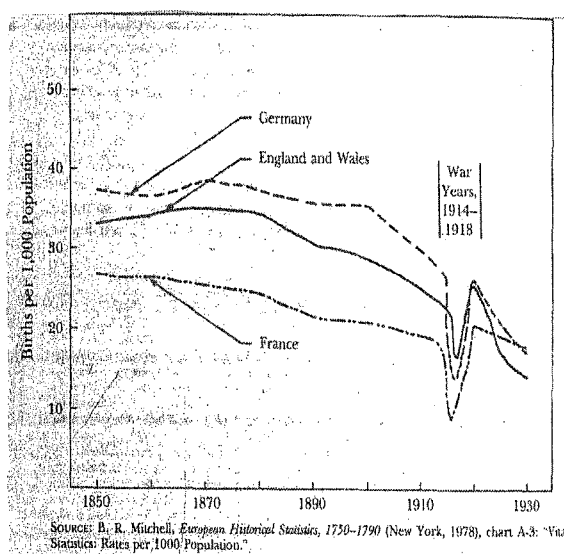

Fig. 1: Crude Birth Rates for France, England and Wales, and Germany

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[5] Margaret Deland, 'The Change in the Feminine Ideal,' *The Atlantic Monthly* Vol. CV, (March 1910), p. 293.
[6] Teitelbaum, *The British Fertility Decline*, p. 3.
[7] Kennedy, *op.cit.*, p. 42.
[8] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire 1875-1914*, London: Abacus, 1997, p. 193. The theory of demographic transition was formulated in the 1920s and 30s and dominated the study of demographic decline until recent decades. Transition theory assumed that all societies would gradually come under the sway of 'modern' forces, so that it was possible to predict future demographic developments elsewhere in the world. It saw advances in technology and science from the eighteenth century leading to a rise in living standards and medical care which reduced mortality, but argued that emerging lifestyles associated with industrialisation and urbanisation would reduce the demand for children: given, for example, their reduced economic usefulness in the cities. Furthermore, people living in

Figure 2.—Number of Children Under 5 Years Old per 1,000 White Women 20 to 44 Years Old, Urban and Rural: 1800 to 1950
[Urban-rural classification by 1940 Census rules]

Source: Data for 1800 to 1840 and 1910 to 1950 from table 6; data for 1850 to 1900 computed from reports of pertinent population censuses.
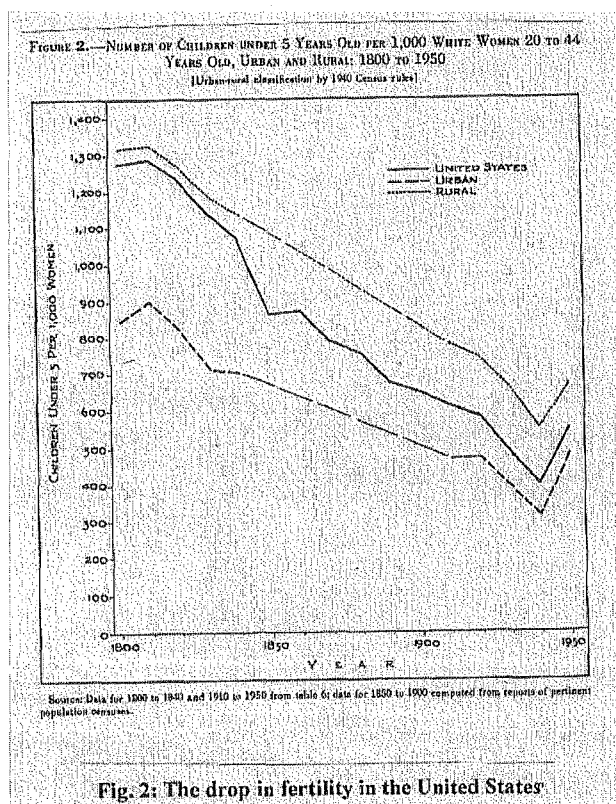
Fig. 2: The drop in fertility in the United States

Demographers in the age of the New Woman and beyond, as Sogner has observed, studied population conditions "at a level of abstraction where women as such seem hardly more interesting than men as such": women being as conspicuously absent from works of demography as from traditional historiography, which also concerned itself with demography only as it impacted on the nation and state.[9]

Late nineteenth-century demography, despite its 'scientific' tone, presented reproduction as a social responsibility through an "overdetermined connection between womanhood and motherhood."[10] The fertility index was defined as a ratio of births to the total population of women of 'childbearing age': a notion that presumes womanhood to be defined by biological destiny.[11] Under the Malthusian paradigm, a

cities would be presented with alternatives to the family-oriented lifestyle: see George Alter, 'Theories of Fertility Decline: A Non-Specialist's Guide to the Current Debate' in Gillis, et.al., op.cit., pp. 15-20.
[9] S. Sogner, 'Historical Features of Women's Position in Society' in Federici, et.al., op.cit., p. 245. Historians concerning themselves with demography have similarly discussed the problem of the birth rate purely in terms of national concerns and without reference to women's lives: John C. Hunter, in his article on the French government's prioritising of 'the principle of equality'– which held that all men should serve in the army for the same period, even if they had fathered large families – over both the amelioration of the birth rate and an improved defence on the eve of the First World War, did not mention women, though his argument was centrally concerned with the French aspiration to create "a society based on the equality of all citizens." See 'The Problem of the French Birth Rate on the Eve of World War I', French Historical Studies 2 (1962), pp. 490-503.
[10] Cole, op.cit., p. 646.
[11] Ibid.

more gender-neutral process for measuring fertility had prevailed, in which fertility had been measured in relation to couples. The end of the Malthusian era in demographic studies saw the Scottish gynaecological surgeon J. Matthews Duncan make the gendered distinction between fertility and fecundity: fertility being the number of children produced by the population, and fecundity indicating the reproductive potential of individual women's bodies. This endorsed a view that saw fecundity as carrying with it a responsibility to be fertile.[12] But the 'modern woman,' the ultimate symbol of the social problem of 'egotism', would brook no interference with her newfound perception of a responsibility to *herself*.

The demographic transition was characterised by the virtual demise of the large family in all wealthy countries. The case of Great Britain, where marriages in 1925 were dominated by one and two child families (figure 3) and childlessness had doubled in frequency since 1870, was typical of other industrialised nations.[13] Fertility decline was 'led' by the middle and upper classes in a revolutionary change in reproductive behaviour occurring in France and the United States from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and in France and Germany from the late nineteenth century.[14]

Great Britain: Distribution of women (per 1,000) with various numbers of live births for selected marriage cohorts. (All marriages under 45 years of age; adjusted data)

No. of women (per 1,000) with specified numbers of live births	Date of first marriage						
	1870 -79	1890 -99	1900 -09	1910	1915	1920	1925
0	65	99	113	122	150	138	101
1 or 2	125	231	335	373	447	458	506
3 or 4	191	258	277	282	254	258	221
5 to 9	434	340	246	200	139	135	106
10 or more	177	72	29	23	10	12	6
All	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000

Fig. 3: Shrinking family size in Great Britain

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[12] *Ibid.*, p. 651.

[13] In nineteenth-century Britain families of five or more children had constituted three-fifths of all families. Queen Victoria had nine children in eighteen years, and an average of six children prevailed until the 1880s. The rapidity of the change is also illustrated in the case of Great Britain: for couples marrying during the war and in the 1920s, one or two children was the norm in 45 to 50 percent of cases, whereas this kind of small family had represented only 12.5 percent of marriages in the 1870s. Even by the period 1900-1909 a third of all marriages had produced only one or two children. See D. V. Glass and E. Grebenik, Papers of the Royal Commission on Population Volume VI: *The Trend and Pattern of Fertility in Great Britain, Part 1*, London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1954, p. 3, and Richard Allen Soloway, *Birth Control and the Population Question in England, 1877-1930*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982, p. 8. The trend towards smaller families was also marked in Germany: whereas in 1910 one third of the population had lived in a family of no more than four people, by 1933 over half the population did so. See T. Mason, 'Women in Germany, 1925-1940: Family, Welfare and Work, Part I', *History Workshop* 1 (1976), p. 82. But the 'small-family system' was primarily associated with France: the average French family of 1914 consisted of just two children, compared to 2.5 in Great Britain and 3 in Germany: see Robert A. Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 78.

France was exceptional, in that an early onset of fertility decline, before 1830, had seen the annual net reproduction rate fall below the level theoretically required for a population to replace itself as early as 1890. It was to remain at this level almost constantly until 1946. The French population, which had grown by 32 percent in the period 1801-1850, grew by only 14.6 percent between 1850 and 1914.[15] By the 1930s most of the North, West and Central European populations were similarly reproducing themselves at a level near or below replacement, fertility having plunged with "remarkable simultaneity and speed."[16] Such a transition, occurring across a period that also saw the emergence of a feminism constantly linked in public discourse to the "specter of women's individualism," sparked fears regarding an apparent rejection of the maternal role amongst 'new women.'[17]

Depopulation was firmly embedded in the public consciousness by 1914. In 1913 *The Times* reflected "the public…is accustomed to the headline in the general press, 'The Declining Birthrate,' and to the announcement which is made by the Registrar-General with almost mathematical regularity that 'this is the lowest rate since registration began.'"[18] The proceedings of the National Birth-Rate Commission in Great Britain were well publicised during the war, as were the publications of its prominent leader, James Marchant, who published *Cradles or Coffins: Our Greatest National Need*, in 1916.[19]

In France, where the censuses of 1890, 1891, 1892 and 1895 had revealed an excess of deaths over births, Jacques Bertillon formed the *Alliance nationale pour l'accroissement de la population française* (1896) to lobby for policies to remedy the problem. By 1910 Robert Hertz commented that you could not open a French

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[14] See Michael R. Haines, 'Occupation and Social Class during Fertility Decline: Historical Perspectives' in Gillis *et.al.*, *op.cit.*, pp. 193-226.
[15] G. Wright, *France in Modern Times: From the Enlightenment to the Present*, third edition, New York: W. W. Norton, 1981, p. 180 and 277; Etienne Van de Walle, *The Female Population of France in the Nineteenth Century*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 3-5.
[16] J. E. Knodel, *The Decline of Fertility in Germany, 1871-1939*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974, p. 3; Gillis, *et.al.*, 'Introduction: 'The Quiet Revolution' in Gillis *et.al*, p. 1.
[17] Bell and Offen, *op.cit.*, p. 17.
[18] Quoted by James Marchant, 'Preface,' *The Declining Birth Rate: Its Causes and Effects*, Second Edition, London: Chapman and Hall, 1917, p. v.
[19] James Marchant, *Cradles or Coffins: Our Greatest National Need*, London: C. Arthur Pearson Ltd., 1916.

newspaper or review without finding an article about the depopulation of the country.[20]

The Great War was to raise these anxieties to a fever pitch in France, where the demographic problem was the most marked. The death or wounding of five million men – eight million had been mobilised – saw anxieties about population carve out a position of high visibility in the political agenda. The *Alliance* reached a national audience shocked by the demographic impact of the war, and 1919 saw the establishment by the French government of the *Conseil supérieur de la natalité*.[21]

In countries other than France the decline had been masked for a few decades by a steeper decline in the death rate, so that fertility decline failed to pervade general public consciousness until the war highlighted issues of manpower. Germany's defeat in the war sharpened anxieties about the 'defeat' implicit in its own *Geburtenrückgang* or fertility decline, which had been rapid: by the census of 1933 its national fertility rate was one-half what it had been at the turn of the century. The German birth rate was the lowest in Europe by this time.[22] In the United States anxiety about fertility decline focused on the nativist notion of 'race suicide.' The dying out of the Anglo-Saxon element in American society, the "last 100 percent American Adam…and Eve,"[23] was a constant theme of the general anxiety regarding the falling birth rate in the United States.[24]

Fertility became integral to the rhetoric of war: European and American politicians alike struck fear into the hearts of their electors by lamenting Germany's victory in the 'warfare of the cradle.'[25] Even given the technological innovations that characterised battle by the time of the Great War, notions of a strong population being the source of military strength played an important part in pronatalist rhetoric. Germany boasted a population of 65 million to France's 39.5 million, and according

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[20] Cole, *op.cit.*, p. 663 and 640.

[21] Andrés Horacio Reggiani, 'Procreating France: The Politics of Demography, 1919-1945,' *French Historical Studies* 19: 3 (1996), p. 731-2.

[22] Grossmann, *Reforming Sex*, p. 4.

[23] Katherine Anthony, 'The Family' in Harold E. Stearns (ed.), *Civilisation in the United States: An Inquiry by Thirty Americans*, New York: Brace and Company, 1970 (1922), p. 320.

[24] See John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860-1925*, New York: Atheneum, 1975. Theodore Roosevelt's 1905-9 campaign for fecundity, in which he used the idea of 'race suicide' to argue against birth control, popularised Francis A. Walker's theory that immigration discouraged reproduction amongst the older stock: p. 147. Nativism combined decisively with anxieties about fertility decline in the 1920s. Edward A. Ross wrote of the "Slow Suicide among Our Native Stock" in 1924: Dorothy M. Brown, *Setting a Course: American Women in the 1920s*, Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987, p. 115.

[25] Theodore Roosevelt, quoted in Kennedy, *op.cit.*, p. 43.

to the 1911 census France, once the second largest population in Europe, had been

surpassed by Russia, Germany, Austria-Hungary and Britain, and was being

approached by Italy.[26] After the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1) there had been a

reluctance to reproduce, and by 1911 the French population had increased by only 9.7

percent, in comparison to Germany's 57.8 percent.[27] The demographer Paul Haury

claimed that the essential cause of the war had been Germany's perception of France

as a "dying nation."[28] Despite French perceptions of Germany's manpower as

superior (figure 4), between 1870 and 1930 Germany's own crude birth rate had

declined by more than 50 percent, making Germans similarly nervous about the

relative *Volkskraft* (population strength) of their enemies, particularly Russia, which

boasted the highest birthrate in Europe.[29]

*... Une des causes profondes
de la guerre actuelle a été
notre faible natalité.*

*(Discours de M. Paul DESCHANEL
à la Sorbonne)*

Fig. 4: Militarism and the birth rate: 'One of the profound causes of the
present war has been our low birthrate'

While civilised nations feared each other, they also betrayed a collective

nervousness about the possibility that the decadence of civilisation (the decline was

likened to the process that had seen the fall of Rome and Greece) would lead to the

supremacy of more prolific 'savages': that the decline of the birth rate in Western

countries might forebode the "transfer of power to the yellow and black races of

[26] C. Dyer, *Population and Society in Twentieth Century France*, New York: Holmes and Meier, 1978, pp. 5-7; Hunter, *op.cit.*, p. 491.
[27] France's defeat in 1870-71 was blamed by government officials on the declining population: see Roberts, *op.cit.*, p. 99; Dyer, *op.cit.*, p. 5. Germany's increase was overwhelmingly due to territorial gains.
[28] Roberts, *op.cit.*, pp. 105-7.

mankind."[30] Fertility decline was inextricable from perceptions of a generalised cultural, political and economic decline: the degeneration of civilised countries attested to in Spengler's *Decline of the West*.[31] Depopulation provided a coherent explanation for the crises of the post-war years, and presented contemporaries with a clear goal: the healing of the moral disease that was the key to all the nation's problems.[32] This ideological linkage between population and national strength was deeply ingrained in culture and was the central tenet of pronatalism.[33] Henri Chéron, addressing the French Senate in 1920, described propaganda for abortion and contraception as "propaganda against French natality, that is, against the nation."[34]

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[29] Knodel, *op.cit.*, p. 4; Cornelie Usborne, *The Politics of the Body: Women's Reproductive Rights and Duties*, London: Macmillan, 1992, p. 16.

[30] For example, Sir Leo Chiozza Money, *The Peril of the White*, London: W. Collins Sons and Co., 1923; C. E. Pell, 'The Fertility Question' in Raymond Pierpoint (ed.), *Report of the Fifth International Neo-Malthusian and Birth Control Conference*, London: William Heinemann, 1922, p. 257; Sir Arthur Newsholme, 'Some Public Health Aspects of Birth Control' in James Marchant (ed.), *Medical Views on Birth Control*, London: Martin Hopkinson, 1926, p. 132. Commander had in 1907 compared the United States in its youth and vigour to "wornout civilisations of the past in their last cycles of existence," speaking of France by implication when she described a low birth rate as a symptom of "the decreptitude of national decay, the senility of national old age": *op.cit.*, pp. 70 and 76.

[31] Spengler argued that all civilisations enter a stage of depopulation, a symptom of a degeneration which begins in the cities and leads to the collapse of nations: Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, p. 105 and *passim*. Images of France as a sick or dying body were a commonplace of natalist rhetoric, which held a crucial place in a wider discourse regarding social degeneration: Roberts, *op.cit.*, pp. 107-8, 111. Similar images of decay and degeneration were used to describe the *Volk* 'body' which was seen to be suffering the effects of a loss of youth and vigour: a third of the population had been aged under 15 years in 1910, but only a quarter by 1925 (Grossmann, *Reforming Sex, op.cit.*, p. 6). On degeneration see Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c. 1848-1918*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, and for France, William H. Schneider, *Quality and Quantity: The Quest for Biological Regeneration in Twentieth Century France*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, especially ch.1. This contemporary tendency among conservatives to align fertility decline with wider national malaise became a historiographical commonplace: see, for example, Philippe Bernard and Henri Dubief, *The Decline of the Third Republic, 1914-1938*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

[32] Roberts, *op.cit.*, p. 117.

[33] British pro-natalists believed that depopulation would affect production, the growth of capital and investments, employment, and wages –and that "we shall be the spectators of the enrichment and prosperity of our neighbours" as the President of The League of National Life foreboded in his address, 'The Disastrous Influence of a Declining Birth Rate on the Life of the Nation', Croydon: Roffey and Clark Ltd., 1929, p. 8. Other approaches to the population problem did not see the progress and power of nations in such numerical terms: the neo-Malthusian and eugenics movements also indicated the new tendency to treat sexuality as the business of the state, but were more concerned with the 'quality' and health of the population than with sheer numbers. Birth control was increasingly recognised as a tool in enhancing eugenic quality. After 1920 Margaret Sanger's focus had shifted from her initial radical position – birth control as a means of freeing the working class from exploitation – to a position that appealed more to the middle class: contraception as a means of social control, to eliminate the 'unfit' (see Kennedy, *op.cit.*, pp. 113-122 on Sanger and the eugenic and nativist movements in America in the 1920s). In Britain it was hoped that birth control clinics would have a eugenic effect. By 1928 Norman E. Himes despaired that the clinics had "been unable to reach the feeble-minded, the insane and epeleptic, the chronic paupers, and persistent leaners upon the state," but observed that they had, however, succeeded in causing family limitation among the "dull normals": see 'British Birth Control Clinics: Some Results and Eugenic Aspects of their Work,' *Eugenics Review* 20 (1928), p. 157.

[34] Roberts, *op.cit.*, pp. 113-14.

The notion of pregnancy as the woman's active service was a commonplace of wartime rhetoric: in a 1915 German pamphlet the prominent Social Democrat Alfred Grotjahn suggested that reproduction was the "only female contribution to war and military power which equals...men's wartime national service."[35] German women were pushed to bear more children as a "moral and patriotic duty," as stated in the preamble to a proposed bill to limit the legal grounds on which women could obtain an abortion.[36] A French wartime postcard depicted a smiling, pregnant woman wearing a helmet in her own form of mobilisation (figure 5).[37] In 1905 Theodore Roosevelt had insisted that those who rejected the "blessing of children" merited the same contempt as "the soldier who runs away in battle."[38]

Fig. 5: Pregnancy as women's national service:
'Come on ladies. Work for France.'

[35] Usborne, 'Pregnancy is the woman's active service,' p. 389.
[36] Ibid., p. 393.
[37] Huss, 'Pronatalism and the popular ideology of the child,' pp. 343-45.

The price of woman is the child

During and after the Great War natalist rhetoric linked soldiery and motherhood as differently gendered versions of duty, of *impôt du sang*, or blood tribute, to the state.[39] Even H. L. Mencken drew the comparison: "The woman who has not had a child remains incomplete, ill at ease and more than a little ridiculous. She is in the position of a man who has never stood in battle; she has missed the most colossal experience of her sex."[40] The bearing of children was a woman's civic duty and, in this context, a kind of reparation for male sacrifice during the war. To 'give one's life' and 'to give life' were powerfully connected. Roberts has noted how arguments for natality were "framed within the ordeal of war": there was emotive cultural force to arguments that "it will be in vain that our sons will have been killed."[41] Women stand for passive immutability and stability in the national project, rather than progress, and provide a background against which men – in war, for example – determine the fate of the nation.[42]

Roberts has detailed the resentment of veterans at women's apparent rejection of the values for which the war was said to have been fought: honour, duty, devotion, and self-abnegation. The perceived frivolity of the homefront – especially large cities – was contrasted to the horrors of the front. In 1917 the dramatist Abel Hermant wrote, "For us and History, this is the year of the war; for them, the year of short skirts."[43] Female rejection of 'her side of the bargain' was intolerable in this climate.

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[38] Quoted in Bell and Offen, pp. 138-9.

[39] Roberts, *op.cit.*, pp. 90 and 143.

[40] H. L. Mencken, *In Defence of Women*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1923, p. 85.

[41] Roberts, *op.cit.*, pp. 117 and 110. It has been argued that a nation's perception of its population becomes particularly crucial after a war, and scholars of 'nation' have recognised the tendency to perceive women's bodies as markers of the health of the nation, especially in so far as women's bodies represent the 'purity' of the nation, and therefore need to be protected and/or controlled. See Rachel G. Fuchs, 'Introduction,' *French Historical Studies* 19: 3 (1996): forum on 'Population and the State in the Third Republic,' p. 633, and Mayer, *op.cit.*, pp. 1-22. The war, with its attendant anxieties about emasculation, brought a need for assurance of national virility, and for the soothing and procreative qualities associated with women. Politicians and pro-natal groups stressed the responsibility of women to the health of the nation, *la mère de famille nombreuse* or prolific mother operating as a symbol of rebirth and redemption after the trauma of war, as Roberts has shown in the case of France (*op.cit.*, p. 91 and 129-131). The French natalist propagandist Paul Bureau called for the creation of a society "oriented towards life" in the wake of so much death: *ibid.*, p. 127.

[42] Mayer, *op.cit.*, p. 10; George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe*, New York: Howard Fertig, 1985, p. 18.

[43] Roberts, *op.cit.*, p. 74.

In France Léon Jénouvrier accused those wanting to 'live their own life' of selfishness, pointing out that the soldiers of France had not tried to 'live their own life' but had *given* their lives.[44] In the postwar period, the task of the woman was to relinquish her individual life – her self-subsistence – in order to create life. In 1918, two Frenchmen who described themselves as feminists asserted that "the child is woman's only *raison d'être*."[45]

In post-war rebuilding, women were to bind the wounds of nations with their mothering, nurturing qualities. In 1918 the wife of Friedrich Naumann listed the priorities women should embrace in the New Germany: 1) to avoid depopulation; 2) to maintain national unity; 3) to make the people's state a pleasant place for all; 4) to improve public school education; 5) to maintain Germanic traditions and high health standards; and 5) to feel oneself to be a German citizen.[46] The last proscription seemed, by implication, to be contingent on the other duties. During the war propaganda against the woman worker in France had similarly suggested this balancing of rights and duties for the woman:

> "The rights of women increase. But what is their great duty: to give birth, to give birth again, always to give birth...should a woman refuse to give birth she no longer deserves her rights...the price of woman is the child. Childless by choice, she falls to the rank of the prostitute, the whore whose organs are only instruments, obscene playthings, instead of remaining the venerable matrix of all the future centuries."[47]

It was from within the birth control movement and the women's movement that questions had arisen regarding the motives of the state in its desire for more births.[48] The war effort was constantly conflated with the effort to repopulate France (figure 6).

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[44] *Ibid.*, p. 120.
[45] Huss, 'Pronatalism and the popular ideology of the child,' p. 330.
[46] Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz, 'Beyond *Kinder, Küche, Kirche*: Weimar Women in Politics and Work' in Bridenthal *et.al.*, p. 42.
[47] Quoted in James F. McMillan, *Housewife or Harlot: the Place of Women in French Society 1870-1940*, New York: St Martins Press, 1981, pp. 191-2.
[48] States appealed to the need for manpower in the event of a future war, to justify the treatment of individual sexual behaviour as a legitimate object of social control. However, if a high population was the best chance of success in the next war, then the best guarantee of peace would be the adoption of

Fig. 6: Pronatalism in wartime France:
'Don't lets stay bachelors all our lives. Let's do our bit for repopulation'

birth control, as the neo-Malthusian Reverend Gordon Lang argued: see 'The Moral and Religious Aspects of Birth Control' in *Report of the Fifth International Neo-Malthusian and Birth Control Conference,* p. 183. Pacifism was, of course, a radical position in this militaristic climate. Cicely Hamilton and others posed questions as to the underlying motives of natalist rhetoric when they argued that under conditions of modern, technological warfare, a large population was no guarantee of victory and could be more of an impediment than a strength: Cicely Hamilton, 'The Cannon Fodder Argument' in *Report of the Fifth International Neo-Malthusian and Birth Control Conference,* pp. 184-6. Helene Stöcker, calling herself a 'radical pacifist', felt compelled to proclaim in 1922 that the state, for whom so many had died to defend, was "no God or idol": Amy Hackett, 'Helene Stöcker: Left-Wing Intellectual and Sex Reformer' in Bridenthal *et.al.,* p. 124. This kind of scepticism about 'national needs' was also implicit in the arguments of socialists and others that the state, if it wanted children, should pay for them. In opposing the passage of the 1920 natalist measures in the *Chambre des députés* in France, the socialist delegate André Berthon said that "in order to have numerous children, one must first be able to feed them. Society must give assistance to single mothers, organise domestic assistance, and provide leaves of absence during pregnancy and after birth": Roberts, *op.cit.,* p. 93. Stella Browne spoke for poor women: "If you have done this to our children, and if you can only offer them slavery and starvation, you shall have no more": Stella Browne, 'The Feminine Aspect of Birth Control' in *Report of the Fifth International Neo-Malthusian and Birth Control Conference,* p. 42.

Georges Clemenceau argued that even if all the armaments in Germany were taken away, the French would be lost militarily if they renounced the large family because "there won't be any more French people."[49] State warnings that a low birthrate was suicide in military terms, and the constant aligning of depopulation with the threat of national peril, had not gone unnoticed in popular consciousness in France. A picture postcard imagined '*poilu*-growing' after the war, humorously depicted the rearing of 'cannon fodder' like crops of cabbages (figure 7).[50] In 1916 Helen Stöcker, president of Germany's League for the Protection of Motherhood, denounced the state's insistence that women "bear live munition."[51]
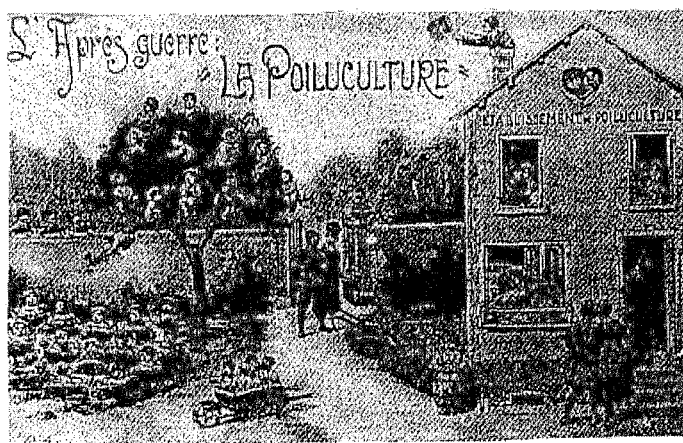
Fig. 7: 'After the war: *poilu*-growing'

France suffered the highest proportional casualty rate in the war, with 16.5 percent of those mobilised killed, compared to 14.7 percent in Germany.[52] In 1919 the prominent French natalist Gaston Rageot contended that French women should "make it a point of honour to conquer German women in peacetime, just as their husbands and brothers conquered German men during the war. Now it is their turn!"[53] Certain women, however, had seen what came of a masculine obsession with 'honour,' and were unwilling to devote their bodies and freedoms to the men who had led their countries to war.

The moral problem of the excessive individualism of postwar society was constantly lamented by natalists. A pervasive "love of well-being, an unwillingness

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[49] Roberts, *op.cit.*, p. 90.
[50] Huss, 'Pronatalism and the popular ideology of the child,' p. 345. '*Poilu*' was the standard term for the French soldier during World War I: it means hairy, ie. virile: Huss, n. p. 359. Other cards depicted babies in uniforms, or school-age children with weapons, in response to the discussion of the 'depleted cohorts' that men born between 1915-18, (when births fell to a new low) would form when they turned 20: *ibid.*, pp. 345-353.
[51] Usborne, 'Pregnancy is the woman's active service', p. 399.
[52] Roberts, *op.cit.*, p. 95.

to sacrifice any of one's comforts and amusements, a growing need for luxury, vanity, a fear of complicating one's life," was a failing increasingly associated with bourgeois modern women.[54] A new awareness of the decline in fertility saw a surge in anti-individualist attitudes to women, just as certain young women displayed a terror of how childbearing might rob them of their individual identities and turn them into sentimental, unseemly blobs who "think in terms of milk, oatmeal, nurse, [and] diapers."[55] One French woman wrote, "Now we just want to live our own lives...without worrying about the fate of future generations."[56] However, in this pervasively natalist post-war climate women were encouraged to view their lives within the narrow confines of what the nation needed of them: their reproductive capacity.

The conditions of the period led to a denigration of women as mere baby-making machines. Hausen noted that German women were addressed as individuals even less frequently than formerly.[57] Medical discourse, which decisively influenced government policy in all countries where depopulation was discussed, stressed the maternal function as the natural fulfillment of womanhood, and warned of the tragic consequences of its perversion.[58] In natalist ideology, a woman's body had no integrity of its own apart from its maternal capacity – as the "repositories of future generations" as Zola's Dr. Boutan in *Fécondité* (1899) had put it – a capacity which in this period was defined as a *social* function.[59]

While 'individualism' was highly prized in the United States as the central feature of a free life of liberty, apparently this applied to men only. Theodore Roosevelt had denounced the submission of some women to "*coldness, to selfishness,*

[53] *Ibid.*, p. 90.
[54] Paul Bureau, the natalist propagandist, quoted in Roberts, *op.cit.*, p. 125.
[55] F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Beautiful and Damned*, London: Penguin, 1988 (1922), p. 124.
[56] Quoted in Roberts, *op.cit.*, p. 139.
[57] Karin Hausen, 'Mothers Day in the Weimar Republic' in Bridenthal, *et.al.*, p. 148.
[58] A standard Medical text even in 1925 warned of the dangers of the 'maternal instinct driven inwards,' linking the bearing of children to female bodily and mental health: see Barbara Brookes, 'The illegal operation: abortion, 1919-39' in London Feminist History Group, *The Sexual Dynamics of History: Men's Power, Women's Resistance*, London: Pluto Press, 1983, p. 169. Doctors warned that fertility control in the earlier years of marriage could lead to later inability to conceive, and suggested that *coitus interruptus* caused neurasthenia in women: see Arthur E. Giles, 'Birth Control' in James Marchant (ed.), Medical *Views on Birth Control*, London: Martin Hopkinson, 1926, pp. 85-7, and Octavius Charles Beale, *Racial Decay: A Compilation of Evidence from World Sources*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1910, pp. 206-217. Cornelie Usborne has noted that even 'progressive' Weimar policy – noted for its promise of sexual equality – tended to assume the primacy of women's maternal role over all others: *The Politics of the Body*, p. 53.
[59] Roberts, p. 121; Zola quoted in Cole, *op.cit.*, p. 641.

to love of ease, to shrinking from risk..." in his strictures on 'race suicide.'[60] An English doctor warned that the effect of a "deliberate refusal to accept the responsibilities of parenthood" would be that qualities of patience, gentleness and care of others would "be shrivelled up through disuse."[61] This selfishness, this slavishness to the "brazen cult of self" was blamed for the divorce rate, the surge in abortions, and other social evils.[62] Mother's Day was instituted in France in 1920 and Germany in 1923 as a celebration of female self-abnegation.[63] Men determined the social construction of motherhood by these means, just as they controlled maternity and population policy. After 1925 the German Mother's Day holiday was presented as a day of instruction which would "raise the consciousness of all women to their maternal responsibilities and duties."[64]

Discourse on population rarely concerned itself with the individual: fertility decline in this militaristic climate was conceived as an issue of national health and defence, rather than as a private matter concerning the needs and decisions of individual women and couples. Nelly Roussel marvelled of French legislators that "this gang of grotesque actors posing as moralists have found a way of composing their long harangues *without speaking of women and of mothers!*...These gentlemen may want children, but they don't seem to know how they are made!"[65] There had been no woman present at the first extraparliamentary commission on the question in France in 1902, which ultimately led to the repressive legislation of 1920.[66]

The effects of the war, and the perception of demographic crisis, gave states an opportunity to intervene in personal decisions regarding family and sexuality. In Germany in 1916 the Prussian Minister of Justice had urged state prosecutors to 'punish with severity' women who underwent abortions and to 'suppress their natural sympathy' in such cases. Three repressive 1918 bills, prevented from becoming law only by the interruption of revolution in Germany, completely subordinated the rights of individual women to the requirements of the state. One of the bills, which limited

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[60] Quoted in Kennedy, *op.cit.*, p. 47.
[61] Giles, *op.cit.*, p. 85.
[62] Kennedy, *op.cit.*, p. 48.
[63] Roberts, *op.cit.*, p. 129.
[64] Usborne, *The Politics of the Body*, p. 63.
[65] Roberts, *op.cit.*, p. 119.
[66] Jean Elisabeth Pedersen, 'Regulating Abortion and Birth Control: Gender, Medicine, and Republican Politics in France, 1970-1920,' *French Historical Studies* 19: 3 (1996), p. 684.

the legal grounds on which doctors could perform abortions, would have allowed for the compulsory notification of the names and addresses of women who underwent abortions had it become law, because "the general welfare of the state has to have precedence over women's feelings," as the preamble to the bill stated.[67] Paragraph 218 of the German Criminal Code, which punished abortion with a jail sentence even after it was amended in 1926, and Paragraph 184, section 3, which prohibited the advertising, publicising, or display of contraceptives as "objects intended for indecent use," decreed what opponents termed *Gebärzwang*, the tyranny of involuntary childbirth.[68] The bill introduced in the French *Chambre des députés* on 23 July 1920 and passed just six days later 521 to 55, imposing strict penalties for the dissemination of any propaganda that encouraged abortion or contraception, was the most oppressive of its kind in Europe.[69] The United States continued to look to the Comstock Law in the 1920s to silence those who would advise young women and couples about how to control their own fertility.[70]

These controls were not, however, purely demographic. By exempting condoms – one of the most wide-spread forms of contraception – from consideration, French and German legislators betrayed a deeper concern to preserve the double standard of morality, which sanctioned male promiscuity while maintaining the conditions that shackled women to their domestic, biologically-determined place in society. All 'female' forms of birth control were banned, but pro-natalist legislation did not address the most widely spread form of birth control, the practice of *coitus interruptus*. Adolphe Pinard, a French deputy and expert on natality, told the Chamber in 1920 that if the proposed law would bring the certitude of raising the French birthrate, he would "vote for it with both hands," but "what you bring is only the shadow of a repression. In fact, what you bring is nothing."[71]

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[67] Usborne, 'Pregnancy is the woman's active service,' pp. 392-3. The three bills were passed by the Upper House, the Bundesrat, and two of them – the first decreeing three years in prison for anyone knowingly transmitting venereal disease (ie. registered prostitutes, as men could not be forcibly examined), and the second banning all manufacturing, importing, sales and advertising of contraceptives, bar condoms – by the Reichstag Committee on Population Questions. Also see Usborne, *The Politics of the Body*, pp. 21-3.
[68] Grossmann, 'Abortion and Economic Crisis', p. 68.
[69] Roberts, *op.cit.*, p. 94.
[70] The group of statutes known as the Comstock Law, passed in 1873, forebade the mailing, transportation, and importation of contraceptive information in America. See Kennedy, *op.cit.*, pp. 23-4 and ch. 8, 'Birth Control and the Law,' pp. 219-71.
[71] Roberts, *op.cit.*, p. 95-6; Usborne, 'Pregnancy is the woman's active service,' p. 407.

Pinard's was one of a number of voices protesting the failure of states to prioritise more positive – rather than coercive – measures to raise natality.[72] As Roberts and Usborne have implied, the 'fertility crisis' and its natalist rhetoric are inextricable from a masculine ideology that perceived a threat to established gender roles, in the startling new attitudes of women to their own fertility.[73] The perception of a demographic crisis justified the control of the female reproductive body by the state, which did "not have the right to remain neutral" in the battle for supremacy between female egotism and female altruism.[74]

Pedersen notes that Foucault's treatment of bio-power, characterised by "an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies [of the entire 'species body'] and the control of populations," here applies only to women, through whose bodies state control was exercised.[75] Men retained their reproductive autonomy.[76] Moves to check depopulation were moves to bring women's sexuality under state control, to prevent the control of fertility from falling into the hands of individual women.

The birth control movement was associated with socialism and specifically with Soviet Russia, where a law had been passed in 1920 which legalised state-funded abortions.[77] However, the fears of authority regarding control of fertility by

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[72]Proposals to stimulate the birth rate through maternal inducements and improvements in welfare – more wide-ranging social measures – were, in general, given second place to legal sanctions against birth control which were cheaper and seemed to promise quick remedy of the population problem. Pedersen contrasted the attitudes of two French groups in the depopulation debate: the 'patriarchal patriots' who stood by using fiscal incentive programs for fathers of legitimate children, and the 'solidarists', who advocated social assistance programs for mothers, especially single mothers: Pedersen, *op.cit.*, pp. 678-87.

[73] Roberts, *op.cit.*, p. 96 and *passim*; Usborne, 'Pregnancy is the woman's active service,' pp. 407-8.

[74] Quoted from the French decree to establish medals for mothers (1920): Bell and Offen, *op.cit.*, p. 308.

[75] Women underwent enforced pregnancies or illegal, dangerous abortions because of inadequate access to contraception, and many hundreds of women went to prison each year for undergoing terminations. See Usborne, *The Politics of the Body*, p. 30, and Brookes ,*op.cit.*, pp. 165-176.

[76] Foucault, *op.cit.*, p. 139 on the 'species body'; Pedersen, *op.cit.*, p. 697. Legislative control over women's bodies was not premised solely on national population needs: the control of venereal disease was also justification for state interference in the sexual lives of individual women: see chapter 2 below.

[77]*Report of the Fifth International Neo-Malthusian and Birth Control Conference*, p. 42. In fact, socialists were divided on the issue of birth control or were deeply ambiguous in their attitudes to the Neo-Malthusian movement. In 1913 the German SPD had publicly rejected birth control. Socialist leaders on the whole were opponents of birth control and tended to the view that the 'population question' diverted attention from the class struggle. See William Petersen, 'Marxism and the Population Question: Theory and Practice' and Jay M. Winter, 'Socialism, Social Democracy, and the Population Questions in Western Europe: 1870-1950', both in Michael S. Teitelbaum and Jay M.

individuals were, as Stella Browne pointed out, at base fears about its "widening of the scope of human freedom and choice, its *self-determining* significance for women." Women's control of their own fertility might have profound effects upon the foundation of the domestic ideology, the subordination of women on the basis of their biological function. Browne insisted: "...make no mistake about this. Birth Control, the diffusion of the knowledge and possibility of Birth Control, means freedom for women, social and sexual freedom, and that is why it is so intensely feared and disliked in many influential quarters to-day."[78]

The strong opposition aroused by the flapper was tied up with awareness of increasing sexual and procreative choices for women, which states – try as they might – could not contain. The separation of sex from procreation interfered with the traditional notion of women as passive and submissive, by implying that women could enjoy intercourse without fear of the biological consequences: a possibility which, in legislative terms, was 'obscene'.[79] Birth control would end the slavery of women in childbirth revealed in letters to Margaret Sanger in *Motherhood in Bondage* (1928). This threatened the double standard that separated the wife from the whore.[80] Female access to *les funestes secrets* ("deadly secrets") was dangerous when

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Winter (eds.), *Population and Resources in Western Intellectual Traditions*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. 77-101and 122 -146.

[78]Browne, *op.cit.*, p. 40: Browne went on to explain that birth control was perceived as a threat because it would destabilise the established form of patriarchal marriage: "when marriage no longer means the subjection of unlimited motherhood and economic dependence of mothers, the main social reasons for its retention as a stereotyped formula will be at an end": pp. 40-1.

[79] James Woycke, *Birth Control in Germany 1871-1933*, London: Routledge, 1988, p. 50. Legislation of the period designed to remove the capacity to control fertility in marriage, including the US Comstock Law, referred to 'objects intended for obscene use' or similar.

[80]One German opponent of "this decrepid Malthusian egoism" said that "All Christian husbands should know that these practices lead not to stronger marital bonds but to the morality of the brothel." The moral impact of birth control would be to make wives "the slaves of lust," declared another (*ibid.*, pp. 52 and 134). Birth control was referred to as "conjugal fraud" or "Malthusian fraud": see Octavius Charles Beale, *Racial Decay: A Compilation of Evidence from World Sources*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1910, p. 274 and *passim*. The boundary between the 'sterile' eroticised prostitute as 'other' to the fertile mother/wife was of course merely a construction. As Marsha Meskimmon points out, many women were both prostitutes and mothers. Gerta Oberbeck's painting *Prostitute* (1923) challenged this boundary by representing the prostitute as an ordinary woman purchasing a douche. The fertility of the prostitute was not addressed in the work of male artists, who tended to depict the mother in contrast to the prostitute, in line with the 'wives for procreation, prostitutes for pleasure' paradigm (see Marsha Meskimmon, *We Weren't Modern Enough: Women Artists and the Limits of German Modernism*, London: I. B. Tauris, 1999, pp. 29-32). Nineteenth-century 'scientific' literature had revived the notion of the sexual woman as dangerous, and as a specific enemy of capitalism, in line with nineteenth-century ideas about the dangers of masculine sexual spending. Foucault described this tendency: the notion that the 'blood' – the strength, the wealth – of the bourgeois, was its 'sex' or semen, and that it had to be guarded and used only for procreative purposes. See B. Dijkstra, *Evil Sisters: The Threat of Female Sexuality and the Cult of Manhood*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996, pp. 54-63, and Nye, *op.cit.*, pp. 60-2.

accompanied by a new insistence on their right to sexual pleasure.[81] One man exclaimed against Marie Stopes, "What have you done? You have let women know about things which only prostitutes ought to know; once you give women a taste for these things, they become vampires."[82]

The perceived threat of a collapse of boundaries between wives and whores made fertility control a moral issue. Birth control created the 'new woman': it allowed the flapper to choose a life not defined by fertility and family life. The raising of the birth rate was "above all a moral question" as the French decree establishing medals for mothers asserted:[83] the 'moral question' being the question of how to convince young women to place the needs of others – the nation, the man, the child – before her own.

Despite the opposing voices emanating from such quarters as the birth control movement, the effect of the war had been to strengthen the basis for the observation that women's relations are not based on individual feeling but on universals, generalities: that the 'mother' is a universal, and to become one is to renounce individualism and its hallmarks: rights, autonomy, selfhood.[84] Nelly Roussel had suggested this in 1904: "Rights? What would you do with them, oh woman? Have you any need of rights? Accomplish without a murmur the sole task that suits you; the task that is your sole reason for existing. Make citizens and soldiers for us; give birth, give birth without pause; destroy your grace and wear away your health by continual gestation…Expect no recompense. You are made to give and not to receive…" She went on to warn that, "The day will come…when we will become mothers *only when we please*…"[85] She was right. However, the woman of the 1920s who chose a life outside motherhood, eschewing her social duty, faced formidable

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[81] Michelle Perrot, 'The New Eve and the Old Adam: Changes in French Women's Condition at the Turn of the Century' in M. R. Higonnet, J. Jenson, S. Michel and M. Collins Weitz (eds.), *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987, p. 54.

[82] Quoted in Dijkstra, *op.cit.*, p. 4.

[83] Bell and Offen, *op.cit.*, p. 308. John R. Gillis detected an interesting epistemological shift occurring in the nineteenth century, which saw mothering, a shared task, become *motherhood*: an identity which came to define adult femininity, at the same time that fertility among the upper and middle classes began to decline. See 'Gender and Fertility Decline among the British Middle Classes' in Gillis *et.al*, pp. 31-47. The nineteenth century had seen great emotional emphasis placed on the family and the child as its centre. Children took on greater emotional value as their economic usefulness decreased, and childhood itself was given more prominence as an important stage of life as parental concerns turned from the need to be prolific, to the quality of the upbringing of few children. See Philippe Aries, *Centuries of Childhood*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979.

[84] See, for example, Simone de Beauvoir's analysis of Hegel's view of this: *The Second Sex*, translated by H. M. Parshley, New York: Vintage Books, 1989, p. 435.

[85] Quoted in Bell and Offen, *op.cit.*, pp. 135-6.

opposition. The effect of the war and its pressures, combined with public awareness of the decline in fertility, had been to strengthen a pronatalist ideology that attempted to efface female individuals in order to create mothers.

Chapter 2

The 'larger life': the woman in the city.

"Women to-day are not something apart from the national life, a sort of annex to the race, kept entirely for domestic service and reproduction; they are becoming *people*, *half the nation*, and growing to be considered and respected as such." (Lydia Commander Kingsmill, 1907)[1]

In a 1892 work Jules Simon, the French republican politician, had addressed the issue of citizenship: "What is a man's vocation? It is to be a good citizen. And woman's? To be a good wife and a good mother. One is in some way called to the outside world: the other is retained for the interior."[2] The city was not a place for women. Political activity has been understood to be located in the public sphere, which encompasses the 'masculine' categories of citizen, national, rational actor, knowing subject, heterosexual and Western.[3] One of Natalie Barney's most famous witticisms was that nothing in London was made for women, not even the men.[4] The question of how women can be modern subjects, when they are associated with the private sphere and not the public, continues to preoccupy gender studies.[5] Doctrines of individualism, of citizenship, did not necessarily apply to women, whose habitation of public space was questionable, and whose position in the city was precarious, even leaving aside the question of a maternal obligation that was to override individual aspirations.

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[1] Commander, *op.cit.*, p. 146, my emphasis.

[2] Quoted in McMillan, *op.cit.*, p. 12.

[3] See for example Breda Gray, 'Review: Women, States and Nationalism. At home in the Nation?', *Gender, Place and Culture* 8:4 (2001), pp. 411-13.

[4] Quoted in Jane Marcus, 'A Wilderness of One's Own: Feminist Fantasy Novels of the Twenties: Rebecca West and Sylvia Townsend Warner' in Susan Merrill Squier (ed.), *Women Writers and the City: Essays in Feminist Literary Criticism*, Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1984, p. 139. Natalie Barney, the famous *salonnière* in the Parisian expatriate community of the 1920s and 30s, was one of many creative women weaving a 'larger life' in the Paris urban scene. See Shari Benstock, 'Paris Lesbianism and the Politics of Reaction, 1900-1940' in Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus and George Chauncey, Jr., *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, Meridian: New York, 1989, pp. 332-346.

[5] See, for example, Suzanne Mackenzie, 'Women in the City' in Richard Peet and Nigel Thrift (eds.), *New Models in Geography: the political-economy perspective*, London: Unwin Hyman, 1989, pp. 109-126, and Jo Little, Linda Peake and Pat Richardson (eds.), *Women in Cities: Gender and the Urban Environment*, London: Macmillan, 1988.

The new city of the twentieth century was an ever-expanding site of potentiality that offered opportunities – spaces – for its inhabitants to live a multiplicity of lives. Urbanisation was linked to a vast dissolution of the moral authority associated with the family and the small community. Those cities that had grown to the status of 'world-city' – like the great metropolises Paris, Berlin, London and New York – were playgrounds of pleasure for the 'international' rich but also for the groups of the 'underground': lesbian and gay subcultures, artistic communities like Montparnasse in Paris, and the demi-monde.

Sociologists and other commentators on cities attributed many social problems to the 'individualisation' of behaviour. William I. Thomas noted in 1923 that while in small communitites people became "more or less habituated to and reconciled with a life of repressed wishes," the fortunes of the individual being bound up with those of the family and community, the conditions of city life fostered in individuals a "personal schematization of life, - making one's own definitions of the situation and determining one's own behavior norms."[6] As McGovern noted, the traditional "straight and narrow" could not serve the choices and opportunities of city life.[7]

The doctrine of separate spheres, while manifest in culture from ancient times, was propagated and diffused on a huge scale in the nineteenth century, Hobsbawm's 'era of the triumphant bourgeoisie.'[8] The spatial separation of the sexes it dictated served to uphold a sexual double standard that cast women as housewives or whores, 'courtisane ou mènagère', prostitute or *hausfrau. La femme au foyer* – the woman by the hearth – supported a moral world required by the sexual division of labour under industrial capitalism, by which men ruled the world of public affairs, business and commerce. A woman theoretically had no place in the public realm, but was compensated with domestic power within a 'private' sphere that was hers by virtue of her hegemony in the realm of reproduction and child-rearing, a 'natural' role of which her exclusion from the public world was a 'natural' extension.[9]

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[6] William I. Thomas, *The Unadjusted Girl: with cases and standpoint for behavior analysis*, Montclair, New Jersey: Patterson Smith, 1969 (1923), p. 71 and 86.
[7] James R. Mc Govern, 'The American Woman's Pre-World War I Freedom in Manners and Morals,' *The Journal of American History* 55 (1968-69), p. 319.
[8] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital 1848-1875*, London: Abacus, 1975, p. 15.
[9] See McMillan *op.cit.* on the cult of domesticity in France, esp. chapter 1. The bourgeois 'double standard' of morality prescribed fidelity for wives and chastity for daughters but allowed men to have pre-and extra-marital sexual relations with women not of their class. Friedrich Engels reflected: "What for the woman is a crime entailing grave legal and social consequences is considered honourable in a man or, at the worst, a slight moral blemish which he cheerfully bears." On the subject of separate

Indeed, if demographers, politicians and scientists continued to espouse a world view grounded in Kathleen Biddick's definition of *Dérèlection*: an "inability to write about the feminine as other than an imagined unity of the maternal function and the mother-daughter relation," so city planners in the age of the Metropolis continued to allocate space according to biological function, perpetuating the continuance of the 'Two Spheres' by creating suburban spaces for women where they were disconnected from the workplace and the rest of the city, and restricting their mobility by failing to provide adequate transport.[10] As Elizabeth Wilson notes, the city after the industrial revolution continued to be conceived within ancient binary contrasts: male/ female, culture/ nature, city/ country.[11] The urban woman she describes is a 'sphinx in the city,' a symptom of disorder in a society where men rule the outside, and women the inside. Aaron Betsky conceives this as a matter of womb versus penis: a construction that links space and biological function. Men project, women protect. Men construct 'inhuman' spaces and women make them liveable, rebuilding the protection of the womb in interior spaces.[12]

Patrick Geddes, a Scot prominent in the modern town planning movement that sprang up in the 1890s, also called himself a sociologist. He dedicated his career to stressing the biological imperative for retaining the concept of the Two Spheres. In evolutionary terms biological role determined social role, and therefore the social role

spheres, Engels noted that even with the opening of employment in industry to women, the wife's domestic duties in the "private service of her family" precluded her taking part in "public production": such that the "modern individual family is founded on the open or concealed domestic slavery of the wife, and modern society is a mass composed of these individual families as its molecules" (*The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, New York: International Publishers, 1972 (1884), pp. 138 and 137). According to Nye, the public and private spheres of the bourgois social structure were so sharply delineated that "only two wholly different beings could occupy them," necessitating the construction of a biomedical model of male and female by medical scientists and thinkers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau in France, that made the sexes 'naturally' suited to their respective roles and duties. The ideological construct of 'separate spheres' required a lot of defending on the shaky ground of 'nature': Nye, *op.cit.,* ch. 4.

[10] Kathleen Biddick, 'Genders, Bodies, Borders: Technologies of the Visible,' *Speculum* 68 (1993), p. 416; Helen Meller, 'Planning theory and women's role in the city', *Urban History Yearbook* 17 (1990), pp. 85-6.

[11] Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City*, p. 8.

[12] Aaron Betsky, *Building Sex: Men, Women, Architecture and the Construction of Sexuality*, New York: William Morrow and Company, 1995, pp. xii-xv. Architects and theorists including Betsky were influenced by Foucault's notion of 'heterotopia' or 'other spaces.' Spaces designated for the 'other' in society included the prison, the brothel, the asylum and the colony. Betsky and others extended the definition to apply to women and to include the street and other urban spaces. See Mary McLeod, '"Other" Spaces and "Others"' in Diana Agrest, Patricia Conway and Leslie Kanes Weisman, *The Sex of Architecture*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996, pp. 15-28.

of women was to nurture, in the interior, protective space of the home.[13] But while the twentieth century city and its planners reinforced the gendering of space, women were on the move. By 1907 Commander could say that "all classes of American women are less in their homes...and in every way have larger, freer lives than formerly."[14] Middle-class women were observed to claim an enlarged sphere of action even before the war.[15] The increased presence of middle-class women in public places – places of men, of power – for commerce, and for pleasure, attested to a rebellion against their traditional exclusion from urban space. When the young Alabama in Zelda Fitzgerald's *Save Me the Waltz* tells her mother she wants to go to New York, she asks, "What on earth for?" – to which the teen replies, "To be my own boss."[16] The woman in the city, though a 'sphinx,' was offered the possibility of living a life outside the patriarchal definition of woman-as-mother, a definition upheld by a structure that rested on the separation of the private domestic space and the public civic space, the gendered "twin anchors of the middle-class state."[17]

Urban growth had been rapid from 1800: by 1910 the percentage of Europeans who could be considered townsfolk had tripled, and in America the percentage had increased sevenfold.[18] Great Britain had led the process of urbanisation, with a shift from rural areas that saw over half the population classifiable as urban by 1851. The United States census of 1920 showed for the first time that most Americans lived in cities and towns. With 5, 620, 000 inhabitants, New York was a 'world city'.[19] A cultural 'urban tilt' became increasingly obvious in the West.

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[13] Meller, *op.cit.*, pp. 87-8. Feminist planners and architects have criticised the fact that the built environment of the city reinforces stereotypes of men's work as 'productive' and women's work as 'reproductive,' delineating their respective 'proper' places and their relative significance. See Matrix, *Making Space: Women and the Man-Made Environment*, London: Pluto Press, 1985, and Delores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighbourhoods and Cities*, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1981.

[14] Commander, *op.cit.*, p. 166.

[15] McGovern, *op.cit., passim*.

[16] Zelda Fitzgerald, *Save Me the Waltz*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1968, p. 16.

[17] Betsky, *op.cit.*, p. 149.

[18] Andrew Lees, *Cities Perceived: Urban Society in European and American Thought, 1820-1940*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985, p. 1. In the period 1800-1910 London's population rose from 1.1 million to 7.3 million; Paris' from 547, 000 to 2.9 million; Berlin's from 172, 000 to over 2 million, and New York's from 60,000 to 4.8 million.

[19] Teitelbaum, *The British Fertility Decline*, p. 3.

The growth of public awareness of the decline in fertility coincided in the twenties with interest in the city and urban life as a phenomenon.[20] During the decade before the Great War there had been an awakening of interest in town planning and the possibility of urban improvement.[21] Urban life was a chief concern of the pioneering 'Chicago School' of sociologists, including Louis Wirth, who characterised urban relationships as "impersonal, superficial, transitory, and segmental." Cities were understood to breed loneliness and individualism.[22]

A general anti-urbanism was an important cultural influence in the 1920s. Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, better known as Le Corbusier, spoke of the "sickness of great cities" and "the cancer of Paris" throughout the twenties, while upholders of rural virtue in the great confrontation between urban and rural values in America castigated the city for breeding religious scepticism and intellectual arrogance.[23] In 1928 Karl von Mangoldt wrote that the development of big cities threatened "the roots of our whole existence."[24]

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[20] There had been a surge in inquiry into urban living from the 1880s, beginning in Britain where urbanisation was the most marked. This interest continued well into the inter-war years, with the leading role of British thought on the subject giving way to the massive outpourings of virulent anti-urbanism from German commentators and urban sociologists in America: Lees, *op.cit.*, pp. 11-12.

[21] Philip Mairet, *Pioneer of Sociology: The Life and Letters of Patrick Geddes*, London: Lund Humphries, 1957, p. 139. Also see Lyle W. Dorsett (ed.), *The Challenge of the City 1860-1910*, Lexington, Massachusetts: D. C. Heath and Company, 1968.

[22] Louis Wirth, 'Urbanism as a Way of Life' (1938) in Richard Sennett (ed.), *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities*, New York: Meredith Corporation, 1969, p. 153. Wirth drew together strands of thought on the city associated with figures like Émile Durkheim, George Simmel and Max Weber in this essay, as well as the more recent contributions of urban sociologists like Robert Park, who was credited with founding the Chicago School. See Brian J. L. Berry, *The Human Consequences of Urbanisation*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973, pp. 9-15, on sociological urban theory. The Chicago school viewed city life as being disastrous for the family due to the movement towards individualisation which was concentrated there. See Ernest R. Mowrer, *Family Disorganisation*, New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1972 (1927), and Charles Richmond Hendersen, 'Are Modern Industry and City Life Unfavourable to the Family?', *The American Journal of Sociology* Vol. 14 (July 1908-May 1909), pp. 668-80, for an earlier example. Whereas biblical and early Christian writers had used the city as a symbol of man's estrangement from God, sociology saw it as representing man's estrangement from his neighbour and communal bonds: see Lees, *op.cit.*, p. 6.

[23] Mowry and Brownell, *op.cit.*, pp. 3-4; Lees, *op,cit.*, p. 268; William E. Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity 1914-1932*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958, pp. 7-8. Lewis Mumford, the influential disciple of Patrick Geddes, was pessimistic about the American city: "Our metropolitan civilisation is not a success...it is still a wilderness" ('The City' in Stearns, *op.cit.*, pp. 19-20).

[24] It did so in four ways: biologically, in terms of the low birth rate of cities; politically through the "negation of the bases of a healthy democracy"; militarily because of the vulnerability of big cities to attack; and morally – because of the obstacles the city put in the way of moral regeneration (quoted in Lees, *op.cit.*, p. 275). Anti-urbanism was especially marked in Germany, and intensified in the 1930s under the influence of National Socialism; urban-rural conflict was a great theme of the 1920s in American culture, as evidenced in the novels of Sinclair Lewis and others. On Alfred E. Smith's loss of the 1928 US federal election, Stanley Walker wrote, "Of all the many counts against Smith, one was that he was a New Yorker. As such, he was taken as the high and menacing symbol of evil and his name held up before the country as the man who represented all that was abhorrent about the great city

Demographers and other commentators were obsessed with the relationship between urbanisation and the declining birth rate. A strong heritage of a "biologically-based anti-urbanism," originally emanating from Britain, held that degenerate city dwellers would die out – perhaps in three generations – without the 'new blood' provided by rural migration.[25] City life was believed to be unhealthy. The popular conviction that urban women were susceptible to sickliness and nervous complaints remained strong well into the inter-war years.[26]

Women needed a rural environment for their 'natural' conservatism and morality to flourish. The city offered only materialistic values and sensual temptations.[27] Jane Addams, the extremely influential social worker and commentator, expressed concern that the city was a poor environment for the young girls flooding there, as "the modern city sees in these girls only two possibilities, both of them commercial": the utilisation of their labour power, and the extraction of their wages from them in "pandering to their love of pleasure."[28] Walter Lippman complained that "those who make no pretensions to much theory are twisted about by

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– from pronunciation to liquor-drinking": *The Night Club Era*, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1999 (1933), p. 65.

[25] Lees, *op.cit.*, pp. 147 and 136-9; J. Milner Fothergill, *The Town Dweller: His Needs and Wants* (1889) in Lynn Hollen Lees and Andrew Lees (eds.), *The Rise of Urban Britain*, New York: Garland Publishing, 1985.

[26] Arthur Bordier, a French doctor, labelled urban sickliness 'malaria urbana' in 1887 and attributed the low birth rate of cities to fatigue from work and 'worldly pleasures,' lack of exercise and 'too much celebral centralisation of organic energies' among other things: Lees, *op.cit.*, p. 141. Previously, James Cantlie had attributed the poor health of Londoners to bad air and poor nutrition, which bred 'city disease': *Degeneration Amongst Londoners* (1885), in Lees and Lees, *The Rise of Urban Britain*, *op.cit., passim*. It was well known that much fewer urban men were fit for military service than their rural counterparts: Lees, *op.cit.*, pp. 139 and 148. The idea that city living destroyed the urban woman's nerves was in great vogue: Fothergill asserted that "the highly strung neurosal woman is, as a rule, a town product" and advised that "these blighted women are very poor material for wife and mother" (*op.cit.*, p. 96). In 1890 J. P. Williams-Freeman had written that urban mothers produced only poor milk, or none at all: quoted in Lees, *op.cit.*, p. 138.

[27] If city women were bad breeders, they were also morally inferior to their rural sisters: the town girl avoided the disciplining influence of domestic service, being "apt to prefer the squalor of unrestrained freedom and the chaff and excitement of the streets and alleys" (Fothergill, *op.cit.*, p. 76). Lees noted that a typical article in the German periodical *Das Land* emphasised the dangers and temptations of city life for women, stressing that urban life destroyed the foundations of the feminine character: *op.cit.*, p. 161. In the United States it was a common notion that urban living could easily overwhelm the virtuous, particularly innocent girls from rural areas and immigrant women, and lure them into prostitution. The 'white slave' trade became a focus of a general indictment of urban life. See Egal Feldman, 'Prostitution, the Alien Woman and the Progressive Imagination, 1910-1915,' *American Quarterly* 19 (1967), pp. 194-206.

[28] Jane Addams, *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets*, New York: Macmillan, 1957 (1909), p. 8.

fashions, 'crazes,' at the mercy of milliners and dressmakers, theatrical producers, advertising campaigns and the pre-meditated gossip of the newspapers."[29]

Authority was nervous about the city.[30] In 1891 Emile Levasseur had written, "In the great agglomerations, passions ferment more…storms of [the revolutionary] kind almost always break out in the capitals."[31] Berlin had seen bloody street fights in the revolution of 1918-19, and there had been popular disturbances in London during the Boer War period, leading to fears being expressed as to the explosive climate of that city. Memories of the Commune inevitably loomed large in the case of Paris, where the capital had been "the setting if not the cause" of the most memorable revolutionary outbreaks in recent European history.[32] There was also an awareness of the threat of the city in American thought: in 1891 Josiah Strong had warned: "When our urban population has been multiplied several fold…THEN will come the real test of our institutions, then will appear whether we are capable of self-government."[33] The Mayor of New York, James J. Walker, felt it was dangerous for the poor working man, on his way to work at dawn, to see groups of well-dressed tipsy people emerging from night clubs: "That way lay Bolshevism."[34]

Neo-Malthusian tendencies, in the intensely pronatalist climate of the 1920s, were viewed as another form of urban subversiveness.[35] In France, where the 1920 law effectively silenced the neo-Malthusian movement, proponents of birth control like Paul Robin and Madeleine Pelletier had been vilified by the nationalist press and regarded with suspicion by the state, being made objects of police surveillance.[36] In 1921 Margaret Sanger was arrested by the New York police as she rose to speak on

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[29] Walter Lippmann, *Drift and Mastery: An Attempt to Diagnose the Current Unrest*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1961 (1914), p. 93.

[30] Lees, *op.cit.*, pp. 166-9.

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 170. In 1889 the conservative journal *Die Grenzboten* had predicted that the increasing predominance of the big city would lead ultimately to the rule of the proletariat, and Wilhelm Borée had declared that "The conflict between city and state is as old as Germany itself: *ibid.*, p. 172.

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 173, 169 and 170; on revolution in the streets of Berlin see Torsten Palmér and Hendrik Neubauer, *The Weimar Republic Through the Lens of the Press*, Cologne: Könemann, 2000, pp. 44-62.

[33] Lees, *op.cit.*, p. 174.

[34] Walker, *op.cit.*, pp. 88-9.

[35] On the history of contraception and the birth control movement see Clive Wood and Beryl Suitters, *The Fight for Acceptance: A History of Contraception*, Aylesbury: Medical and Technical Publishing Company, 1970. In 1910 Hans Rost lashed out against the big cities which "like Kronos, devour their children…[and are the] graves of the human race": quoted in Lees, *op.cit.*, p. 148.

[36] It was feared that they were selling contraceptives to fund revolution. See McMillan, *op.cit.*, p. 36 and Cole, *op.cit.*, p. 662.

'Birth Control: Is It Moral?' at the first American Birth Control Conference.[37] In England, where the birth control movement had attained greater respectability, it did so only by appealing to its devotion to moral causes like early marriage and the prevention of promiscuity, prostitution, abortion and venereal disease.[38]

An urban-based resistance was in evidence in the notion of the 'birth strike,' the famous German proposal having been put by two Social Democratic Party members from Berlin.[39] The urban woman and her supporters, with their developed intellectual faculties and other 'modern' personality traits, were distressingly inclined to question for what the state might require children, and – more importantly – to ask for what reason the modern woman might require children, given the value she placed on her freedom, her mobility, and her individualism.

At the same time that the propaganda of depopulation reached a fever pitch, the young urban woman was thrust to the fore of national consciousness. The 'flapper' was hijacked by the media and seemingly exulted. F. Scott Fitzgerald made his fortune from tapping this interest, in a world apparently obsessed with the wayward urban woman. Dorothy Parker wrote of the flapper,

> All spotlights focus on her pranks

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[37] Dorothy M. Brown, *Setting a Course: American Women in the 1920s*, Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987, pp. 113-14.

[38] *Report of the Fifth International Neo-Malthusian and Birth Control Conference*, 104-8. Also see Angus McLaren, 'The Sexual Politics of Reproduction in Britain' in Gillis, *et.al., op.cit.*, pp. 85-100. Maries Stopes, the woman credited with the popularisation of birth control in England, among other policies to render her message respectable made sharp tactical distinctions between birth control and abortion: see Ruth Hall, *Marie Stopes: A Biography*, London: Andre Deutsch, 1977. The British movement for birth control had been lent unexpected respectability after Lord Dawson, the King's physician, attacked restrictive attitudes towards sexuality at the 1921 Church Congress: "To tell you the truth, I am not too sure that too much prudent self restraint suits love and its purport. Romance and deliberate self control do not, to my mind, rhyme very well together. A touch of madness to begin with does no harm. Heaven knows, life sobers it soon enough. If you don't start life with a head of steam you won't get far." He went on to call for Church support for birth control, in a speech that did much to break down resistance to the movement: see Colin Francome, *Abortion Freedon: A Worldwide Movement*, London: George, Allen, and Unwin, 1984, pp. 55-6.

[39] The two doctors, Alfred Bernstein and Julius Moses, were propagandists for birth control among the working classes as a weapon of revolution. In 1912 they called for a national birth strike, arguing that if women refused to supply the ruling class with cannon fodder and cheap labour, capitalism would collapse. However, the SPD leadership condemned the motion as anti-socialist, as it implied that the working classes were responsible for their own misery. The task fell to Clara Zetkin, Luise Ziete and Rosa Luxemburg to defend the SPD official line: Zetkin famously proclaimed that boycotting the birth of 'soldiers for the state' would also mean 'no soldiers for the revolution.' See Usborne, *The Politics of the Body*, pp. 8-9. In France in 1919 Nelly Roussel encouraged women to a *grève des ventres* or 'womb strike' to protest the conditions of poverty in which women were being pushed to bear children. See Roberts, *op.cit.*, p. 123.

All tongues her prowess herald

For which she well may render thanks

To God and Scott Fitzgerald.[40]

These women were defined by their urban outlook. In contrast to Rousseau's Julie – the 'new Heloise,' who found spiritual fulfilment in the rural setting and motherhood, fleeing the city as the spatial anathema to the virtuous maternal ideal of womanhood – the flapper yearned for the city. A motif of the young girl's arrival in the great city characterised the twenties, following Owen Johnson's novel *The Salamander* (1914), in which the heroine, the prototype-flapper Dore Baxter, has "got to have New York."[41] Zelda Fitzgerald and her friend Sara Haardt both married literary figures as a ticket to New York out of the rural South.[42] Alexandra Kollontai could list a number of 'women of the new type' in literature who sought a new life in the big city, like Karl Hauptmann's Mathilde.[43] Victor Margueritte's *La Garçonne* (1922) depicts a modern woman who renounces her bourgeois family to live an independent life in Paris.[44]

The visibility of women on the streets was construed as a threat to existing hierarchies of male cultural authority. A fascination with the new presence was everywhere apparent, the "intermixing of gender-specific assignment of space"[45] seeming to define the male experience of modernity. The city of modernity was depicted as a woman. This is a commonplace of Western literature generally: the city is to be "conquered, raped and subjugated, or idealized in a quest, captured in a war, wooed like a lover, spurned like a wife."[46] Literary men in the 1920s intensified this

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[40] Dorothy Parker, 'The Flapper' quoted in 'Flapper Culture and Style' at http://www.geocities.com/flapper_culture/.

[41] Quoted inTaylor, *op.cit.*, p. 6.

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 50 (Sara Haardt married H. L. Mencken).

[43] Alexandra Kollontai, 'The New Woman' (1920) in *The Autobiography of a Sexually Emancipated Woman*, translated by Salvador Attanasio, London: Orbach and Chambers, 1972 (1926), p. 55.

[44] See Roberts, *op.cit.*, pp. 46-61.

[45] Katharina Von Ankum, 'Gendered urban spaces in Irmgard Keun's *Das kunstseidene Mädchen*' in Katharina von Ankum (ed.), *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture*, California: University of California Press, 1997 p. 164.

[46] Marcus, *op.cit.*, p 140. Male writers have more traditionally associated the female body with earth and nature. The tendency to project 'woman' onto a desired or feared space is part of a generalised theme of woman as 'other' or 'object' to the male 'self' or 'subject' in the Western canon. This pattern is illustrated in the institution of flanerie, associated with Charles Baudelaire and other observers of the modern city. The *flaneur* wanders the streets, observing, and is himself unobserved. The woman, being the 'natural' object of observation, is excluded from this anonymous spectatorship according to film theory: see Anke Geleber, 'Female Flanerie and the Symphony of the City' in von Ankum, *op.cit.*, pp. 67-88.

tendency, conflating the city with the visibility of women within it, from Carl
Zuckmayer on Berlin to Henry Miller on New York in *Black Spring*: "Tall, stately,
full-bodied, self-possessed, she cuts the smoke and jazz and red-light glow like the
queen mother of all the slippery Babylonian whores…This is Broadway, this is New
York, this is America."[47]

The anxiety surrounding fertility came to focus inevitably on the city, an urban
'cesspool' which had spawned the revolution in manners and morals. Urban
sociologists and other commentators continually connected the "urban evil" with
rising divorce, the prevalence of venereal diseases, and other social problems.[48]
Fecundity was seen to be particularly affected by urban lifestyles. Floods of women
of child-bearing age were more visible in the city, more conspicuously outside the
space reserved for them on a biological basis – the home, the private sphere - , than
ever before. They were in the streets, going to work, shopping, going about their
business: many of them, with the new economic roles available to women, *had*
business. They were not secreted inside the private spaces, the interstices, of the city
but were in the streets, where traditionally only disreputable women had been (figures
8-9).

Fig. 8: Prostitutes on Friedrichstrasse,
Berlin 1930

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[47] Carl Zuckmayer wrote in *A Part of Myself* that "people discussed Berlin…as if Berlin were a highly
desirable woman, whose coldness and capriciousness were well known…Some saw her as hefty, full-
breasted, in lace underwear, others as a mere wisp of a thing, with boyish legs in black silk
stockings…All wanted to have her…To conquer Berlin was to conquer the world." Quoted in Patrice
Petro, *Joyless Streets: Women and Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Germany*, Princeton:
Princeton University Press, 1989, p. 42. Also see Dorothy Rowe, 'Desiring Berlin: Gender and
Modernity in Weimar Germany' in Marsha Meskimmon and Shearer West (eds.), *Visions of the 'Neue
Frau': Women and the Visual Arts in Weimar Germany*, Aldershot, Hants: Scolar Press, 1995, pp. 143-
164. Miller quoted in P. Jukes, *A Shout in the Sreet: The Modern City*, London: Faber and Faber, 1990,
p. 103.
[48] Hendersen, *op.cit.*, pp. 671-73.

Fig. 9: The flapper and the street

Census figures continually revealed a lower birthrate within the bounds of the metropolis, and demographic theory gave a prominent place to rural-urban differentials. Berlin, with reportedly the lowest birth rate in the world by 1924, was a "wilderness of sterile promiscuity."[49] By 1933 just over 35 percent of married couples in Berlin were childless, twice the national average, and by 1931 as many as one million women a year had abortions.[50] It was suggested by one contemporary source that abortions were more frequent than births in Berlin in 1929.[51]

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[49]Usborne, *The Politics of the Body*, p. 32; Mason, *op.cit.*, p. 82. Urban fertility has almost always been lower than rural in the West: see William Petersen, *Population*, Second Edition, London: Macmillan, 1969, pp. 496-505.

[50] Grossmann, *Reforming Sex,* p. 4 and 'Abortion and Economic Crisis,' pp. 80-1.

[51] With a ratio of 103: 100. See A. M. Carr-Saunders, *World Population: Past Growth and Present Trends*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936, p. 98.

Lydia Kingsmill Commander had observed as early as 1907 New York's "numerous class of childless couples." Her visits to twenty-two apartment houses in some of the better neighbourhoods of the city, comprising 485 families, revealed only 54 children. As had been observed in other countries, Commander found that urban housing discouraged large families.[52] The 1917 report of the National Birth Rate Commission in Great Britain devoted an entire chapter to the housing problem, including the issue of landlords who preferred tenants with no children.[53] Weimar urban architecture was "streamlined and determinedly functional" and "clearly designed for a smaller family."[54] Cities presented opportunities for women to find new ways of *being* women, without children and large homes within which to create a haven for family. Small apartments meant more going *out*, creating a larger life: and the modern woman who had other plans for herself could say, 'Oh but we have no *space* for children!'

Herbert Spencer and others had theorised that western society's inevitable rise to the height of civilisation would devastate natality: a thesis borne out more recently by scholars such as Fawcett, who found that people classified as 'more modern' were more likely to subscribe to values that were anti-natalist in implication.[55] The problem of civilisation was a problem of large cities. Early comment on the city had linked it unequivocally to the moral problem of "wicked individualism."[56] The modern urbanite, educated, socially ambitious and exposed to mass media, did not have the fatalistic attitude to reproduction associated with the rural population. Gloria in Fitzgerald's *The Beautiful and Damned* made the distinction: "It isn't an indignity for them. It's their one excuse for living. It's the one thing they're good for. It is an indignity for *me*."[57] The flapper, as the iconic modern woman, demanded the dignity of a life lived independently of the biological

[52]Commander, *op.cit.*, pp. 10-11.

[53] *The Declining Birth Rate: Its Causes and Effects*, pp. 46-56.

[54] Grossmann, *Reforming Sex*, pp. 7-8.

[55] J. T. Fawcett and M. H. Bornstein, 'Modernization, individual modernity and fertility', East-West Center reprint no. 36, from Fawcett, J. T. (ed.), *Psychological Perspectives on Population*, Basic Books: New York, 1973, p. 111. Enid Charles distinguished between physiological sterility and psychological sterility: the latter denoting those "temperamental peculiarities" which made an individual likely to avail him or herself of the opportunities for control of fertility. See T*he Twilight of Parenthood: A Biological Study of the Decline of Population Growth*, London: Watts and Co., 1934, p. 179.

[56] Lees, *op.cit.*, p. 161.

[57] F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Beautiful and Damned*, London: Penguin, 1988 (1922), p. 140.

'destiny' which had defined traditional womanhood, while men were defined by their public roles.[58] The flapper saw herself as 'good' for something else.

The 'civilisation' theory of depopulation gained wide acceptance, incorporating a Spenglerian bitterness about the development of modern civilisation, symbolised by the big city, into the debate on depopulation. The German school of urban studies theorised that city life bred a rational, impersonal, and autonomous character: Spengler saw civilisation throwing up sterility, arising from an isolated urban existence that frees the individual from the "plantlike urge of the blood to continue itself."[59] The highly civilised urban woman no longer "approximated more nearly to the lower animals": she had "too many sides to her nature to contentedly merge her existence in the reproductive function." [60] 'Modern' personality traits, with which women were increasingly aligned, particularly in the cities, sounded a note of doom for fertility.

The trend towards smaller families, which was associated with France but by 1907 was described as part of the "American Spirit,"[61] was also bemoaned in Britain, and in Germany where in 1928 the Prussian minister for social welfare said that people "simply do not want more than one or two children."[62] This tendency was associated with the rise of the urban world. Classic transition theory assumed city dwellers had more reason to limit their families or remain childless altogether.[63] In France, Arsène Dumont had attributed fertility decline to 'social capillarity': that is, to the 'selfish' ambition of individuals to advance in the socio-economic scale, an ascension impeded by responsibility for children, who are "rivals for their own

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[58] Helen Callaway has noted that, "To be female is first to be identified with biological reproduction," while a man is likely to be designated as a *father* only incidentally to the list of public activities and achievements which proclaim his essential identity: "The Most Essentially Female Function of All': Giving Birth' in Shirley Ardener (ed.), *Defining Females: The Nature of Women in Society*, New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1978, p. 164.

[59] Civilised man as an aggregate no longer clung to life: depopulation was not merely a matter of causality as science would have it, but a reflection of urban man's "metaphysical turn towards death" (Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, pp. 105, 103). For the German school of urban studies, see Sennett, *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities*, ch. 2.

[60] Commander, *op.cit.*, pp. 176-7.

[61]*Ibid.*, p. 21.

[62] Grossmann, *Reforming Sex*, p. 4. On the 'small-family system' see Carr-Saunders, *World Population*, pp. 106-111.

[63] The strong emphasis on economic modernisation in the theory of demographic transition stressed the influence of new urban life-styles. Certainly large cities led the trend of fertility decline, but the European Fertility Project found more recently that industrialisation and urbanisation explained relatively little of the pattern. See Coale and Watkins, *op.cit.*

happiness."[64] Dumont observed that social capillarity was fostered by political democracy, and that it flourished in brilliant centres of culture like Paris.[65]

Histories concerned with gender and urban space have been preoccupied, especially since the late 1970s, with the prostitute and moral controls in the nineteenth-century western European urban scene, in the golden age of the *flâneur* and Josephine Butler.[66] The prostitute was conceived as being outside the moral structures of the middle class, a world built on the foundation of the Two Spheres. She was a rebuke to the social order in her carving out of a feminine space for herself in the city, on the street. The prostitute was a 'loose woman' in every sense, as Betsky notes, being "loose from the bounds of a moralized space."[67] She acted, for contemporary observers and for later historians, as the "quintessential female figure of the urban scene."[68]

However, the idea of the 'public woman' as an aberration commands particular attention in the war and postwar period, due to the increased visibility of women of all classes in urban space. The era saw a breakdown of distinctions between working girl and *working* girl, as women carved out a space for themselves as participants in the economy: claiming a *productive* role in apparent contempt for their *reproductive* role.

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[64]Depopulation was one of the 'perils of prosperity' associated with the conditions of social competitiveness – ambition and bourgeois love of luxury and decadence – which were viewed as being products of modern democratic individualism. Egoism was the "ruin of bourgeois society": Cole, *op.cit.*, p. 667. The French Revolution with its emphasis on the rights of the individual, was posited by some to have bred these conditions, making man more circumspect and prone to limit fertility as it benefited him as an individual, as argued by C. Turgeon, who asserted in 1907 that demographic *growth* gave rise to foresight, egoism, self-interest, feminism, ambition and love of pleasure, which led in turn to decline, and by Jacques Bertillon in his *La dépopulation de la France* (1911): See Joseph J. Spengler, *France Faces Depopulation*, Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1938, pp. 167-70.
[65] *Ibid.*, pp. 156-8. Joseph Spengler noted that 'volitional' theories of fertility decline – those that blamed individual 'selfishness' – dominated the debate on depopulation (see pp. 135-6).
[66] See Graham Russell Hodges, 'Flaneurs, Prostitutes, and Historians: Sexual Commerce and representation in the nineteenth-century metropolis,' *Journal of Urban History* 23: 4 (May 1997), pp. 488-497 and Anthony R. Henderson, 'Prostitution and the City,' *Journal of Urban History* 23: 2 (Jan 1997), pp. 231-239, for reviews of recent publications on the subject.
[67] Betsky, *op.cit.*, p. 149.
[68] Henderson, *op.cit.*, p. 231. The focus of historians of gender and urban space on this period, the mid-to-late nineteenth century, has been determined partly by the abundance of source material generated by government regulation of prostitution.

In her 1916 *Women's War Work*, Mrs Churchill expressed the idea that war brings the contribution of women to light, making them more visible.[69] Historians have painted the war as a period of unprecedented economic opportunities for women, characterised by their 'new' visibility in the city. During and after the war, office and clerical work – concentrated in the cities, and in the public view – overtook domestic service as the main form of employment for young women. The relocation of women's economic roles gave the illusion that they were being given greater access to public power.[70]

The war opened up to women areas of employment that had previously been closed to them. The conflict created an increased bureaucratisation of public life that saw a major growth of employment for women in the white-collar sector that would not be reversed with the Armistice. In 1906 women had constituted 5.5 percent of the service sector in France: by 1921 they represented 28 percent.[71] In Germany by 1925 there were almost one and a half million female white collar workers: three times as many as in 1907.[72] Female clerks, typists, sales girls and minor administrators filling the cities became a recognised image of modernity: in popular culture the glamorous 'Girl' of modernism was imagined to effortlessly combine work and a social life in the big city. However, women seeking freedom and independence in the city, the

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[69] Quoted in Deborah Thom, 'Women and work in wartime Britain' in Richard Wall and Jay Winter (eds.), *The Upheaval of War: Family, Work and Welfare in Europe, 1914-1918,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 297. Popular memory of the war emphasised the images of women replacing men on the homefront by assuming traditionally male jobs: of seeing women operating machinery, or working as tram conductors or postal deliverers.

[70] More recently historians have emphasised the theme of continuity in women's employment: McGovern pointed out, in the case of America, that the great leap in women's work occurred between 1900 and 1910. In 1890 American women comprised 21.7 percent of the employed, 23.5 percent in 1900, 28.1 percent in 1910, 28.3 percent in 1920, and 29.7 percent in 1930: McGovern, *op.cit.*, p. 320. Other scholars have similarly seen the increase in female employment in the war period as being less significant than popular memory would have it. Despite the prominence of a domestic ideology in French society, that country was known for its high rate of female participation in the labour force – estimated at as high as 35 to 40 percent - before the war. Daniel Ute found that in Germany war service in armaments factories was taken up by women who were already in employment, displaced especially from the service industry, and Bridenthal and Koonz argued that women's presence was felt more because it had not been accepted in the first place, and was hardly likely to be embraced in this period of inflation and depression: Daniel Ute, 'Woman's work in industry and family: Germany, 1914-18,' in Wall and Winter, *The Upheaval of War*, p. 278; Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz, 'Beyond *Kinder, Küche, Kirche*: Weimar Women in Politics and Work' in Bridenthal, *et.al.*, pp. 44-5. Deborah Thom suggests in the case of Britain that the fact that the war was given credit for changes in female employment that were already well underway, may be attributed to the government's defining women workers as substitutes or replacements for men at the front, regardless of whether they had previously been employed. Women's work was treated as war service, but Thom suggests that the patriotic motives encouraged by such slogans as "Do your Bit, Replace a Man for the Front" were not necessarily the actual motives for young women to go out to work: *op.cit.*, pp. 301-7.

[71] Robert, *op.cit.*, pp. 256-264.

[72] Mason, *op.cit.*, p. 80.

working women who became icons of female emancipation, were in reality paid less than their male colleagues, had little status and almost certainly encountered sexual harrassment in the workplace.[73]

If the literary flapper was a "lovely, expensive," idle, urban woman as F. Scott Fitzgerald described her, and indeed the flapper was a phenomenon of the middle and upper classes, the world of work remained a vital part of the new life she forged. If Zelda Fitzgerald chose to marry and play the role of beautiful muse for her writer husband, her flapper sisters, including her childhood friend Tallulah Bankhead, prioritised careers as an integral part of the new lives they carved out in the urban space. Alexandra Kollontai wrote in 1920 that "the new woman could emerge as a type only with the growth in the number of women who were earning their own living."[74] Her socialist perspective saw women forced by capitalism to discard 'feminine' virtues – which were futile in this new world – in a transformation of the female psyche that was "accomplished primarily and principally in the lower depths of society." In her view, the new woman was forged from the determination – born of hunger – of the working class woman, but the psychology of this woman was "reflected in the rest of her contemporaries" such that she set "the tone of life…in respect to the image of the woman of our time."[75]

Work was a crucial dimension of the 'new' womanhood being created by women in cities. Women, especially women of the 'better' classes, were not supposed to be single and self-reliant: they were supposed to be married, producing children, and contained in the domestic sphere. The flapper could not have existed outside the period's realignment of gender roles caused by economic changes that brought women into prominence in the city. The working woman, Commander observed by 1907, had claimed for others the right to a presence on the streets: "the

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[73] In 1925 less than 1 percent of female white-collar workers held management positions, compared to 6 percent of males: Bridenthal and Koonz, *op.cit.*, pp. 51-2. Usborne noted that the New Woman in Germany was often depicted as using her sex appeal to gain promotion, and salesgirls were obsolete by the time they were thirty: Cornelie Usborne, 'The New Woman and generational conflict: perceptions of young women's sexual mores in the Weimar Republic' in M. Roseman, *Generations in Conflict: Youth Revolt and Generation Formation in Germany 1770-1968*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 142. Von Ankum notes that sexual harrassment was often depicted in popular culture, for example in G. W. Pabst's film *The Joyless Street* (1925), in which one of the female characters is propositioned by her boss: von Ankum, 'Gendered Urban Spaces,' p. 165.
[74] Kollontai, *op.cit.*, p. 95.
[75] *Ibid.*, pp. 95-101.

freedom she has won belongs not only to her class, but to all women who know how to conduct themselves as if they had business, whether they have or not."[76]

However, if, as Kollontai suggested, capitalism was "wresting [women] away from the cradle" for their own survival, creating "a respect-demanding army of fighters" working outside the home, the *idle* urban woman was also failing to produce children for the nation.[77] Commander had noted that "Wherever women are without employment and make a business of social life there is a low birthrate."[78] The city encouraged *recreation* over *re-creation*, at least for those wealthy enough to live the life of pleasure and luxury denounced by the upholders of rural thrift and simplicity.

Stanley Walker observed, "Soon after 1920 great, ravening hordes of women began to discover what their less respectable sisters had known for years – that it was a lot of fun...to get soused. All over New York these up and coming females piled out of their hideaways, rang the bells of speakeasies, wheedled drugstores into selling them gin and rye, and even in establishments of great decorum begged their escorts for a nip from a hip flask."[79] The new woman was visible in the speakeasy, and was also conspicuous as a consumer in the city, spending her income on fashion, cigarettes and visits to the cinema.[80]

The conditions associated with the woman as consumer were easily translated into the notion of woman as commodity.[81] The presence of middle and upper class women in the city, for work or recreation, met with some discomfort in cultures still influenced by a dissolving bourgeois morality which assumed the prostitute to be the only "current, perceivable, and conceivable form of female presence on the street."[82] Nineteenth-century controls on prostitution had indicated a desire to separate out the 'fallen' woman by defining 'red light' areas to facilitate surveillance, and setting up

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[76] Commander, *op.cit.*, p. 164.
[77] Kollontai, *op.cit.*, pp. 98-9.
[78] Commander, *op.cit.*, p. 198.
[79] Walker, *op.cit.*, pp. 30-1. By 1925 the New York City Investigating Committee of Fourteen reported that the number of women in illegal speakeasies was 'astounding': Mowry and Brownell, *op.cit.*, p. 25.
[80] Shearer West, 'Introduction' in Meskimmon and West, *op.cit.*, p. 1.
[81] While women were perceived to be the main consumers of modern mass culture – what Siegfried Kracauer called the 'Cult of Distraction' – and mass-produced commodities like fashion, they were also used to sell these products: see Meskimmon, *We Weren't Modern Enough*, pp. 178-185. In Otto Dix's 1925 painting *Three Women of the Street* or *Three Prostitutes of the Street*, the ambiguous position of the woman in the public realm is suggested as the women, framed by the decorated shop window behind them, hover "both literally and metaphorically between the roles of commodity and consumer": Rowe, *op.cit.*, p. 159.
[82] Anke Gleber, 'Female Flanerie and the *Symphony of the City*' in von Ankum, *op.cit.*, p. 79.

special VD hospitals.[83] But immorality was becoming indefinable spatially. In Berlin Otto Dix and George Grosz were obsessed with representing the prostitute: in Dix's 'Big City Triptych'of 1927-8 he juxtaposed images of street prostitutes with women dancing to jazz music: good women and bad are barely distinguishable (figure 10).

Fig.10: Otto Dix, 'Big City Triptych', 1927-8

To be a single woman in the public realm was to risk being categorised as sexually available, and probably a prostitute.[84] The two artists conveyed the climate of violence towards women in evidence in postwar German urban culture, arising from pervasive social anxieties regarding the role of women in society. Grosz depicted the dismembering of prostitutes in his series of *lustmords* (sex murders), powerful "images of male inadequacy and revenge" set against the background of the metropolis.[85] The woman who stepped outside the bounds of the private sphere, they seemed to say, would suffer the consequences.

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[83] McMillan, *op.cit.*, pp. 21-4. In 1909 a petition submitted to the Bremen Senate in Germany by a number of women's organisations had requested the repeal of the prostitution law which enforced the registering and regular medical checks of suspected prostitutes, appealing to the "serious danger to the entire world of working women, particularly to young single women in the cities": Elisabeth Meyer-Renschausen, 'The Bremen Morality Scandal' in Bridenthal, *et.al.*, p. 97. The war increased these controls in Germany: any woman alleged to have had relationships with several men in one month, whether or not she had received money, could be registered as a prostitute after only two warnings and subjected to compulsory – and sometimes fatal – treatment for VD (Usborne, 'Pregnancy is the woman's active service,' p. 392; Meyer-Renschausen, *op.cit., passim*).

[84] Rowe, *op.cit.*, p. 155.

[85] Peter Hall, *Cities in Civilisation: Culture, Innovation and Urban Order*, London: Phoenix Giant, 1998, p. 273. Also see Beth Irwin Lewis, '*Lustmord*: Inside the Windows of the Metropolis' in von Ankum, *op.cit.*, pp. 202-232. Klaus Theweleit's studies of sexual aggressiveness in the letters and other writings of right-wing Freikorps fighters revealed this violent attitude towards women in the period: see *Male Fantasies Volume I: Women, Floods, Bodies, History,* translated by Stephen Conway,

If the big city presented dangers to women, it also offered the possibility of an exciting, expanded life. The urban woman was the ultimate symbol of modernity. Like the new cities and industries she inhabited, she moved faster.[86] The most daring were 'fast' or 'speeds'. R. S. W. Mendl described the age in terms of this faster beat, with its speeding motor cars and assembly lines in Ford's workshops, with its ladies who were "in so great a hurry that they wear short skirts which enable them to move fast and cut off their hair to save a few precious moments of the day..."[87] Women were associated with the assembly line, which had opened up semi-and unskilled work for them.[88] The British Tiller Girls and other dance troupes danced in lines with synchronised, 'machine-like' movements.[89]

The 1929 activity report of the Task force for the Recovery of the *Volk* linked rationalisation and industrialisation – imported from America – with the disintegration of the "ethical idea of motherhood."[90] Women themselves, to observers, were 'rationalised,' efficient interchangeable parts functioning in the city of modernity.

According to Hegel, independence and self-existence are only possible "by means of the sacrifice of what is universal."[91] The new woman, synonomous with the hard, ruthless city, had abandoned her essential – 'universal' – mother- nature, in the eyes of her critics, who assumed that she must, therefore, be wholly empty. In 1924 the novelist Magdeleine Chaumont painted a grim picture of this new woman in the city:

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990, and *Male Fantasies Vol. II: Psychoanalysing the White Terror,* translated by Chris Turner, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989. Marsha Meskimmon has also noted how an increase in violence against women coincided with their increased visibility in the public sphere: *We Weren't Modern Enough,* p. 41.

[86] The rationalisation and mechanisation of production on a large scale saw the advent of assembly-line production and new standards of speed, efficiency and productivity. New technology like the telephone, radio, and the automobile increased the tempo of life.

[87] Geoffrey C. Ward and Ken Burns, *Jazz: A History of America's Music,* Pimlico: London, 2001, p. 102.

[88] The assembly line requires less skill and creates a labour force of unskilled or semi-skilled workers: Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossman, and Marion Kaplan, 'Introduction: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany' in Bridenthal, *et.al.,* p. 10.

[89] Siegfried Kracauer in 'The Mass Ornament' (1927) used the Tiller girls as an exemplary instance of 'the physiognomy of the period': the girls were no longer individuals but a 'mass ornament,' a reflection of the capitalist production process which effaced the individuality of the worker. The "Tiller Girls' legs correspond to the hands in the factory". See David Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity: Theories of Modernity in the Work of Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin,* Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985, pp. 147-49.

[90] Hausen, *op.cit.,* p. 140.

"Observe in any *public place* the expression that all women wear upon their faces. Do we see one who is kind, dreamy, or satisfied? No, they all have features that are shut, hard, spiteful...Put simply, women are becoming nasty, aggressive...there is no longer either the *heart of the mother* or that of the daughter or lover. There is the dried-out heart of *la femme moderne*; the universal heart has become a desert."[92]

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[91] Hegel, *op.cit.*, p. 518.
[92] Roberts, *op.cit.*, p. 76, my emphasis.

Chapter 3

The Flapper: "the young woman who follows the fashion
in all things: no child, etc."[1]

"Any real girl...who has the vitality of young womanhood, who feels

pugilistically inclined when called the "weaker sex," who resents being put on a

pedestal and worshipped from afar, who wants to get into things herself, is a

flapper...The flapper is the girl who is responsible for the advancement of woman's

condition in the world." (Letter to the editor, *Daily Illini*, April 20, 1922)[2]

"These beings – without breasts, without hips...who smoke, work, argue and

fight exactly like boys, and who...seek out savory and acrobatic pleasures on the

plush seats of 5 horsepower Citröens – these aren't young girls! There aren't any

more young girls! No more women either!" (Parisian law student, 1925)[3]

The term 'flapper' had originated in late-eighteenth-century England to describe

a young, awkward duck or partridge finding its wings. It was taken up in a figurative

sense, by 1900, to refer to an immoral, unsteady or flighty young woman who lacked

decorum. Significantly, the term could also simply mean 'young girl.'[4] The iconic

flapper of the 1920s wore fashions associated with youth: straight dresses and short

skirts – which reached the top of the knee in 1927[5] – were associated with girlhood.

The 'Gibson Girl', the ideal female type of the American 1890s, had long hair, broad

hips, a large bust and a narrow waist.[6] The flapper was her antithesis. She was

(ideally) lean and athletic, with small breasts. Her dresses had straight lines and were

short and plain, with a low waist (figure 11). She bobbed her hair in boyish fashion

(figure 12) and led a trend towards greater familiarity between the sexes.

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[1] Quote from Clement Vautel, *Madame ne veut pas d'enfant* (1924), in Roberts, *op.cit.*, p. 135.
[2] Paula S. Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 291.
[3] Roberts, *op.cit.*, p. 20.
[4] *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Second Edition, Volume V, Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1989, p. 1008.
[5] Paul H. Nystrom, *Economics of Fashion*, New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1928, p. 394; Kenneth A. Yellis, 'Prosperity's Child: Some Thoughts on the Flapper', *American Quarterly* Vol. XXI (1969),p. 59.

Fig. 12: Louise Brooks: bobbed hair

The flapper had rejected Louisa May Alcott's version of femininity. Marjorie in Fitzgerald's 'Bernice Bobs Her Hair' protests 'Oh, please don't quote "Little Women" …That's out of style…What modern woman could live like those inane females?"

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[6] Yellis, *op.cit.*, p. 44. The 'Gibson Girl' ideal was based on Charles Dana Gibson's drawings of his

Accused of being hard and selfish, she continues, "The womanly woman! ...Her whole life is occupied in whining criticisms of girls like me who really do have a good time."[7]

The 'new man' who depicted the flapper and seemingly idealised her, in fact betrayed ambiguous attitudes about the new womanhood she had forged. F. Scott Fitzgerald, despite his 'creation' of the flapper, harboured deeply ambivalent feelings about the new woman he chronicled, and her sexual permissiveness. His heroes are set upon by these "masked destroyers," seemingly innocent women whose face powder symbolises their corruption in the suggestion of the foul dust of the sterile wasteland between East Egg and the city in *The Great Gatsby*.[8] Fitzgerald, fascinated with Zelda's unconventionality, had "married the heroine of my stories."[9] But his embracing of 'urban' progressive values was ambiguous and confused. On one hand he criticised Zelda for lack of ambition and was attracted to prominent, successful women, pillorying women who felt "more at home in a kitchen than in a ballroom." Yet he also believed that "being in love, really in love – doing it well – is work enough for a woman," and castigated Zelda for her lack of domesticity.[10] Ernest Hemingway also demanded subservience from the women in his life, despite creating 'indestructible' women like Lady Brett in *The Sun Also Rises*.[11]

The ambivalence of the 'new man' to these women was particularly pronounced when it came to issues of sexuality and procreativity, as evidenced in Fitzgerald's denunciation of his wife's "chill-mindedness." A similar undertone

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wife.
[7] F. Scott Fitzgerald, 'Bernice Bobs Her Hair' (1920) in *Bernice Bobs Her Hair and Other Stories*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963, pp. 17-18.
[8] Joan M. Allen, *Candles and Carnival Lights: the Catholic Sensibility of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, New York: New York University Press, 1978, pp. 73, 110.
[9] Matthew J. Bruccoli, Scottie Fitzgerald Smith and Joan P. Kerr (eds.), *The Romantic Egoists*, New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1974, p. 79.
[10] *Ibid.*, p. 97. Zelda provided Fitzgerald with material for his fiction through her diaries, which he 'cannibalised' as early as 1919 while attempting to sabotage Zelda's own creative career by prompting Scribner's publishing house to poorly package and promote her *Save Me the Waltz*. See Taylor, *op.cit.*, pp. 13, 51, 61, and 72-3, and Koula Svokos Hartnett, *Zelda Fitzgerald and the Failure of the American Dream for Women*, New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1991, pp. 133-4. The 'American dream for women' was to attain a Prince Charming to rescue her and prevent the necessity of her having to work for a living. In 1921 Zelda said that "I think a woman gets more happiness out of being gay, light-hearted, unconventional, mistress of her own fate, than out of a career that calls for hard work, intellectual pessimism and loneliness...flappers are brave, gay and beautiful": *ibid.*, p. 113. Zelda found too late that dancing on tables at the Waldorf and being the most famous flapper of all was not enough. She wanted to build an independent identity as a ballet dancer, a dream which failed because she was too old.

characterised Bertolt Brecht's recording in his diary of his reaction to his girlfriend aborting his child: "I could strangle that whore!...I've never seen such a naked display of the prostitute's bag of tricks..."[12]

This suggestion of a blurring of boundaries between women *morally* was an issue of class. The sexual woman in literature had traditionally been depicted as having crawled out of the working class, and her moral dissolution was taken as read. Now girls of the middle and upper classes claimed the same sexual freedoms.[13] Respectable women seized other prerogatives of the disreputable woman, like smoking: a trademark of the flapper (figure 13).[14]

The frank use of make-up, previously confined to prostitutes, was adopted by women in great numbers. "By appropriating the right to use such sexual aids," Fass argued, "respectable women proclaimed that they too were endowed with a sexual personality."[15] If the period before the war had seen Theda Bara as cinematic vamp held up in opposition to a virginal 'mother-wife' Lillian Gish or Mary Pickford, presenting a "choice between evolution and degeneration," the 1920s saw a breakdown of the division between bad girl and good girl, a blurring of lines in which the flapper was an important figure.[16]

Fig. 13: The flapper's adoption of the prerogatives of the disreputable woman: smoking

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[11] Bernice Kert, *The Hemingway Women*, New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1983; Mimi Reisel Gladstein, *The Indestructible Woman in Faulkner, Hemingway, and Steinbeck*, Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1986.

[12] Brecht's diaries, entry of 9 May 1921, quoted in Theweleit, *Male Fantasies, Vol. I*, pp. 163-4.

[13] Studies suggested, furthermore, that this pre-marital experimentation did not necessarily interfere with a woman's chance of future marriage. See Usborne, 'The New Woman and generational conflict,' p. 157.

[14] Though bohemian women and prostitutes had smoked in public before the 1920s, this was taboo for respectable women. Fass has noted in the case of America that smoking was morally value-laden and had sexual connotations: *op.cit.*, pp. 293-300.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 284.

[16] See Dijkstra on Theda Bara's role as the 'vampire', or sexual woman who sexually entices the model man and destroys him in the 1915 film *A Fool There Was*: *op.cit.*, pp. 9-13, and p. 40 on the opposition between the passive, maternal wife in the film and the 'degenerate' vamp.

If in the theatre of 1925 Tallulah Bankhead could choose between playing "the wife or the prostitute in Lonsdale's *Spring Cleaning*, or the wife or the tart in *Tarnish*," those who strove to depict contemporary womanhood themselves, like F. Scott Fitzgerald, were at a loss to adjust to a world in which "Dark Lady and Fair, witch and redeemer [had] fallen together" to create "intermediate types."[17] Fitzgerald's flapper was a 'good girl' if a little 'fast,' the daughter of the most exemplary parents, who had acquired the sexual prowess of the vamp (figure 14).[18]

"My goo'ness—I'm fast!"

Fig. 14: The 'nice girl' who is a little 'fast'

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[17]Tallulah Bankhead, *Tallulah: My Autobiography*, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952, p. 144; Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel*, New York: Criterion Books, 1960, pp. 301-2; Thomas noted that "fifty years ago we recognised, roughly speaking, two types of women, the one good and the other completely bad, - what we now call the old-fashioned girl, and the girl who had sinned and been outlawed. At present we have several intermediate types, - the occasional prostitute, the charity girl [girls who justified sexual intimacy by saying they intended to marry the man, or that they would marry in the event of pregnancy], the demi-virgin, the equivocal flapper, and in addition girls with new social behaviour norms who have adapted themselves to all kinds of work": *op.cit.*, pp. 230-31. Fass quotes an American college professor on the subject who said that once, "one might with safety say this woman is good, this one is bad. That was in the days when the bad woman was known by her extreme clothing and her artificial aids to excite the sex impulse. But when a large portion of our 'respectable' women adopt the same methods...a man is scarcely to be blamed if he sometimes makes a mistake in judgement": *op.cit.*, p. 309.

[18] E. Stevenson wrote, "The generic flapper is a nice girl who is a little fast, who takes the breath of staid observers with her flip spontaneity, her short-lived likes and dislikes, her way of skating gaily over thin ice": *Babbitts and Bohemians: The American 1920s*, New York: Macmillan, 1967, p. 141. H. L. Mencken wrote that "The veriest schoolgirl today knows as much as the midwife of 1885," and Malcolm Cowley noted that girls at Smith College in New York modelled themselves on Hemingway's hard-drinking, promiscuous Lady Brett: Leuchtenburg, *op.cit.*, pp. 171-2.

The flapper was characterised by her politically significant rejection of the values and behaviours instilled in her. As Kollontai noted, while the struggle of the working class woman for autonomy coincided with the interests of her class, the woman of the bourgeoisie faced greater opposition, because the "ideology of their class is hostile to the transformation of the feminine type."[19] In her rejection of the paradigm of femininity associated with sexual passivity, fecundity and maternal love, the flapper staged a counter-ideological rebellion, a rebellion made all the more potent by the extreme natalism of the period.

Mayer reminds us that women are representatives of purity in the national project. Symbolic status is connected to their reproductive role; their moral fortitude is conceived as vital to the nation.[20] The task of traditional femininity was to act as a guardian of morality, and to foster it in the domestic setting by acting as an example to children. The 'new morality' celebrated and bemoaned in the 1920s was associated with changes in the sexual behaviours of the daughters of the middle classes. Thomas noted that it was among girls of the "well-to-do" that the "new type" had emerged, a type characterised by "seeming innocence [and] sexual sophistication."[21] 'Flapperish' young women of the bourgeoisie appeared to adopt the relative sexual freedoms of their working-class sisters, claiming a pre-marital sexual life as men had always done. If the mother acted as a symbol of hope for post-war regeneration, the flapper was a symbol of moral decay.

Stefan Zweig had been shocked by his experience of young bourgeois girls in Berlin who "bragged proudly of their perversion, to be sixteen and still under suspicion of virginity would have been considered a disgrace...every girl wanted to be able to tell of her adventures and the more exotic, the better."[22] The popularisation of psychoanalysis in the 1920s, especially in America, saw young women who were "hipped on Freud and all that" venting their sexual energies for the sake of their health.[23] Magazines like *Flapper Experiences* chronicled the new sexual

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[19] Kollontai, *op.cit.*, p. 100, my emphasis.

[20] Mayer, *op.cit.*, p. 82.

[21] Thomas, *op.cit.*, p. 84.

[22] Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday: An Autobiography*, New York: The Viking Press, 1943, p. 313.

[23] Leuchtenburg, *op.cit.*, p. 165. Freud's theories in their popularised form were subjects of common knowledge: by 1922 Elsie Clews Parsons could write that, "There is no need in this post-Freudian day of dwelling upon the effects of suppression of sex instinct or impulse. Suppression leads, we are told...to perversion or disease": 'Sex' in Stearns, *op.cit.*, p. 311. In *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* Lorelei

permissiveness of youth, and Hollywood advertised films featuring "beautiful jazz babies, champagne baths, midnight revels, [and] petting parties in the purple dawn" while moulding Clara Bow into the 'It' girl.[24] (figure 15)

Fig. 15: Clara Bow, the 'It' Girl, in the screen version of the 1924 hit play *Dancing Mothers*, in which the flapper Kittens enjoys cocktails for lunch

Reactions to the flapper's rejection of the hallmarks of traditional femininity speak loudly of her contemporary importance. Although the flapper was represented as being interested only in sexual adventures, in pleasing and shocking men, and in fashion, the vehemence of the opposition she faced suggests hers was more than a frivolous rebellion. Dorothy Parker had written, "The playful flapper here we see, / The fairest of the fair / She's not what Grandma used to be, - / You might say, au contraire."[25] The flapper's contrariety, her self-will, was the mainspring of the resentment she aroused. She behaved in ways that were contrary to what was expected or logically understood of women, according to tradition. She defied the established way of being a woman.

If this established femininity was defined by warmth and nurture, the flapper was cold: at least in the eyes of observers. Roberts has argued that cultural

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is introduced to "Dr. Froyd" who warned her of the dangers of inhibitions and "seemed very very intreged (sic.)at a girl who always seemed to do everything she wanted to do": Anita Loos, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, London: Penguin, 1992 (1925), p. 18

[24] Leuchtenburg, *op.cit.*, 168.

perceptions about female coldness were rooted in the gendered divisions of war, and the perception of veterans that the homefront, especially in urban areas, was characterised by its gaiety and luxury in utter contrast to the battleground. The perception that women were busy liberating themselves while men were increasingly subjugated to the war machine, and that they were indifferent to the man's anguish, pervaded post-war literature in France. In Paul Géraldy's *Le Guerre Madame* (1916), a soldier on leave visits an ex-lover in Paris, who complains about her boredom with the Paris night life. The cover of a 1919 novel juxtaposed a woman applying make-up with a map of the Western front.[26] In Colette's *The Last of Chéri* (1926) Chéri is a broken, listless figure in comparison to his coolly efficient wife Edmée, whose independence and chilly attitude to her husband is in stark contrast to her 'feminine,' clinging pre-war character in *Chéri*.[27] The new woman, newly independent, efficient, and seemingly preoccupied, seemed to have no comfort to offer the man or nation.

The intrusion of greater numbers of women in civic space and industry saw a conflation of women not just with the city, but with the machine. The pivotal scene in Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis* (1926), a brutal fantasy of the city of the future, saw the 'good' Maria (Bridget Helm) turned into a robot, a mechanised whore with a metal pageboy.[28] This image of the new woman as a 'rationalised', machine-like arm of technological modernity reflected a pervasive anxiety about a "psychic and spiritual *dematernalization* of women."[29] Roberts has argued that for many observers, the modern woman signified a colder, more impersonal world.[30]

Although the promiscuity of the new woman was bemoaned, men complained that women were cold and out of reach. In literature of the period, men searched in vain for pity from women, for a barely-remembered maternal warmth, and found only a cut-glass bowl, Fitzgerald's famous symbol — Carleton Canby tells Evelyn, 'I'm going to give [you] a present that's as hard as you are and as beautiful and as empty

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[25] Dorothy Parker, 'The Flapper' quoted in 'Flapper Culture and Style' at
http://www.geocities.com/flapper_culture/
[26] Roberts, *op.cit.*, pp. 22-45 on *la femme moderne* as a symbol of moral and gender trauma arising from the upheaval of war.
[27] *Chéri* (1919) and *The Last of Chéri* (1926), in *Short Novels of Colette*, New York: Dial Press, 1951.
[28] See Michael Minden, 'The city in early cinema: *Metropolis, Berlin*, and *October*' in Edward Timms and David Kelley (eds.), *Unreal City: Urban experience in modern European literature and art,* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985, pp. 193-213; J. Lungstrum, '*Metropolis* and the Technosexual Woman of German Modernity' in von Ankum, *op.cit.*, pp. 128-144.
[29] As the Nazi newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter* put it in 1929. Quoted in Hausen, *op.cit.*, p. 145.
[30] Roberts, *op.cit.*, p. 75.

and as easy to see through."[31] John Dos Passos' *Manhattan Transfer* (1927) depicted shallow female life in an urban wasteland: Emile associates his own depression and the loneliness of the city with the new woman's cold materialism: "Everything is so hard. Women look in your pocket not in your heart...I can't stand it anymore."[32] Ellen is untouchable, an "intricate machine of saw tooth steel": she "sits up cold and out of reach like a lighthouse. Men's hands crawl like bugs on the unbreakable glass. Men's looks blunder and flutter against it helpless as moths."[33] Representations of women as hard-edged, cold, and efficient had their basis in the perception that young women were rejecting maternity and its attendant qualities of nurture and softness.[34]

Representations of ardent men being rejected by cold or simply superficial young women betrayed a fascination with the flapper's utter rejection of the 'Sentimental Love Religion' (figures 16-17).[35]

Fig. 16: The ardent young man and the cold flapper

HE (passionately): *You are trying to forget me!*
"*No—I'm trying to remember you.*"

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[31] F. Scott Fitzgerald, 'The Cut-Glass Bowl' in *Flappers and Philosophers*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920, p. 97.

[32] John Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer*, London: Constable and Co., 1933 (1927), p. 85. The 'flapper-as-gold-digger' theme pervaded literature: Lorelei Lee in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (*op.cit.*) was a more light-hearted example of the kept woman.

[33] Dos Passos, *op.cit.*, pp. 215 and 171.

[34] Feminist theory has long held that an essentialist conception of femininity as synonymous with nurture has contributed to female subordination: Everingham noted that a female-centered perspective is often assumed to be grounded in an ethics of care and greater concern for the needs of others. See C. Everingham, *Motherhood and Modernity: an investigation into the rational dimension of mothering*, Buckingham: Open University Press, 1994, p. 4.

Fig. 17: The flapper's rejection of the
'Sentimental Love Religion'

Breaking It Gently
HE: *I thought we were engaged?*
SHE: *We were.*

Rosalind in Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* told Amory,

"There used to be two kinds of kisses. First when girls
were engaged and deserted; second, when they were engaged.
Now there's a third kind, where the man is kissed and deserted.
If Mr Jones of the nineties bragged he'd kissed a girl, everyone
knew he was through with her. If Mr Jones of 1919 brags the
same everyone knows it's because he can't kiss her anymore."[36]

Tallulah Bankhead (figure 18), recalling her "ecstatic affairs" in London in the
1920s, admitted she was "incapable of sustained ardors," and Donald Stewart
complained of his ex-lover Dorothy Parker that her gaiety was "*her* emotion; she
wasn't worrying about *your* emotion."[37]   According to Zelda Fitzgerald, the
flapper was "reticent emotionally and courageous morally."[38]   She had dispensed
with 'maidenly reserve' and the double standard.[39]   As women sighted the

[35]Fiedler, *op.cit.*, p. 221.
[36] F. Scott Fitzgerald, *This Side of Paradise*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1920, p. 165.
[37]Bankhead, *op.cit.*, p. 163; Marion Meade, *Dorothy Parker: What Fresh Hell Is This?*, New York:
Villard Books, 1988. p. 142.
[38] F. Scott Fitzgerald and Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald, 'What Became of Our Flappers and Sheiks?' in
McCall's Magazine LIII: 1 (Oct. 1925), p. 30.
[39] McGovern, *op.cit.*, p. 323; Alexandra Kollontai observed that "The 'rebellion' of women against a
one-sided sexual morality is one of the most sharply delineated traits of the new heroine": *op.cit.*, p. 93.

possibility of financial independence, they had less time for romantic notions of romance and courtship that assumed the primacy of love and marriage in their lives. The new woman's feelings and mental energies, Kollontai noted, were directed upon other things in life but sentimental love feelings.[40]

Fig. 18: Tallulah Bankhead, who fled to New York and then London to find fame

The earlier sacralistion of romantic love had been an important aspect of the 'Cult of True Womanhood,' which had judged women according to their piety, purity

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[40] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

and submissiveness – themes that were associated with the maternal role and containment in the home, where Henry James' 'Pure Maidens' had remained uncorrupted by the realities of the world.[41] The True Woman had been defined by her dependence, but more importantly by her selflessness: in 1905 Theodore Roosevelt said of the mother, "her very name stands for loving unselfishness and self-abnegation, and, in any society fit to exist, is fraught with associations which render it holy."[42] By 1910 Margaret Deland wondered, "Can we remember that selflessness, and see no difference between it and the present feminine individualism?"[43]

The flapper was not entirely a product of the war, as some writers have argued. She was in many respects the natural heir to the 'Ibsen woman' who had insisted on her right to an independent existence from the late nineteenth century, and the suffragette who had insisted this existence be recognised in law. The flapper actually *lived* the natural outcomes of these movements. The startling opposition to this life expressed by critics arose from the recognition that the flapper represented the irreversibility of the gains of feminism.

The flapper was, in the eyes of many observers, defined by her rejection of motherhood and its hallmarks. Fitzgerald's female characters objected to the domestic life: Gloria in *The Beautiful and Damned* doesn't want "responsibility and a lot of children to take care of." She insists that "one owes as much to the current generation as to one's *unwanted* children."[44] Fitzgerald's wayward teens were horrifyingly eclipsed by women like Nancy Cunard, the promiscuous heiress to a shipping line fortune, who underwent an elective hysterectomy in 1920 to avoid pregnancy.[45] Dos Passos depicted his female characters coldly undergoing abortions: "It won't take very long, will it? If I can only pull myself together I have an engagement for tea at five."[46] However, people feared the flapper would make an irresponsible mother: when Dorothy Parker became pregnant, one sceptic questioned whether it was possible for Dorothy "to have anything in common with children because they didn't drink." Contemporaries predicted that the child would emerge

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[41] Welter, *op.cit.*, 151-174; Fiedler, *op.cit.*, p. 290.
[42] Quoted in Bell and Offen, *op.cit.*, p. 140.
[43] Deland, *op.cit.*, p. 292.
[44] Fitzgerald, *The Beautiful and Damned*, pp. 37 and 124.
[45] Taylor, *op.cit.*, pp. 162-3.
[46] Dos Passos, *op.cit.*, p. 252.

'tight,' having formed *in utero* a habit for martinis and French brandy, and would need a cup of coffee.[47]

The French theorist Leroy-Beaulieu and his followers attributed depopulation to the rise of a "neo-pagan egoism and pursuit of pleasure" bred by civilisation.[48] The flapper's desire to lead a life of pleasure, as it appeared to her critics, was the mark of her moral sterility, the triumph of egotism over her sense of duty. Reactions to the flapper linked her 'moral sterility' to *biological* sterility. One commentator, in a 1925 comment in the French *Progrès Civique*, asserted, "These unhappy women do not want to be mothers because they do not dare to confess that they are sterile, sterile in their heart and in their feelings."[49] Monique Lerbier's spiritually and emotionally empty life of promiscuity in Paris was ultimately mirrored in her inability to conceive a child in Victor Margueritte's *La Garçonne* (1922).[50]

With young women interacting more freely with men and taking on their "independent ways,"[51] fears multiplied regarding the apparent blurring of crucial boundaries between men and women. Clément Vautel's novel *Madame ne veut pas d'enfant* (1924) contained an ominous prediction that, "We are moving towards the suppression of the sexes...The human being will soon be neither man nor woman...he will unite the attributes of both..."[52] A clear demarcation between male and female was upheld as a cultural ideal by critics of the flapper. The perceived 'masculinisation' of women was a problem of the perversion of sexuality, a symptom of cultural decline, but more importantly in this period it implied the degeneration of fecundity. The flapper's demand for a life equal in self-sufficiency and value to those of men destabilised a balance between the sexes viewed as vital to production of children.

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[47] Meade, *op.cit.*, p. 264.

[48] Spengler, *France Faces Depopulation*, p. 8. Rageot's *La Natalité* similarly depicted poor natality as sign of psychological decadence: Roberts, *op.cit.*, p. 125. The 'social woman' who devoted her life to leisure pursuits had long been a cause of complaint. In the American educational film of 1916, *Where are My Children?* a respectable District Attorney drives his wife and her 'brainless' socialite friends from the house after he discovers she has denied him children by secretly undergoing abortions. Depictions of the souls of children in Heaven after an abortion scene were titled "a social butterfly is again ready for house parties": R. Eberwein, *Sex Ed: Film, Video, and the Framework of Desire*, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1999, pp. 54-5.

[49] Roberts, *op.cit.*, p. 130.

[50] *Ibid.*, pp. 46-54.

[51] *Ibid.*, p. 139.

[52] *Ibid.*, p. 134.

It has been claimed that clothing is a visual language, in that it makes clear reference to who we are and how we wish to be taken.[53] Perhaps more significantly, as Paul H. Nystrom noted in 1928, fashion is the result of "common mental activity, of *like thinking by many people*."[54] A reluctance to view fashion as a serious field of enquiry probably contributed to a historiographical dismissal of the flapper, who in historical and popular memory is synonymous with her clothes. If the highly decorative, impractical fashions worn by ThorsteinVeblen's leisured bourgeois wives signified to the world their idleness,[55] the clothes worn by the flapper were made for work, motion, and city life.

The clothes the flapper wore indicated her refusal to play 'mother of the nation,' her insistence on her right to live a life defined outside biological function, as men did. By 1930, observing the narrowing of the gulf between the sexes, John C. Flügel could note in his *The Psychology of Clothes* that, "There seems to be …no essential factor in the nature, habits, or functions of the two sexes that would necessitate a striking difference of costume – other than the desire to accentuate sex differences themselves…"[56] Havelock Ellis reflected in 1931 that all the changes of the past decade regarding the lives of women had been the outcome of a single movement: the movement for making them the companions of men. The flapper's desire to be "the social equal and companion of man, whether in work or play, even perhaps in the play of sex" was witnessed "even by her hair and her skirts and the simple fashion of her garments."[57]

A cultural anxiety about the difficulty of telling men and women apart was apparent in cartoons and drawings of the period. In the cover illustration for *Madame ne veut pas d'enfant* the lounging male and female figures are virtually indistinguishable in physiognomy and dress (figures 19-20).[58]

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[53] Fred Davis, *Fashion, Culture, and Identity*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 1 and *passim*.
[54] Nystrom, *op.cit.*, p. 55 (my emphasis).
[55] Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1957 (1899).
[56] Quoted in Yellis, *op.cit.*, p. 53.
[57] Havelock Ellis, 'The Function of Taboos' in *More Essays of Love and Virtue*, London: Constable and Co., 1931, pp. 88-89. The designs of Gabrielle Chanel adapted sportswear to daily life, freeing the body for an idealised lifestyle of athletic recreation, flitting from engagement to engagement, and dancing all night. The Chanel look was also a classless look, contributing to the perceived difficulty of classifying 'good' and 'bad' women. Her designs were quickly copied and mass-produced, making them accessible and inexpensive. See Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*, London: Virago Press, p. 41.
[58] Roberts, *op.cit.*, p. 135.

Fig. 19: Similar physiognomy and dress

Fig. 20: Cultural anxiety about the difficulty of telling men and women apart

SHE: *At this distance it's hard to tell the men from the women.*
HE: *Yes, at this distance it's not worth while trying.*

Louise, the polar opposite to the selfish Elyane, proclaims that she is a "real woman" with long hair, breasts and hips – who "doesn't cheat and play around with her sex".[59] The flapper's attempt to 'disguise' her reproductive capacity was associated with her appropriation of masculine styles: a disturbing and hugely

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[59] *Ibid.*, p. 135.

important cultural phenomenon that was received with trepidation.[60] Both male and female commentators received it as an expression of cultural crisis: one women's magazine denounced the trend towards androgyny as "morally embarrassing for male feelings."[61] The garçonne style was not simply a fashion but an effective "occupying [of] the space of both sexes at once."[62] (figures 21-3)

Fashion attracted disproportionate attention in the 1920s because the flapper's clothes indicated her rejection of the traditional idea of womanhood. As Wilson said of fashion, it is in "this marginalised area of the contingent, the decorative, the futile, that not simply a new aesthetic but a new cultural order might seed itself."[63] Critics of flapper fashion joined other voices demanding the complete psychic and phsiological separation of the sexes. According to a prominent German gynaecologist, "where there is true culture the sexes move away from one another and develop their differences to the extreme."[64] Demands for sexual differentiation can be understood in light of the influence of evolutionary theory. Following Darwin, the biologist Patrick Geddes had seen the character of woman as dominated by tenderness and selflessness, arising from her maternal instincts.

Fig. 21: The garçonne look

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[60] For example, a 1925 article in the German magazine BIZ, entitled "Now That's Enough! Against the Masculinization of Women" denounced the fashion as an "embarrassing aberration": see Petro, *op.cit.*, p. 105. The significance of aspects of androgyny in fashion is itself a hotly contested issue: Davis notes how the symbolic effect of the style is to "dramatize cross-gender tensions, not resolve them," a position which would cast the flapper in an antagonistic role. However, other observers, including feminists, have regarded 'boyish' fashions for women not as symbols of sexual equality, but as subtle devices to mute egalitarian demands, with an undertone of appeal to a latent homoerotic impulse in men: casting the androgynous woman not as equal but as immature boy to dominant man. See Davis, *op.cit.*, pp. 35-7 and Shearer West, 'Introduction' in Meskimmon and West, *op.cit.*, p. 6.
[61] Usborne, 'The New Woman and Generational Conflict', p. 144.
[62] West, *op.cit.*, p. 6. Also see Sabine Hake, 'In The Mirror of Fashion' in von Ankum, *op.cit.*, p. 196. The garçonne look was overtly sexual, as opposed to the more mainstream athletic look adopted by young women. It was associated with sexual deviance, specifically with the lesbian subculture, as has been noted in the case of Berlin: see Petro, *op.cit.*, p. 109 and Meskimmon, *We Weren't Modern Enough*, ch. 5.
[63] Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*, p. 245.
[64] Quoted in Lynne Frame, 'Gretchen, Girl, Garçonne? Weimar Science and Popular Culture in Search of the Ideal New Woman' in von Ankum, *op.cit.*, p. 19.

Fig. 21: Androgyny in the twenties
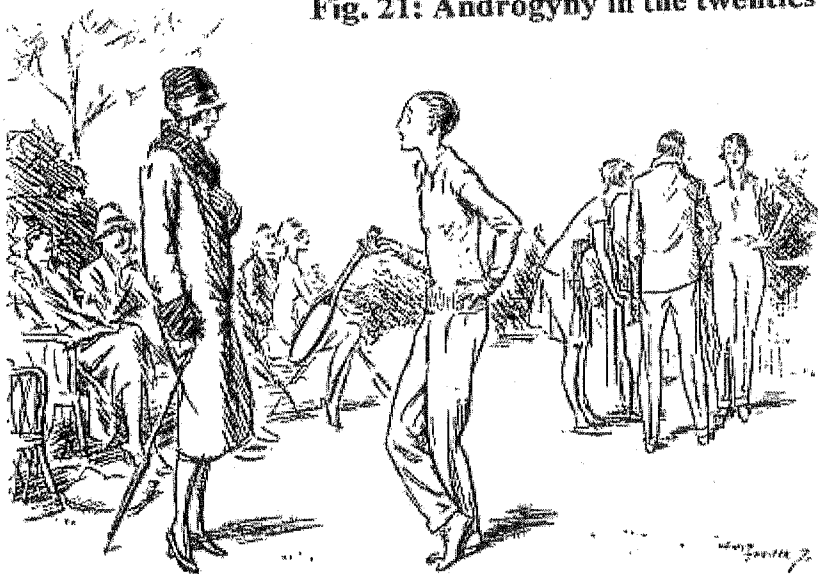
Angl. "Well, I daresay they're comfortable, but—I suppose I'm old-fashioned—I don't much like them. Why one would think you were a boy."

Niece. "Oh, come, dear old thing, that's absurd. Who ever saw a boy wear earrings?"

13. Novbr. 1927
Nummer 46
36. Jahrgang

Berliner

Illustrirte Zeitung

Verlag Ullstein Berlin SW 68

Preis
des Heftes
20 Pfennig

Fig. 22: A German magazine imagines androgyny

The altruism of the woman was a necessary partner to the egoism of the man, creating a "harmonious blending" crucial to man's rise on the evolutionary ladder. The woman's rejection of her evolutionary task of passivity and altruism would destroy the species.[65]

William Sumner had theorised that civilisation should create good wives, and that vamps – strong, independent women – were products of a degenerative society.[66] The "bourgeois cosmos" examined by Nye rested on sharp sexual differentiation, which came to be emphasised in medical discourse at the time of the consolidation of the separate spheres in France after 1789, to exclude women from the public realm. Domesticity was understood to be the "socially functional analogue of the biological function of maternity."[67] The collapse of the opposite and complementary roles of the sexes would disturb a balance seen as crucial to the whole process of social reproduction, and devastate natality: "the masculinsation of women must gradually affect the birthrate."[68]

Short hair was another masculine prerogative under siege by the flapper. Bobbed hair – the bubikopf in Germany, the 'Eton crop' in England, the 'à la Jeanne d'Arc' in France and the 'Ponjola' bob, fashionable in the United States[69] – was the trademark of the emancipated woman in the city. The hairstyle became a political controversy. For hundreds of years women's hair had been long, and conservatives viewed it as the crown of womanhood, denouncing short hair as another indication of

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[65] Fraser Harrison, *The Dark Angel: Aspects of Victorian Sexuality*, New York: Universe Books, 1977, pp. 90-97. The influence of Darwin and his followers was seen in the pronouncements of social feminists like Jane Addams in the United States, who argued that women's special skills and virtues were required to bring about cooperation in a male capitalist world of aggression and competition. See Brown, *op.cit.*, pp. 33-4.

[66] Dijkstra, *op.cit.*, p. 33.

[67] Nye, *op.cit.*, p. 52.

[68] Leroy-Beaulieu quoted in Cole, *op.cit.*, p. 669. In nineteenth-century popular culture and medicine, human fertility was thought to rest on the logic of complementarity. The greater the sexual difference between a couple, the more certain they could be of a fertile union. A French medical work by J. J. Virey, *Da la femme* (1825) advised that the ideal couple consisted of "the *most female woman* and the *most virile man*, when a dark, hairy, dry, hot and impetuous male finds the other sex delicate, moist, smooth and white, timid and modest": Nye, *op.cit.*, p. 59. Popular articles in Weimar Germany advising men on their choice of a wife recommended women with rounded physiques and warned against angular – 'unfeminine' – women, who according to the best 'scientific' knowledge of the day were sure to be temperamental and difficult to manage. The gyneacologist P. Mathes, in an influential 1924 work on female constitutional types, argued that while the 'real' or 'complete' woman was rounded in physique, the "intersexual" woman – characterised by her slim, athletic build and unstable psyche, was "deficiently differentiated" – and likely to suffer physical complications in birth or even infertility, leading to marital disaster (Frame, *op.cit.*, pp. 12-40). Also see Petro, *Joyless Streets*, pp. 119-21

[69] The ponjola, which had been popularised by Irene Castle and worn by Zelda Fitzgerald, was radical enough to keep women out of New York's fashionable restaurants in 1918: Taylor, *op.cit.*, p. 95.

cultural decline.[70] Bobbed hair was attacked as a symbol of female promiscuity and self-conscious denial of the domestic ideal. Drieu la Rochelle saw "women...cutting their hair as a sign of sterility..."[71]

The trend towards youthful slimness and emphasis of the limbs instead of the midsections of the female form suggested a rejection of the nurturing role. Maturity was concealed: some women even bound their breasts to achieve a pre-pubescent, or boyish, look.[72] The aesthetic ideal of the flapper was youth.[73] Given the anxieties about gender roles that marked the period, this was construed as a rejection of the consummation of 'normal' female sexual development, ie. maternity.[74]

Flapper fashion, as another French natalist interpreted it, was the "fashion of non-nursing...the fashion of non-motherhood."[75] For contemporaries, the clothes worn by the flapper indicated, and were symbolic of, the new idea of womanhood she was forging, a womanhood defined – in the perceptions of panicked nationalists – by her rejection of motherhood. Hysterical reactions to the flapper's symbolic rejection of motherhood, and by extension womanhood *itself* as it had been understood, suggest that the rebellion she effected had ramifications that stretched beyond the need to raise the birth rate.

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[70] Yellis, *op.cit.*, p. 48; Hake, *op.cit.*, p. 186.

[71] Quoted in Roberts, *op.cit.*, pp. 74-5.

[72] Leuchtenburg, *op.cit.*, p. 172.

[73] The leaning towards an idealisation of the immature or unripe in the female form did not erase the erotic connotations of feminine dress. Fashion was therefore seen as symbolic of the kind of sterile promiscuity with which the flapper was associated. As Fass noted, more informal interaction between the sexes fostered the "cultivation of styles that operated on a purely sexual level." The fashion and manners of the flapper represented a "well-poised tension between the informal boyish companion and the purposefully erotic vamp." Fashions defended as practical also enhanced sexual attractiveness, the understanding of which shifted from the previous playing up of the waist, hips and breasts, to bare legs, shoulders and backs, as well as clinging fabrics in evening wear. Evening wear in particular was more self-consciously erotic and sexually sophisticated than the feminine flounces of earlier fashions. See Fass, *op.cit.*, pp. 279–283. The erotic implications of bare or nearly bare legs and arms and plunging necklines did not go unnoticed. Bruce Bliven, in a 1925 article, noted the "Great Disrobing Movement" in fashion and asked, "Where will it all end?...Nudity had been the custom of so many countries and over long periods of time. No one who has read history can be very firm in saying that IT Never Can Happen Again": Bruce Bliven, 'Flapper Jane', *New Republic*, Sep. 9, 1925, at http: //www.geocities.com/flapper_culture. The skimpy nature of the new fashions provoked a voicing of concern among natalist doctors that the reproductive organs of young women might be damaged by draughts, just as 'scientific' reports warned women of the physical strains of their new professional and leisure activities in Weimar, and the danger to their reproductive organs: Roberts, *op.cit.*, p. 72; Lynne Frame, 'Introduction' in von Ankum, *op.cit.*, p. 3.

[74] Female sexual development was a topic generating intense interest in the period. Freud saw normal female development as moving towards a point at which the woman desires not the penis but a child. See Dijkstra, *op.cit.*, p. 364, and 372-376 on Hemingway's Lady Brett as an example of stunted female sexual development.

[75] *Ibid.*, p. 72.

Geddes had declared, "What was decided among the prehistoric Protozoa…cannot be annulled by an Act of Parliament."[76] Women were excluded *by their nature* from politics in the system propounded by Rousseau, who founded the natural law of politics in sexuality and the relations between the sexes, so that male monopoly on civil power was conceived as a matter of biology.[77] The 'chill-mindedness' of women – their rational attitudes to their own fertility, and their rejection of the qualities and behaviours associated with maternity – had grave political implications. The 'masculine' woman was associated with the women's movement: militant suffragettes had often been accused of 'mannish' behaviour.[78] The New Woman's demanding of unprecedented civil and sexual rights aroused fear of cultural anarchy, of the disappearance of all that was 'solid' in culture. The reintroduction of altruism, the restoration of the woman to the role connected to her biological function, would restore crumbling social boundaries.

Despite these highly 'political' implications inherent in the life she had chosen, the flapper was represented as having rejected her evolutionary task not to pursue any ideal, but to be a plaything for men. The flapper, Zelda advised, following her husband, was an artist in the field of "being young, being lovely, being an object."[79] She not only rejected children but was a child herself. On the birth of her baby girl, Daisy (of *The Great Gatsby*) says, "I hope she'll be a fool – that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool."[80] Flappers were depicted as wanting to be the irresponsible playmates of men, abandoning serious pursuits[81]: Zelda wrote in 1925 that the "flapper creed" was to "give and get amusement," and that she was "infinitely preferable to the kind of girl who, ten years ago…straightened your tie as evidence that in her lay the *spirit of the eternal mother*."[82] The flapper had not finished with being a child herself, according to commentators: "we find the young woman of 1920 flirting, kissing, viewing life lightly, saying damn without a

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[76] Quoted in Harrison, *op.cit.*, p. 94.

[77] See Nye, *op.cit.*, pp. 48-9.

[78] Jenny Gould, 'Women's Military Services in First World War Britain' in Higonnet, *et.al.*, *op.cit.*, pp. 120-1.

[79] 'What Became of Our Flappers and Sheiks?' p. 30.

[80] *The Great Gatsby*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1974 (1926), p. 24.

[81] For example, Frederick Lewis Allen noted in 1931 that women wanted to be the "light-hearted companions" of men, not the mothers of the race: *op.cit.*, p. 108.

[82] What Became of Our Flappers and Sheiks?, p. 12, my emphasis.

blush, playing along the danger line in an immature way – a sort of mental baby vamp."[83]

The flapper's rebellion was denigrated for having been dignified by no serious purpose. Her liberation was dismissed as a shallow, frivolous way of pandering to men, while the world of consumerism used her 'emancipation' to sell goods.[84] Others took her resolve not to "have any more unwanted children" or to be debarred from traditionally masculine professions, as a sign that feminism had "won a victory so nearly complete that we have forgotten the fierce challenge which once inhered in the very word."[85] The flapper was received with disappointment among older feminists: in 1922 Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote that they seemed chiefly concerned with "mastering birth control and acquiring 'experience.'"[86] Historians have similarly dismissed the flapper as apolitical: Dorothy M. Brown, for instance, said of the American woman that if the "Hard-won advances of the older generation were reversed or barely sustained by the middle generation" the younger generation "cared little for the battle or the cause."[87]

The political significance of the flapper's rebellion was not overt; she voiced no specific demand for political reform or legislative change. But hers was a profoundly important revolt that was not easy to effect. The flapper wanted to *live* on

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[83] F. Scott Fitzgerald quoted in Bruccoli, *et.al., op.cit.*, p. 79.

[84] Sarah Beebe Fryer, *Fitzgerald's New Women: Harbingers of Change*, Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988, p. 9. It has been argued that the media determined the image of the flapper's mobility – featuring pictures of her driving sports cars and golf balls – 'depoliticising' her emancipation: Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*, p. 185. Zelda Fitzgerald complained by 1922 that Flapperdom had become so fashionable, so mass-produced a style, that it was now " a game; it is no longer a philosophy": see 'Eulogy on the Flapper' in Bruccoli, *op.cit.*, p. 78. The 'emancipated flapper' was a marketable icon, commodified especially in popular cultural forms like the movies and tabloids in the 1920s. This served to homogenise them, turning them into an "empty consumerist icon of woman," a trend Jeanne Mammen critiqued in her 1927-30 painting *Boring Dollies*. See Meskimmon, *op.cit.*, pp. 183-4, and 167-8 on the 'de-politicisation' of the *neue frau* by the popular media. Dijkstra, noting the "behavioural directives" fed to young women by the entertainment industry, saw the flapper as being "exploited and regulated by male fantasy, although they saw themselves as having finally been liberated from Puritan constraints": *op.cit.*, p. 358.

[85] Bliven, *op.cit.*, p. 4.

[86] Studlar, *op.cit.*, p. 163. Even amongst the more radical feminists of the earlier generation, like Helene Stöcker in Germany, the young 'new' woman was criticised for her selfishness. Stöcker had fought for a new sexual equality embracing 'free love' as an act of rebellion against an outmoded double standard, and resented the younger generation's promiscuity and rejection of motherhood because she viewed it as merely hedonistic. It was felt that the flapper blindly took for granted rights that had been hard-won in recent memory by their elders, and that they were guided not by ideological ideals but by "fashion, mass media and consumerism": Usborne, 'The New Woman and Generational Conflict', pp. 146-9.

[87] Brown, *op.cit.*, p. 192. Also see William O'Neill, *Everyone was brave: the rise and fall of feminism in America*, Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969, pp. 295-7, and Mary P. Ryan, *Womanhood in America: from Colonial Times to the Present*, New York: New Viewpoints, 1975, ch. 6, for depictions of the American flapper as apolitical.

equal terms with men. One young woman said in 1922, "the feeling of comradeship is running rampant...The girl does not stand aloof – she and the man meet on common ground..."[88] The flapper existed in a milieu that demanded she sacrifice her individuality to the ultimate universal: to duty. But the ideology of motherhood fostered in the 1920s was not merely a question of the need for repopulation following the demographic impact of the war. Motherhood and subservience went hand in hand, as the flapper well knew. These young women were punished for assuming their lives to be as valuable and full of potential as men's, even as they voted and worked beside them in growing numbers.[89] Despite the potential for social ostracism, the flapper insisted on being the comrade of the man, claiming her right to be recognised and valued as a self-sufficient individual, as he was.

She often had to leave home to do this, as the large city offered opportunities for self-expression that were not available in small communities, under the influence of family. In the city, as Zelda Fitzgerald's Alabama reflected, "Almost everybody had theories: that the Longacre Pharmacies carried the best gin in town; that anchovies sobered you up...but nobody knew how to have a baby."[90] The city, while representing danger to women as the 'masculine' aggressive sphere, was a space untainted by the narrow confines of traditional understandings of womanhood. It offered freedom of self-consciousness, a 'room of one's own' where there was literally no space for children, and the opportunity to do paid work, to be economically independent and self-sufficient. If the flapper seemed more interested in recreating freely with men than with 're-creating' them for the nation, she did not lack serious purpose. In this pervasively natalist climate, she insisted on living a life of intrinsic human value, independent of her reproductive capacity.

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[88] Quote from Fass, op.cit., p. 307. The new spirit of comradeship was reflected in radical new challenges to the institution of marriage. The notion of the companionate marriage was a controversial topic in the bourgeois world of the 1920s, partly because its proponents often linked it to calls for the legalisation of birth control within established relationships. Though the idea of a marriage that could be easily dissolved, given there were no children involved, was a topic of heated debate in all countries undergoing the trauma of changing gender roles, the best-known argument for it was put by Judge Ben Lindsey in the United States: see Ben B. Lindsey and Wainwright Evans, The Companionate Marriage, London: Brentano's Ltd., 1928. Oswald Spengler linked the 'new marriage' to the fall in natality: "now emerges the Ibsen woman, the comrade, the heroine of a whole megalopolitan literature from Northern drama to Parisian novel. Instead of children, she has soul-conflicts; marriage is craft-art for the achievement of 'mutual understanding'": Spengler, The Decline of the West, p. 105.
[89] Except in France, where women did not win the franchise until 1944.

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[90] Fitzgerald, *Save Me the Waltz*, p. 46.

Conclusion:
'Women are good for other things...'

The 'chill-mindedness' detected in the flapper was the lack of will to nurture others, which in a woman translates as 'selfishness' and 'shallowness'. Fitzgerald's Gloria is described as having a "disturbed and childish heart" in a novel dominated by references to her revulsion at the "earthiness, the intolerable sentiment of child bearing."[1] Depopulation was a moral issue because the collapse of a paradigm of femininity inextricable from motherhood, and the separation of sexuality from procreation made posible by birth control, foreboded a collapse of traditional gender roles. Women, freed from obligatory motherhood, can be equal partners with men, in marriage and society as a whole.

Measures taken in the 1920s to raise the birth rate had no effect, as the official pronatalist line did not accord with the needs and decisions of individuals. States had fought only the symptoms of social and economic shifts: depopulation was a manifestation of deeper processes of social change, affecting all industrial countries, that could not be reversed. The debate about fertility decline and birth control was bound up with the debate about the changing roles of the sexes, and the realisation that female identity could no longer be defined by reference to the maternal, domestic role.

Theories about fertility compare the fatalistic attitude of the 'traditional' man to 'modern' urbanites who are understood to be more open to change and innovation.[2] These ideas were in currency at the time of the flapper's incursion into the male domain of the city. Mimicking the jazz musicians of their time, this urban-based middle or upper-class woman dealt in innovation, in improvisation, composing a 'larger life' beyond motherhood. This was possible in large cities, spaces of potentiality where women went to work and play as autonomous individuals, taking advantage of the anonymity of urban space to create lives that were their own.

The flapper brought about a revolution that would alter the lives of women to a startling degree. As Spengler bemoaned, "it is all the same whether the case against children is the American lady's who would not miss a season for anything, or the

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[1] Fitzgerald, *The Beautiful and the Damned,* pp. 187, 319.
[2] Fawcett and Bornstein, *op.cit.,* p. 123.

Parisienne's who fears that her lover will leave her, or an Ibsen heroine who 'belongs to herself' – *they all belong to themselves and they are all unfruitful.* "[3] The flapper aroused fear and anger because she embodied the potential for all women to take up the 'case against children': that women cannot be independent and self-willed, and live on equal terms with men, if they are defined by fertility and family life.

On New Year's Eve 1930, Pope Pius XI issued *Costi Connubii*, an encyclical on Christian marriage that denounced sex without intention to procreate, imposed absolute prohibition on contraception and abortion, and insisted on women's subordinate position within the family. It warned that the freedom to choose a life other than motherhood was "not the true emancipation of women" but the "debasing of the womanly character." The notion of woman's equality with men was "unnatural": a "false liberty," because the woman's descent from her "truly regal throne…within the walls of the home" would rob her of her dignity.[4] The encyclical was a clear attack on the New Woman of the 1920s in Western Europe and America, the flapper who had demanded the dignity of a life not determined by her biological capacity.

These women demanded recognition as individuals first, and potential mothers second. The flapper said this by choosing fashions that made the breasts and hips "neither more nor less important than any other part of the female body,"[5] by claiming the same freedoms and behaviours as men and working class women, by working to be independent, and by making the large city – anathema to traditional, 'maternal' womanhood – her home. Kollontai observed, "Before us stands woman as personality, before us stands a *human being possessing a characteristic value*, with her own individuality, who asserts herself – in short, the woman who has broken the rusted fetters of her sex."[6] The flapper lived in a world that saw this as a *false* freedom, a *false* idea of womanhood: as a German newspaper decried in 1929, "woman's *real* work is motherliness, and thus sacrifice."[7]

The choosing of a different kind of womanhood, a womanhood conceived by others as false, was not an easy, 'egotistical' option. The flapper did not deal in frivolous contrariety. Though she has been condemned for being shallow, selfish and

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[3] Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, p. 105.
[4] Quoted in Bell and Offen, *op.cit.*, pp. 310-14.
[5] Roberts, *op.cit.*, p. 68.
[6] Kollontai, *op.cit.*, p. 74, my emphasis.
[7] Hausen, *op.cit.*, p. 145, my emphasis.

flippant about the gains of feminism, nothing could be more 'political' than what the flapper represented: womanhood free from biological destiny, free to roam civic space, and 'good' for any number of human, individual endeavours.

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