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Stephen Legg. *Prostitution and the Ends of Empire: Scale, Governmentalities, and Interwar India*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015. xi + 281 pp. \$25.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8223-5773-5; \$94.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8223-5759-9.



Reviewed by Tara Suri (Princeton University)

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Stephen Legg's *Prostitution and the Ends of Empire: Scales, Governmentalities, and Interwar India* is an important exploration of late colonial preoccupations with the brothel, a "scandalous" space fueling the archival accretions that sustain contemporary historical inquiry. Since the publication of Judith Walkowitz's *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* [1980] and Kenneth Ballhatchet's *Race, Sex, and Class under the Raj* [1980]) landmark works over thirty years ago, a rich historiography has emerged on the governance of transactional sex across imperial contexts, especially British India. This historiography has contributed to theorizing on intimacy, sexuality, race, and the colonial state, engaging with the archival politics of what Anjali Arondekar terms "the seductions of recovery." [1] Recent scholarship has sought to map the messy application and negotiation of laws addressing transactional sex across different regional contexts of colonial India. Such scholarship has characterized, moreover, the slippage between categories like prostitution and trafficking. [2]

In *Prostitution and the Ends of Empire*, Legg builds on this literature and his earlier work to examine a key transition in the governance of prostitution in the interwar era, a period that has received less attention in the historiography. His work traces how systems involving the

regulation and segregation of prostitutes were replaced with efforts seeking to suppress prostitution and abolish tolerated brothels. The shift in governance reflected a shift in how the brothel was imagined. Once "a site of social and biological safety and visibility" that prevented the spread of venereal disease, in the interwar era, the brothel became a site "of risk and occlusion" linked to the problem of trafficking (p. 239). Legg tells the story of this shift by examining the role of a range of ideas, events, and actors, including the central colonial state, provincial governments, military officials, health experts, police, moral campaigners with differing agendas, and women labeled prostitutes. Attending to these different spatial and temporal dynamics necessitates an approach that questions the coherence of scalar categories like the "local," "national," "imperial," and "international." In its consideration of these scales, Legg's empirical contribution offers methodological and theoretical interventions that are of relevance to the study of gender and sexuality, law, urbanism, history of medicine, colonialism, international relations, and South Asia, among others.

Focusing on the city of Delhi, the first chapter tracks the spatial marginalization of women labeled prostitutes onto G. B. Road, a locale that continues to connote vice in present-day imaginations. Legg examines the logics—of

municipal government branches concerned with public morality, army officials anxious about venereal disease, and women's organizations with different rehabilitative agendas—that converged and diverged through the articulation of the problem of prostitution and the devising of strategies for its management. To assess the operation of these logics, he extends the literature on colonial governmentality via an engagement with Giorgio Agamben. Following scholarship critiquing Michel Foucault's neglect of colonialism, this engagement foregrounds the primacy of sovereign power in relation to biopolitical and disciplinary imperatives. Legg illustrates how the governance of transactional sex exemplified the "excesses and neglects" of the colonial state (p. 45), which at once abdicated responsibility by framing prostitution as a social problem requiring the intervention of civil society and also sought to control such intervention. In this way, the naming of the "social" was constitutive of colonial civil society.

The colonial state's uneven abdication and assertion of authority was mirrored by what Legg usefully posits as the "(inclusive) exclusion" and "(excluding) inclusion" of women labeled prostitutes (p. 52). While, for example, residents' associations successfully petitioned to evict prostitutes from their communities, the local government still attributed certain rights to them and sought to find an appropriate site for their relocation. Conversely, while abolitionist and women's organizations successfully lobbied for legislation that banned tolerated brothels and focused on rehabilitation, rescue homes were underfunded and a policy of segregation continued. Friction between these processes of exclusion and inclusion resulted in the "civil abandonment" of the prostitute on G. B. Road. Yet without fetishizing resistance, Legg shows how groups of prostitutes protested eviction, "negotiat[ing] the degree and location of their abandonment" (p. 93).

While the first chapter looks at the relationship between the colonial state and civil society in governing prostitution in Delhi, the second chapter shifts its scalar lens to look at the dynamic between the central and provincial governments in the passage of suppressionist legislation. Examining this dynamic unravels the conceptual unity of the nation by considering regional difference. Legg demonstrates how the central government named prostitution as a problem of "local" scale, shunting responsibility to provincial governments. In response to moral campaigning, the emerging field of sexology, League of Nations data, and reports of scandal, these governments enacted a series of provincial Suppression of

Immoral Traffic Acts.

Yet while the acts included provisions for rescue and rehabilitation, Legg shows that their implementation focused on criminalizing solicitation and brothel closure, thereby contributing to the civil abandonment of the prostitute. Taken together, then, the first and second chapters emphasize the disjuncture between the stated aspirations of law and its effects. Legg's approach converges here with legal scholarship that does not presume the effects of law (for example, Prabha Kotiswaran's *Dangerous Sex, Invisible Labor: Sex Work and the Law in India* [2011]); in its nuanced examination of sovereign power, the book would prove of interest to scholars examining contemporary, "carceral" anti-trafficking efforts.

The final chapter takes a more explicitly transnational turn, locating the shift from segregation to suppression within an interwar landscape marked by the internationalism of the League of Nations, which sought to address trafficking through its Social Section. Legg tells this scalar story via Meliscent Shephard, a British representative of the London-based Association for Moral and Social Hygiene who campaigned for the suppression of tolerated brothels and trafficking in India from 1928 to 1947. Situating Shephard within histories of imperial feminism and hygiene, Legg shows how she appealed to different scales in her advocacy. The chapter follows her legislative lobbying in different Indian cities, investigations of red-light areas, circulation of reports and texts on trafficking, advocacy at League of Nations meetings, ambivalences, alliances, and rivalries. By detailing Shephard's engagements within different scalar sites, the chapter's appeal to individual narrative methodologically underscores the role of people in constituting and reconstituting the "local," "national," "imperial," and "international." The depth of attention to this fraught figure moreover illustrates the contingencies and indeterminacy shaping these scales and associated institutions. In this, the chapter reflects the book's broader governmentality framework, which draws together Foucauldian "apparatus" and Deleuzian "assemblage" to conceptualize scale.

Ultimately, Legg shows, a conflict of scale contributed to the end of Shephard's career in India. Namely, Shephard's ideological commitment to the racial hierarchies of the colonial state caused her relationships with nationalist Indian women's organizations to falter. That these groups collaborated with but eventually socially rejected Shephard points to the complexities shaping their own role in governing prostitution. It raises further questions

about how to conceptualize the “scale” of their anticolonial visions in relation to the institutionally enshrined scales emphasized in the book.

Through its three chapters, *Prostitution and the Ends of Empire* structurally enacts its exploration of these scales as spaces and effects of governing. In showing how the brothel is taken up as a problem of local, national, imperial, and international significance, Legg opens up the constitution of state/civil society, province/nation, international/national, and metropole/periphery. The attention to the circulation of ideas—relating to sexology, moral hygiene, and colonial medicine—through these spaces moreover incorporates an analysis of scale within what one might call an intellectual history of suppression. Nimble moving through a range of literatures, archives, and materials in a way that is itself multiply scaled, *Prostitution and the Ends of Empire* offers insights

for scholars across disciplines.

Notes

[1]. Anjali Arondekar, *For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 1.

[2]. See, for example, Sarah Hodges, “‘Looting’ the Lock Hospital in Colonial Madras during the Famine Years of the 1870s,” *Social History of Medicine* 18, no. 3 (2005): 379-398; Janaki Nair, “‘Imperial Reason,’ National Honour and New Patriarchal Compacts in Early Twentieth-Century India,” *History Workshop Journal* 66, no. 1 (2008): 208-226; and Ashwini Tambe, *Codes of Misconduct: Regulating Prostitution in Late Colonial Bombay* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

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