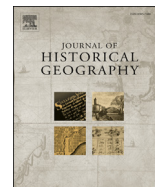




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## Review

**Global Anti-Vice Activism, 1890–1950: Fighting Drinks, Drugs, and “Immorality”,** Jessica R. Pliley, Robert Kramm and Harald Fischer-Tiné, (Eds.). Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (2016). 366 pages, £74.99 hardcover.

‘How could the likes of Bishop James “Holy” Johnson, fitness entrepreneur Eugen Sandow, anti-imperialist Mohandas Gandhi, and nudist-eugenicist Caleb Saleeby pull at the same reform yoke?’ So asks David Courtwright (p. 313) in his afterword to this enterprising collection of twelve empirical chapters, gathered into three sections: ‘Health and the body’; ‘Drink and drugs’; ‘Prostitution and sex trafficking’.

Nudist and eugenicist might seem a rather incongruous pairing, but it is through identifying these very links that the first section makes its mark, highlighting the embodied nature of moral reform. Precisely through the way it performed a scripting of ‘regeneration and restoration’, for Philippa Levine (p. 36), for example, the nudity of the likes of Caleb Saleeby was as much an anti-vice project as it was a target for campaigners who likened it to obscenity. In like manner, Carey Watt shows that the ‘natural healing’ of Eugen Sandow could be consistent with eugenic imperatives—a mirror he held up to the vice of a corrupted age as he conducted his world tour in 1904–5—while serving as a means for the Anglo-German strongman to make money, of course. Some campaigners, as Antony Taylor’s chapter shows, marked their difference through a kind of spatial separation, recreating themselves through nudism in utopic isolation. The nude walked a delicate line, however, and their commune easily opposed by anti-vice campaigners as ‘godless Edens’ that fostered rather than defeated moral degradation. Moral reform was shaped by a politics of display, then; as the editors note, the body was bound into moralising and racialising discourses of health and security.

Reformist impulses shaped new transnational moral geographies as vice became, as Courtwright noted, ‘steam-propelled’ (p. 314), problems made mobile and amplified by globalization. The chapters elaborate not merely the creation of new connections, however, nor simply the effects of expanding networks of travel: significantly, they show how the *definitions* and diagnoses of problems and solutions were themselves changed by these new geographies. Stephen Legg puts it this way, in his chapter on interwar India: ‘the imperial government and its official and non-official populations, as well as Indian entrepreneurs and laborers, were internationally mobile, thus making diseased prostitutes in India a transnational problem’ (p. 247). Diagnosis and deliberation across a definitional (and subsequently archival) network that included New Delhi, London, and the League of Nations in Geneva reflected, Legg notes, the newly ‘transnational nature of the risk’ (p. 265).

As well as the history of regulation, the lesson from the volume is to attend to the geography of definition, of the ways knowledge

shaped the identification of issues commanding intervention. It was through that space of travel and connection that local circumstances were remade as transnational concerns. This fact is reflected in important reflections on the composition and compilation, materiality and mobility of reports and inquiries, as they were sent from local to central governments, and across the spaces of empire or between NGOs and state agencies. Charles Ambler’s discussion of the Colonial Office’s inquiry into liquor in Southern Nigeria highlights overlapping, even conflicting, racialised geographies of ‘missionary, humanitarian, and commercial enterprises’ (p. 106). Bishop Johnson might find moral support for prohibition amongst temperance campaigners, although his argument that the liquor traffic was a form of what Ambler calls ‘economic imperialism’ (p. 109), a kind of slavery, relied upon a very different moral geography of empire to that of colonial administrators and even missionaries. Attitudes to imperialism, we learn from Pavel Vasilyev, shaped attitudes to vice in a very different context of early-twentieth Russia. Vasilyev tracks the influence of and interchange with German medical knowledge as well as local moral constructions, and demonstrates how early Soviet observers came to root addiction in the remains of the imperial regime, ‘a disease especially connected to bourgeois modernity’ (p. 194).

In this vein several chapters pay heed to the international and indeed scalar nature of knowledge collection and exchange. Legg’s attention to the role of the League of Nations has a more recent parallel in Diego Armus’s discussion of the impact of a globalized public health on attempts to toughen Argentina’s domestic smoking policy. It is an important reminder that intoxicants remain big business. Nikolay Kamenov situates Bulgarian medical temperance knowledge in the context of international alcohol congresses—testing grounds for national ideas of social hygiene, heredity, and degeneration in interwar Europe, for sure, but also influenced by the investigative work of ‘transnational epistemic communities’ (p. 128), supported by the likes of the Rockefeller Foundation. Jessica Pliley shows how, through its Bureau of Investigation (later FBI), the US government ‘embraced the Progressive-Era mania’ for inquiry, developing a very local testing ground through its monitoring of prostitution (p. 227). But she is also keen to stress that anti-white slavery campaigns folded outwards, as reformers ‘forged transnational ties with each other’ across the Atlantic (p. 222). In his study of distillation and venereal disease in West Africa, Emmanuel Akyeampong highlights how Americans travelled across the British Empire, a space of investigation and education for reformers keen to defend and promote American moral virtues. Akyeampong’s focus is the threat of venereal disease and illicit distillation to empire in British West Africa in the 1930s and 1940s. Contributing to our understanding of just how American reformers used the space of Britain’s empire, Akyeampong’s chapter also assesses how the domestic failure of prohibition in the United States

challenged its international moral imagination, one that had been shaped by such exchanges as anti-vice activists as they girdled the globe.

It would be a mistake to assume that this globalizing anti-vice activism was synonymous with sameness. Indeed, it is through reading the local grammars of reform, to paraphrase the editors, that the reach and limits of reform can be mapped, and those challenges and failures interrogated. Elizabeth Remick shows that the regulation of prostitution arrived comparatively late in China, 'from Paris via Tokyo' (p. 271), after early-twentieth century reformers looked to Japan for a model to reform policing. While the urge to regulate was also encouraged by international agreements on white slavery, the Chinese system was not driven by the exact same biomedical concerns of regulation in Japan and Korea. There was no formal network of local hospitals to tackle venereal disease but instead police-administered rescue homes to support state interests by promoting a path away from prostitution. Finally, these systems for regulating prostitution form the context for Robert

Kramm's examination of attempts to educate soldiers in 1940s US-occupied Japan and Korea to comport themselves responsibly—effectively to be both subjects and objects of reform—in what continued to be read as feminized and dangerous foreign lands.

In their introduction the editors note that issues of moral reform were 'simultaneously embedded in a global grammar and pre-existing local traditions of vice regulation' (p. 14). I am persuaded of their claim that the entanglement of these discourses and practices makes moral reform 'an ideal topic for global history' (p. 17); showing how such developments were forged through the mobility and newly transnational moral imaginations of this globalizing era importantly also opens space for a distinctive historical geography.

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