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Philip Howell
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GEOGRAPHIES OF REGULATION

In the nineteenth century, British authorities at home and abroad attempted to regulate prostitution in order to combat the spread of venereal diseases. Philip Howell examines in detail four sites of such regulated prostitution – Liverpool, Cambridge, Gibraltar and Hong Kong – and considers the similarities as well as the differences between colonial and metropolitan practices. Placing these sites within their local, regional and global contexts, the author argues that the British administration of commercial sexuality was deeper and more extensive than conventionally portrayed. The book challenges our understanding of what constitutes colonial regulation and also confronts imperial historiographies in which projects are simply translated from metropolis to periphery. By emphasizing both particular sites of regulated prostitution, and their place in the British imperial world, this book contributes not only to histories of gender and sexuality, but also to the revision of British imperial history.

PHILIP HOWELL is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Geography, Cambridge University, and a Fellow of Emmanuel College, Cambridge.

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Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Britain and the Empire

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,
São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521853651

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First published 2009

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data
Howell, Philip, 1965–
Geographies of regulation: policing prostitution in nineteenth-century Britain and the Empire / Philip Howell.
p. cm. (Cambridge studies in historical geography 43)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-521-85365-1 (hardback) 1. Prostitution–Great Britain–History–19th century. 2. Prostitution–Great Britain–Colonies–History–19th century.
I. Title.
HQ185.A5.H68 2009
363.4′40917124109034–dc22 2009020684

ISBN 978-0-521-85365-1 hardback

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Preface and acknowledgements

They're not so unimportant, the places we live in. They aren't only the framework for our actions, they involve themselves in the actions, they change the scenery; and not infrequently, when we say 'circumstances', what we really mean is a particular place which never became interested in us. Christa Wolf, *The Quest for Christa T.*

My old department office looks down onto Downing Place. Not very much more than a hundred years ago, if the same vantage point had existed, the view would have included the backyard of the Spinning House, the University's private prison, where women suspected of being common prostitutes were locked up and compelled to undergo inspection for signs of venereal disease. Today it is the noises associated with laboratory animals that carry, but back then it might have been the sounds of commotion from incarcerated women. Every day, I pass not only the location of the Spinning House, but also those of other Victorian disciplinary institutions: the former police station, the old town gaol, and the servants' training institute set up by University clergymen, part of whose mission was to divert wayward girls from a career of prostitution. Crossing like this into what was once known as 'Barnwell' is far from the journey that it was in the nineteenth century, but the social divisions that helped to authorise the policing of prostitution can be faintly felt even so. It does not take that great a feat of the imagination to imagine the geographies of regulation that once existed, and the circumstances that Christa Wolf's narrator sees as reducing individuals more or less to anonymity even as they dominate and structure their lives.

This book does indeed primarily concern the contours of power and control in particular places, rather than, say, the practices of prostitution or the experiences of sex workers. I have tried nonetheless, even and especially when the archives offered little in terms of the nature and texture of people's lives, to remember those who inhabited these landscapes of regulation. My route out of the heart of town, down Mill Road, skirts the cemetery where the fifteen-year-old sex worker Emma Rolfe, the victim of a brutal murder, is buried, and whose headstone I chanced upon years ago. It was always salutary to remember that Emma Rolfe was more than a name in a register, though what we know of most other women

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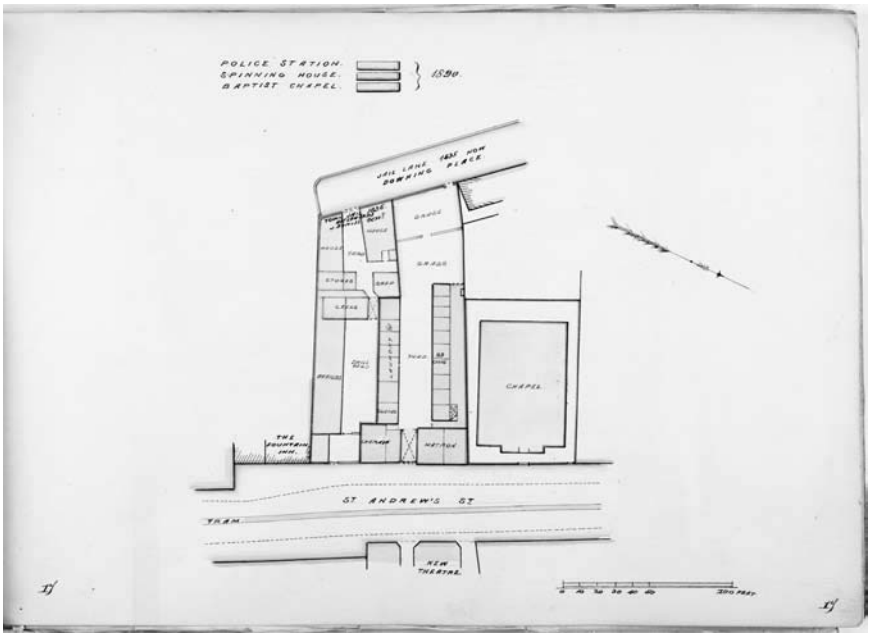

Figure 0.1 Plan of Spinning House, Cambridge. Source: Cambridge University Library MS. Plans. a.1(17).

in her situation is limited largely to what was recorded in the bureaucracy of regulation. And, whilst she clearly cannot stand in for all those who participated in the business of sex, the characterisation of sex workers as, or only as, victims being politically problematic, she remains all the same a reminder of how dangerous 'sex work' can be. Whether it is appropriate to use words like 'sex worker' to describe women like her is also debatable, and it might be worth pointing out that I have generally avoided contemporary terminology in this book. I have instead tended to switch between terms such as 'prostitute', 'prostituted woman', 'prostitute woman', and (very occasionally) 'sex worker', if only to acknowledge the terminological, conceptual and political difficulties involved in any writing on this topic. Whilst this book is not intended as a contribution to current controversies, I might hereby enter a plea that the complexity and diversity of 'Victorian' approaches to policing 'prostitution' be recognised, and not reduced as it so often is to a caricature of repressive moralism.

It is a very long time since I began researching this topic, and it is a surprise to me, if perhaps not to others, quite how long this book has taken to write. Partly, and inevitably given the nature of modern academic life, this is because research typically has to be directed at the relative immediacy of journal publication. I am accordingly grateful to the editors of a number of journals, and to my co-authors,

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for permission to use material that was published first in the form of the following papers: 'A private Contagious Diseases Act: prostitution and public space in Victorian Cambridge', *Journal of Historical Geography* 26 (2000), 376–402; (with David Lambert) 'John Pope Hennessy and the translation of "slavery" between late nineteenth-century Barbados and Hong Kong', *History Workshop Journal,* 55 (2003), 1–24; 'Race, space and the regulation of prostitution in colonial Hong Kong', *Urban History*, 31 (2004), 229–48; 'Sexuality, sovereignty and space: law, government and the geography of prostitution in colonial Gibraltar', *Social History,* 29 (2004), 444–64; (with David Beckingham and Francesca Moore) 'Managed zones for sex workers in Liverpool: contemporary proposals, Victorian parallels', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers,* 33 (2008), 233–50.

Partly too, the equally immediate needs of teaching have taken their toll, though I am at the same time extremely glad to have had the opportunity to have shared this research with several generations of undergraduates, particularly those taking my specialist projects and papers. I have benefited from their comments and questions more than I have usually let on. This is also an opportunity to acknowledge the contribution of a number of students and one-time students who have become colleagues and friends. David Lambert, with whom I have collaborated in researching the imperial career of Sir John Pope Hennessy, has been one of the most important, and it has been a pleasure to watch the progress of his career. Another is Stephen Legg, who has, in addition to sharing his ideas and expertise, well above the call of duty and friendship, cajoled, reprimanded and generally encouraged, all at the right times. Rory Gallagher and Andy Tucker, who have worked on the geographies of contemporary sexuality, have also been invaluable to talk to and argue with. One of my own graduate students, Jong-Geun Kim, has been of great service in discussing another imperial regime of regulated prostitution. But it has probably been my other current graduates who have been the greatest help. It has been a real privilege to supervise Francesca Moore and David Beckingham, and I can record their contribution here without needing to say much more than that I have learned a great deal with them and from them, and that I would not have missed it for the world. Of course, I am responsible for any errors and flaws that exist.

My colleagues in the Geography Department at Cambridge, past and present, have been enormously important to me, even though, as I suppose that I have been independent to a fault, they may not immediately recognise it. Alan Baker, Mark Billinge, Robin Glasscock and Derek Gregory were my earliest guides and inspirations. Subsequently, Jim Duncan, Nancy Duncan, Gerry Kearns, David Nally and Richard Smith demonstrated that academic clusters were useful well beyond the needs of administrative convenience. Others whom I have studied with in and at Cambridge include Sarah Bendall, Iain Black, Andrew Crowhurst, Felix Driver, Miles Ogborn and Chris Philo, who have all given me further help and support. I would like to single out Miles Ogborn, to whose work on the Contagious Diseases Acts I am indebted; I am very grateful indeed to draw upon some of his work here. Others whose research has been close and cognate are

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Satish Kumar, whom I met at a point when this research was starting, and who has been a great academic companion ever since; Richard Phillips, who has always provided a more comprehensive analysis of the regulation of sexuality and its historical geography; and – above all perhaps – Philippa Levine, who has set the bar stratospherically high but who has also been unfailingly generous, characteristically interdisciplinary, always encouraging. I have also benefited from talking to and corresponding with Caroline Bressey, Michael Brown, Paul Deslandes, Richard Dennis, Julia Laite, Paul Laxton and Alan Lester. Additional help, large and small, has come from Maeve Bent, Lynn Hollen Lees, Jonathan Parry, Maria Paschalidi, and Chris Whitton. Maria Paschalidi and her family offered me astonishing hospitality as well as help in Corfu, and Ingrid de Smet and Hugo Tucker provided the same service, a long time ago now, in Oxford. Other friends, for whose intellectual and social support I give heartfelt thanks, include Stuart Basten, Millie Glennon, Nic Higgins and Estelle Levin.

I received a small but important grant from HSBC, administered by the Royal Geographical Society with the Institute of British Geographers, which I gratefully acknowledge, in addition to financial support from the Department of Geography, the University of Cambridge and Emmanuel College. At the Drawing Office in the Department of Geography, Ian Agnew, Owen Tucker and, in particular, Philip Stickler, gave me great help in drawing up most of the maps and graphs in this book, too often requested woefully late. The staff, fellows and the Master of Emmanuel have also provided a wonderful academic home for me, with, amongst other notable advantages, probably the best computing office in the world. The archivists, librarians and record keepers with whom I have worked have been uniformly helpful and well informed, and sincere thanks are proffered to them all. Chris Jakes of the Cambridgeshire Collection, Denis Beiso and Tom Finlayson in Gibraltar, Kate McNichol at the Merseyside Police Information Management and Disclosure Department in Liverpool, and Simon Bailey at the Bodleian in Oxford have been particularly helpful. I am also grateful to the Oxford University proctors for permission to use material from the university archives, specifically the 'Black Book'. The same goes for material from Cambridge University Library, the Cambridgeshire Collection of the Cambridgeshire Library Services, Liverpool Central Library and the Royal Geographical Society. It is a further pleasure to acknowledge the efforts of my successive editors at Cambridge University Press – first Richard Fisher, who commissioned the book, and, secondly, Michael Watson, who took over responsibility for it. I am also very grateful to Helen Waterhouse for overseeing the production progress so ably and patiently.

Finally, and most importantly, I owe everything to my parents and family and to my wife, Elizabeth Mozzillo, for their continuing support. This book is scant enough reward for their love and forbearance, but it was always written with gratitude to them in mind.

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