

LAITE, JULIA. *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens. Commercial Sex in London, 1885–1960.* [Genders and Sexuality in History.] Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke [etc.] 2012. 299 pp. Maps. £55.00. doi:10.1017/S0020859013000540

Dr Julia Laite has undertaken the arduous task of studying the evolution of prostitution in London between 1885 and 1960. Both the geographical setting and the period covered by her research are extensive, but she succeeds in presenting a new perspective on the history of London prostitution. Whilst punctuating her argument with interesting quantitative data, Laite shows that many sources deserve a more thorough textual analysis if we are to use them to understand the gradual criminalization of prostitution.

Laite begins with an overview of the existing literature, highlighting the main issue concerning the historiography: historians of prostitution have focused mostly on nineteenth-century prostitution, leaving aside local causes and other time periods, although both of these had a significant influence on how prostitution was perceived, practised, and controlled. Laite has opted not to use the archives of charitable institutions, but has focused instead on criminal and police records. She rightly defines prostitution as a diverse phenomenon: prostitution is not a single occupation but a multiform economic enterprise. Her main question focuses on the process of criminalization and how negative features of prostitution were created or aggravated by its status as a criminalized activity (p. 41). The core of her subject is therefore English legislation on prostitution over the course of almost a century; the chapters follow a chronological order, from the end of the Victorian era up to the Wolfenden Report (1957).

Various themes run throughout her work: the appropriation and the use of urban space, for example, appear as essential components of the practice of prostitution and its policing. The geography of London prostitution was, and is still, varied, and no red-light districts were created, though certain areas (Soho, most notably) were renowned for the availability of sex workers. Prostitutes moved according to demand, and during the two world wars prostitutes went soliciting in those districts where soldiers were billeted or met them in clubs, bars, and private bottle parties. The interwar period saw licensed establishments taking over the commercial sex space in parallel with a multiplication of privately rented flats. As Laite rightly notes, “prostitution was woven into the fabric of urban space, culture and economy” and therefore evolved according to the changes felt by the urban setting (p. 86). Soliciting was not an offence (if practised without “annoyance”), and up to World War II soliciting in the street was common for most prostitutes, regardless of their class or tariff. In trying to get access to new public spaces, women often faced excessive police zeal; “annoyance” was rarely proved, and arrests and condemnations were highly discretionary throughout the period.

Repression increased over the years, through a range of criminal legislation and licensing laws. Scientific discoveries, such as fingerprinting, were also used to keep track of prostitutes. However, prostitutes often had a good knowledge of the law and the legal system, and strategies were put in place to avoid arrest and prosecution. Bogus marriage, moving off-street, and the use of a legitimate business as a cover for prostitution were already common during the Edwardian era. Despite these strategies, the risks taken by prostitutes were increased when the police forced them into back alleys and other personal spaces off-street.

Laite also mentions the role of the press in the upsurge of moral panics and the attention-seeking articles on prostitutes and the inherent dangers of letting them loose: the fear of white slavery, of venereal diseases, or the “shame of London” before the 1953 Coronation are examples of newspaper attacks against prostitutes. She convincingly argues that most of these fears and panics were unfounded and were literary creations of zealous journalists and concerned civil society, whereas public complaints against prostitutes did not increase.

Her study concludes with a fine analysis of the Wolfenden Report. Laite's analysis of the report and its consequences is very convincing: dual narratives and triple standards both had an impact on the conclusions of this report. She explains how labelling women as "common prostitutes" was used to justify street control in parallel with a pathologization of prostitution, due to a "long-standing dichotomization of agency and victimhood" (p. 198). The Wolfenden Report recommended national legislation, but its effect on London was rather surprising. The move to off-street (vans, clubs) and indoor locations appeared to have been underway before the new legislation, as the number of arrests for soliciting did not increase after the law had been passed, contrary to what had been predicted. In parallel, street soliciting became a lower-class activity, avoided by women who could afford advertisements and a private flat. Laite concludes that the legislation was ineffective in repressing prostitution but "did do a great deal to change the contours and shape [...] the experience of women who sold sex" (p. 212): new ways of conducting business were conceived and new strategies put in place to avoid the police.

Though this conclusion is convincing and highlights the peculiarities of Laite's study in terms of strategies and prostitutes' agency, her book ignores some important issues. Firstly, who are the ordinary citizens mentioned in the title? The study starts with maps of London prostitution, and one would have expected to see a closer examination of the relationship between London's inhabitants and the capital's prostitutes. However the "ordinary citizens" are very rarely mentioned. Laite claims that in most parts of the city prostitutes had a good relationship with their neighbours in 1953 (p. 185). It is also claimed, however, that community tolerance was eroded, leaving the reader unable to decide whether prostitutes were integrated into the community or not (p. 189).

Another issue that deserves attention is the misrepresentation of the reality of prostitution outside England. Examples of the regulation of prostitution "on the continent" are sporadically given to illustrate the discrepancy between the London and the "French" systems. However, the examples given often rely on stereotypes. The French system, though tried in different countries, was not uniform (even in France) and did not accurately represent the continent.

Concerning women in the street and in public spaces, it would be interesting to compare the impact of visible street soliciting over the years by district. Women in the street were not a novelty: work-related movements and domestic economic obligations (such as going to the market) meant that women were very often present in the street. The conflict between the use by men and women of the urban public space indicated at the end of the nineteenth century may therefore refer to very specific districts/streets that were not used by women past a certain hour, such as in the West End. This was probably not the case, however, in working-class districts where women were often seen out and about, even early in the morning. A more thorough distinction according to district would be interesting.

Regarding the main argument, the start of the process of criminalizing prostitutes could be dated to before 1885. Laite is right in arguing that prostitutes were considered criminals despite the fact that they were not committing an offence. This is why the process of criminalization cannot be understood solely as a result of repression; it was also a result of a change in representation and categorization. I would date the start of the process of criminalizing prostitutes to an earlier period, when the authorities assigned prostitutes to specific spaces of confinement, such as the Magdalen Hospital, which opened in 1758. This institution specifically targeted prostitutes, by separating them from the working classes and the poor.

The role of the elite in this process is not to be ignored: by creating an institution to reform these women, the upper middle class clearly identified them as different, outside the norm. The process of criminalization shows the importance of taking into account local differences and parallel evolutions: the history of London's prostitution differed

from the history of prostitution in the provinces. Because of the very nature of this process of criminalization (the absence of laws against prostitution), it is necessary to understand it as a mental process and as reflecting a change in behaviour towards and representation of prostitutes. These changes and their influence on the police (the Police Act of 1834) occurred earlier than 1885.

Laite's study is impressive in the great number of sources compiled; despite the extensive time period involved, she manages to keep track of the legislative changes and of police attitudes towards these women. She goes further than simply listing the legislation by showing the impact of these legal changes on the lives of prostitutes. The quality of Laite's textual analysis of the sources is also to be commended: her reflection on the term "common prostitute", how it imbued women with an identity and "stuck" to them, is interesting and convincing. Finally, she also avoids the mistake of overemphasizing particular events that touched on the history of prostitution in London: Jack the Ripper, Josephine Butler, and white slavery. Each topic is recontextualized according to "the bigger picture", and this is very refreshing for studies on prostitution.

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El sindicalismo socialista español. Aproximación oral a la historia de UGT (1931–1975). Dir. Alicia Alted, Manuela Aroca, y Juan Carlos Collado. Fundación Francisco Largo Caballero, [Madrid] [2010]. 407 pp. Ill. € 24.21  
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Oral history and historical memory. These two elements are intertwined and require historians to be equipped with new analytical tools in order to convert oral accounts into historical knowledge. The information provided to the historian goes beyond the walls of the archives, exceeds the official, administrative, written documents and enters the mists of memory. This is not something new, as many twentieth-century authors have had eyewitness testimonies of the events which formed part of the immediate past to construct their accounts. Starting from the 1960s with the rise of social history, we have witnessed a renaissance in the value granted to oral testimonies in the construction of historical knowledge. The bottom-up perspective of history and, to a certain extent, the accompanying de-professionalization (or maybe we should say de-academization) has encouraged oral history. The History Workshops revitalized the historiographic panorama and constructed a new framework of methodological references and documentary resources in the work of the historian.

The ten chapters which make up the book *El sindicalismo socialista español* combine the testimonies of UGT activists with the historians' own accounts over the period between the Second Republic and the end of General Franco's dictatorship. Alicia Alted, who forms part of the work's coordinating team, has been one of the pioneering specialists in Spanish historiography most concerned with the use and the value of oral sources. This task of granting historiographic value to the memories of the main characters in the events to be analysed is reflected throughout the work.

Memory therefore occupies an important place in its pages. It often reflects on the past from the perspective of the present, shaping something similar to what others have called