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*H-France Review* Vol. 17 (July 2017), No. 121

Malte König, *Der Staat als Zuhälter: Die Abschaffung der reglementierten Prostitution in Deutschland, Frankreich und Italien im 20. Jahrhundert*. Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2016. viii + 488 pp. Bibliography and index. \$168.00 U.S. (hb.) ISBN 987-3-1104-6021-6.

Review by Julia Brüggemann, DePauw University.

In the nineteenth century, Europeans regulated female prostitution. In the process, they forced women into brothels, subjected them to intense medical controls, and, in the process, withdrew many of their political and legal rights. In the twentieth century, many states abolished these regulations. Employing a comparative approach and focusing on Italy, Germany, and France, Malte König explores what was behind these policies and explains the factors that led to the changes. He looks for transnational trends, but also takes the unique circumstances in each national context into consideration, specifically to determine what accounts for the timing of each transition. The result is a deeply researched and engaging book, which tells us a lot about parliamentary politics, medical advances, approaches to policing, gender norms, the fear of venereal disease, etc. In other words, the monograph uses the debates and decision-making that led to the abolition of state-controlled brothels in the three states as a window into larger political, social, and cultural processes.

The book seeks to answer a clearly posed set of research questions: Why did the German, French, and Italian states give up on tightly regulated prostitution in the twentieth century? What were the various factors that led to the policy changes, and what do they tell us about the different societies? How do we explain the different timing of these transformations (Germany 1927, France 1946/60, Italy 1958)?

In order to examine these questions, König divides his monograph into two broad parts. Part one examines the background and legal developments in each country separately while part two employs a thematic approach. This organization allows König to give appropriate attention to local specificities and benefit from the advantages of a synchronic comparative approach.

Part one opens the monograph with a detailed overview of the origins and impacts of the regulatory systems that developed in the three countries under investigation in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. König gives an overview of the legal situations, reveals the far reach and great discretion granted to the police authorities in determining the regulatory status of women, and exposes the invasive nature of medical examinations. Moreover, he stresses the cursory nature of the medical checks. What he doesn't consider fully in this section, however, is the continued motivation behind these policies in the nineteenth century, especially given the ineffectiveness of the available treatment options for highly contagious venereal diseases. In other words, why did the regulatory systems persist even as their official rationale—to protect their societies from the spread of venereal disease—ostensibly failed? Still, the value of this section lies in the impressive breadth and depth of the research presented and it effectively sets the stage for part two.

In a subsequent section, König familiarizes the reader with the legal initiatives and political discussions that finally did lead to the legal abolition of regulated prostitution in his three chosen states. Here, he delves into each state's specific circumstances focusing almost exclusively on new laws and the political/parliamentary horse-trading behind them. By treating the development in each state separately, the monograph loses some of its comparative and transnational dimension for a moment. For example, why did the interwar period that brought transformation in Germany not have the same effect in France or Italy? On the other hand, his organizational approach allows König to explore the political pressures specific to each national context in considerable depth, and he returns to the comparative questions later.

In his second part, the analytical heart of the book, König tackles the public and parliamentary debates, their main themes, and the arguments behind the changed laws in a thematic/comparative framework. In other words, here national specifics are investigated as part of larger trends. The book identifies four main themes as they related to the abolition of regulated prostitution: public health policies, social policies, gender hierarchies and emancipation, and national identities.

The first and most important theme König considers in his quest to understand the reasons behind the closing of the brothels is public health and hygiene. This theme leads him to examine the existing status of medical knowledge of various venereal diseases and their mythical standing in popular opinion. The connections between science, abolitionism, and the propagation of scientific, political, and medical agendas are likewise examined. König bases his presentation on contemporary medical tracts, editorial cartoons, plays, and abolitionist films, but also on demographic statistical data tracking fertility, infant mortality, etc. across all three states under consideration. The fear of syphilis, in particular, became a potent motivator for political and social action across all three states. König traces how factually correct and incorrect knowledge (e.g., about the efficiency of various new treatment options) influenced public perception of the diseases, as well as the understanding of the relative effectiveness (or lack thereof for preventing the spread of disease) of regulated brothels and the political implications of this for abolition. König concludes this section by stating that the discovery of effective treatment options, including penicillin, did not significantly influence the decision to close the brothels. Instead, the French especially remained the most affected by a fear of syphilis even after it could be cured. He argues that what ultimately turned the tide towards policy reform in all three states (albeit at different times) was the relationship to the medical community. Once doctors became convinced in each country that brothels spread rather than contained venereal disease, the states came closer to abolishing them.

The second main theme identified by König broadly relates to social and moralistic arguments proffered by various groups and individuals for and against state-licensed brothels independent of their relationship to public health. These included beliefs about the male sexual drive that was understood by many to be more vigorous than the female version. Male abstinence especially was seen by most medical and other authorities as either impossible or exceedingly hard, though this view lost influence over time, especially in Germany and France. Moreover, for many men in all three countries, König argues that visiting a prostitute was seen as a normal act, indeed a ritual of initiation into adulthood. Others, especially socialists, pointed out the class dimension of regulated prostitution where bourgeois men exploited working class women. Prostitution in this view became an institution that stabilized the existing social order, particularly bourgeois marriage. Furthermore, some European doctors insisted on the physiological and moral pathology of the prostitute, which marked her as a born criminal. König shows in great detail how deeply contested all these ideas were, culminating in a debate among contemporaries about the moral effects of existing state-licensed brothels.

A third theme König investigates in some depth is the effect of female politicians and activists on the debate about regulated prostitution, especially the relationship between women's rights to vote and abolitionist activism. König draws a causal connection between the establishment of the female vote and the legal and systemic abolition of regulated, brothelized prostitution. He argues that the presence of

women in the parliaments changed the “climate” of the discussion that made legal changes possible. He also points to the transformative nature of wars (WWI in Germany, WWII in France and Italy).

A final thematic deep-dive concerns the questions surrounding national identity and international influences such as the League of Nations, the United Nations, and organized Christianity. In France, in particular, regulated prostitution that had seemed so foundational to French culture called national identity into question once black colonial troops began to frequent brothels where white French working class women worked. The relatively stronger influence of Catholicism (and the changing position of the Vatican on regulated prostitution) impacted the three states differently. International organizations as well as the developing concepts of human rights had varying influences on the parliamentary debates in all three states as well.

In a final conclusion, König summarizes the main insights of his research and puts the varying factors that influenced the introductions of new laws in Germany, France, and Italy into conversation with each other. Here, his comparative approach really pays off and the reader gets rewarded for working through the details of the previous sections. Developments that may have seemed unique or specific to the individual country appear connected to larger transnational trends.

The monograph was completed as a *Habilitationsschrift* and while the didactic tone can be distracting, his emphasis on detail is nothing short of impressive. In well over 400 pages, König shows mastery of a wide-ranging secondary literature and comprehensive presentations of vast amounts of primary archival and printed sources. The breadth of topics that König addresses and the considerable and detailed research he presents will be useful for many other researchers working on topics connected to his. This may especially be true for scholars of one of the three states interested in finding highly detailed and now accessible comparative information. This reviewer was profoundly impressed with the breadth and depth of the research presented. König proposes deeply researched and thoughtful answers to the questions he posed for his study at the beginning. However, there remains a wealth of avenues for continued inquiry. Given the topic, the theoretical frameworks offered by gender history could have been more fruitfully employed. König bemoans the absence of voices of the women themselves because of their silence in the archival sources he consulted. This is certainly true, but newer theoretical approaches developed by historians of sexuality give us tools to read these silences.

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