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AIPS Research Proposal

Project Title: The Consumption of Prostitution: A History of Buying Sex in the Northwestern Indian Subcontinent, 1858-1918

Historical, anthropological and sociological inquiries into prostitution in South Asia have largely focused on the figure of the person selling sexual services, variously described as *randi*, *tawa'if* and *baiji* across geographies, while remaining silent on the other side of prostitution, that is, its consumption by men. In order to confront this void, I aim to write a history of the consumer of prostitution—the sex buyer—in the northwestern Indian subcontinent from the ascension of the British Raj in 1858 till the end of the First World War. In doing so, I wish to investigate the engagement between sex buyers and sex markets, and to understand the role of buying clienteles in effecting the wider transformations in the sale of sex during the colonial encounter.

I will begin my study at the start of Crown Rule and conclude it at the end of the First World War because this will allow me to address the question of the sex buyer during a period in which prostitution was becoming more systematized and different groups of buying clienteles, such as British and Indian men, were participating as consumers within the same sex markets. During this time, there were also rapidly changing legislative approaches to regulating prostitution by the Government of India, which will permit me to assess the sex buying habits of consumers across different gradations of state interference. In terms of regional grounding, I wish to focus on the northwestern Indian subcontinent, areas that constitute modern-day Pakistan, such as Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan. While I will primarily attend to these regions, I also wish to widen my geographical scope and identify other points of reference in the British Empire for comparative purposes and to better situate my arguments at their broader levels.

My previous research has utilized British archival material to investigate the case of British soldiers and their sex-buying patterns in Oudh and eastern Punjab. In directing my gaze toward the northwestern subcontinent, I wish to expand my focus to a wider clientele that includes a multitude of participants, such as different classes of Indian men alongside British soldiers and administrators, and to consider sex-buying behaviours in rural spaces, such as villages and at *melas* (fairs), in addition to urban spaces and cantonment areas. While remaining cautious that the category of the sex buyer was not homogenous, this approach will provide leeway for a comparison between European and South Asian buyers, insofar as their attitudes, affect and orientation to the sex trade are concerned. It will address the historical neglect of the sex buyer as a category of analysis, as well as the untapped comparative potential between different sets of sex buyers across race and class.

Archival material in Pakistan will offer me access to a wide collection of sources in Urdu, such as newspapers and periodicals, in addition to government reports, commissioner's records and legislative proceedings, which will shed more light on Indian men and their encounter with sex markets in the northwestern subcontinent. I wish to conduct my research across three major provincial archives: the Punjab Archives in Lahore, the Sindh Archives in Karachi and the Balochistan Archives in Quetta. As with my previous archival work, I anticipate that testimony from buyers will be sparse, and that I must undertake a 'reading against the grain' when dealing with my sources in order to recover the motivations of sex buyers. Moreover, as I seek to historically understand the motivations of men who sought the services of female sex workers, my study will be informed by the notion that sexual relationships are determined by power, emotion, mutual affection and hostility. In carrying out this study, I hope to demonstrate the importance of revisiting histories of prostitution from the standpoint of sex buyers, so that we may offer further insight into the behavioural patterns behind the consumption of prostitution.