

Kramm, Robert: *Sanitized Sex. Regulating Prostitution, Venereal Disease, and Intimacy in Occupied Japan 1945–1952*. Oakland: University of California Press 2017. ISBN: 978-0-520-29597-1; XIII, 299 S.

Rezensiert von: Michael Facius, Centre for Transnational History, University College London

In her introduction to an AHR Forum on „Sex in the Transnational Turn,“ Margot Canaday remarked upon the affinities between the history of sexuality and transnational approaches, both of which direct their analytical attention towards interconnections that transgress borders between individuals, cultures, and states, and expressed the hope that the field would at some point „provide a model for imagining a past across and in spite of national borders.“¹ To this reviewer at least, Robert Kramm’s *Sanitized Sex* is a contribution that fully redeems Canaday’s aspirations. I was impressed with the effortless yet systematic way the author moves between a multitude of spatial and discursive configurations and ties them together into a compact and compelling argument: The regulation of sexuality in immediate postwar Japan under US-American occupation affords us deep insights into the workings of empire and world order.

The author’s gaze is steadily trained onto the details of occupation-period management of sex work by both American and Japanese administrative bodies. Kramm has sifted American and Japanese administrative records and fruitfully confronted them with public discourse as well as private sources such as veterans’ memoirs, and there is much to learn here for scholars in the history of science, sexuality, and public administration. At the same time, the book never loses track of the intersections between the situated intimacy of sexual encounters on the one hand and border-crossing discourses, practices and institutions surrounding the issues of prostitution, venereal disease and identity on the other – most centrally in relation to formations of empire.

The introduction frames the postwar occupation as a pivotal moment in twentieth-century transmutations of imperial and colo-

nial power. Building on the seminal work by Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, Kramm adopts a loose definition of empire as „webs of trade, knowledge, migration, military power, and political intervention.“ This opens up a space for comparative analysis beyond the caesura of 1945 and the still often compartmentalized research on individual imperial formations.² It allows Kramm to chart a vector from the Japanese empire via the occupation period to the Cold War-inflected emergence of an American ‘empire of bases’ and beyond, all through the lens of sexual encounters between occupiers and occupied.

Where better to start, then, than with the last two weeks of August 1945, the period of limbo between the Japanese surrender and the arrival of the American occupation forces? It was in this short period that Japanese bureaucrats, politicians and police forces remodeled nineteenth-century imperial gender roles and the wartime network of enforced sexual labor in euphemistically labeled ‘comfort stations’ into a state-sanctioned system of prostitution as a form of international relations: Sex workers in specially set-up ‘recreation quarters’ would act as a living ‘cordon sanitaire’ between the incoming American soldiers and the Japanese populace. Soon after the first GIs began to make use of this new infrastructure, reports of sexual violence surfaced in the mass media, which served to reinforce both Japanese narratives of victimization and the notion that the respectable parts of the ‘national body’ were indeed in need of protection.

The following chapters approach Japanese sex policies through three thematic foci. The first one is security, the most burning issue surrounding prostitution for lawmakers and police forces. How to protect male clients of sex workers from venereal disease? How to shield the general populace from the adverse effects of the sex industry? Kramm explores how sex work was divided into acceptable practices that could be performed more

¹ Margot Canaday, *Thinking Sex in the Transnational Turn*. An Introduction, in: *The American Historical Review* 115/4 (2009), pp. 1250–1257; here p. 1257.

² Tony Ballantyne / Antoinette Burton, *Empires and the Reach of the Global, 1870-1945*, Cambridge 2014.

or less publicly, and unacceptable ones associated with disease and violence, such as street-walking, that were criminalized and prosecuted.

A second theme is that of health. Military physicians and public health officials attempted to find remedies for the epidemic spread of syphilis and gonorrhea. US personnel blamed the underdeveloped Japanese system of public health and directed their energies to the training of Japanese doctors and a more robust public health framework which centrally included the setup of a system for mapping and reporting occurrences and prophylactic facilities where soldiers washed themselves and were supplied with contraceptives and venereal disease-related drugs.

The third main theme of the book is the moral evaluation of prostitution. US chaplains and military commanders tried to instill into servicemen a morality based on self-discipline and abstinence. Character guidance reminded soldiers that they were figure-heads of American values and democracy in an international environment marked by 'Oriental' degeneracy and the looming threat of communism. Japanese public discourse, on the other hand, foregrounded the danger to the public order and established social and racial boundaries; the fallen prostitute, contrasted with a nostalgic image of the pure and glorious imperial past, became a symbol for the miserable state of post-surrender Japanese society at large.

Cutting across the thematic organization of the chapters, three other crucial aspects are highlighted throughout the book. First, the author rightly stresses that agency was always distributed among a wide range of actors. He points out the internal complexity both of the US occupation forces, where the sexual desires of the servicemen regularly thwarted the vision of the General Headquarters and Christian moralists, and on the Japanese side, where government officials at times colluded and clashed with fascist groups and entertainment entrepreneurs.

Secondly, the study is sensitive to the intersections of subject positions and the power differentials they produce. Hierarchies of race, class and gender were reinforced and refashioned through medical, legal and moral

discourses and in actual sexual encounters. Remembering sex with a Japanese prostitute, a US serviceman could imagine that „racial differences dissolved in the liquid passion of my sperm“ (p. 2) at the very same moment he was profiting from a racialized system of sexual services. Conversely, the Japanese bureaucrats who set up the brothels were willing to sacrifice lower-class women to protect the „purity of our race“ (p. 44).

Finally, following Cynthia Enloe, prostitution is regarded as a site where a form of militarized masculinity was enacted and negotiated.³ One of the minor quibbles I had with the book is that Kramm's frequent claims about the heteronormative valence of this militarized masculinity remain somewhat vague. Even though a map of the sex work scene in Ueno Park reprinted in the book overtly marks an area for male prostitution (p. 213), homosexual practices and their function in discourses of masculinity are only touched upon briefly (p. 168f.). However, the book is all the more successful in elaborating the deep roots of these discourses in globally circulating military practices which engendered a set of values and priorities that bridged the fascist/democratic divide and shaped an implicit understanding between Japanese and American administrators that state-sanctioned prostitution was necessary and proper.

As is often the case, the group of actors that remains most elusive is the one that is ostensibly at the center of the book: sex workers. This, of course, is a vexing problem for the field as a whole, and one of which the author is acutely aware (p. 24). But even if the book cannot fully recover the voices of these actors, it goes a long way towards enabling its readers to better understand their precarious position in occupation-period Japan.

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³ Cynthia Enloe, *Maneuvers. The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives*, Berkeley 2000.