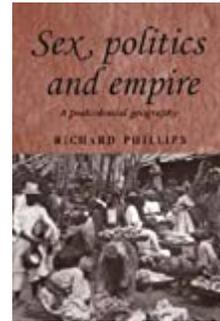




**Richard Phillips.** *Sex, Politics and Empire: A Postcolonial Geography.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006. 256 pp.p Illustrations. \$80.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7190-7006-8.



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## Mapping the Makings of and Resistance to Imperial Regulation of Sexuality

*Sex, Politics and Empire* is a welcome addition to the Manchester University Press Studies in Imperialism series, which has maintained momentum, in part, through something of a “postcolonial turn” in the last decade. Richard Phillips sets himself the task to address how, precisely, sexuality and imperial power were connected, stressing the benefits of a geographical approach to this endeavor, what he later describes as “cognitively mapping” sexuality politics (p. 5). Given that Ronald Hyam’s *Sexuality and Empire: The British Experience* appeared in the same series in 1990, potential readers will inevitably ask how this new book differs from its predecessor. The answer is embedded in the theoretical and methodological rationale for the book, notably in the section of the introduction entitled “Beyond ‘the British Experience’: Postcolonial Criticism and Methods,” where Phillips articulates the limitations of privileging the British experience, focusing only on men, and failing to see the reciprocal influence of sexual experience across the colonizer/colonized divide (p. 31).

Drawing on Michel Foucault’s discussion of sexual-

ity as a social construct, Phillips goes beyond spatial *patterns* (important as these are) to examine spatial *relations* within the British Empire to consider the role of the geographical imagination in creating, negotiating, and representing those relations. He succeeds in his aim to move debates concerning sexuality and empire beyond a focus on the numerous Contagious Diseases Acts across the empire, giving attention to other forms of regulation, resistance to that regulation, and social purity movements. The introduction provides a clear and well-written account of these issues, including the complex and contested nature of such concepts as “geographical imagination.”

Phillips eschews a metropolitan view of his topic, with the issues being explored through four contrasting case studies: Sierra Leone, Bombay, London, and South Australia, and it is these varied case studies that represent the strength of the book. Drawing on rich archival data, Phillips stresses the spatial and temporal variation of legal, political, and cultural practices within the British Empire, and the implications these have for un-

derstanding the diffusion and interaction of legislation, values, attitudes, and practices. I found the discussion of Sierra Leone and the role of Freetown's local class-differentiated press a particularly effective exposition of these interactions. The imperial center of London is not neglected in the text, but rather placed in its wider context, and Phillips unpacks the nuanced ways in which the politically and economically dominant London was itself influenced, and even undermined, by the agency of the colonized. As he argues about the "generative possibilities of colonial space" in the case of Bombay: "Colonies

could be proactive as well as reactive sites of sexuality politics" (p. 136).

While personally I had hoped for a more in-depth analysis in the conclusion and did not find the discussion linking historical and contemporary debates about sexuality as persuasive as the preceding chapters, Phillips has undoubtedly fulfilled his purpose to move understanding of sexuality and empire beyond Eurocentric approaches, and, in doing so, provides a model of sensitivity to the specificities of place and time, which is worthy of replication.

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