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Community Action and the Displacement of Street Prostitution: Evidence from British Cities

Phil Hubbard*

Geography Subject Group, School of Natural and Environmental Science, Coventry University, Priory Street, Coventry, CV1 5FB, U.K.

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Abstract: This paper focuses on recent community protests against female street prostitution in Birmingham and Bradford (UK), where groups of mainly South Asian male campaigners have succeeded in displacing soliciting and kerb-crawling from the inner city districts of Balsall Heath and Manningham respectively. Through an examination of the geopolitics of these community protests, and their subsequent impacts on prostitute women, this paper seeks to examine why these residential groups identified prostitutes as a social problem and consequently sought to remove them from their neighbourhood. Specifically drawing on both locational conflict theories and psychoanalytical ideas about 'difference' and exclusion, the paper suggests that this NIMBY ('not-in-my-back-yard') syndrome reflects a complex mixture of popular anxieties about prostitution which are connected to deep-rooted fears and fantasies about commercial sex-work. In doing so, the paper documents how legal and social processes combine to shape geographies of prostitution, concluding that the regulation of prostitution serves to spatially marginalise sex workers without necessarily solving any of the problems associated with commercial sex work. © 1998 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved

Key words: community action, prostitution, crime exclusion, Bradford, Birmingham

Introduction

Although the burgeoning interest in the 'new' cultural geography has unquestionably heightened geographers' sensitivity to diversity and difference, Sibley (1995) points out that there are still many groups, defined by their race, gender, sexuality or physical appearance, whose geographies remain to be adequately theorised. One such group is that of prostitutes, a vocational identity generally used to refer to individuals who receive payment (whether financial or otherwise) for sexual services (Nagle, 1997). Indeed, as Ashworth *et al.*, (1988) pointed out in the pages of this journal, there remains a general silence on geographies of commercial sex work in the urban West, despite the broad delimitation of certain districts as 'vice areas' having been a common feature of many descriptions of urban form and structure since the work of the Chicago school (Reckless, 1926). Furthermore, it is clear that prostitution has manifest itself in markedly different forms in different settings, with Symanski (1981), for example, claiming that female prostitution in California exhibits a hierarchical structure from the 'lower-class' brothels frequented by

* E-mail: apx081@coventry.ac.uk

'locals and truckers' to the 'higher-class' forms of escort work catering to international business tourists in Los Angeles and San Francisco. Ashworth *et al.*, (1988) correspondingly identified a variety of distinctive settings associated with different forms of commercial sex work in Western European cities, from 'erotic entertainment' zones in traditional 'red-light' districts (e.g. Zeedjik in Amsterdam, Pigalle in Paris and Soho in London) to suburban areas of street prostitution.

It is the latter type of sex work, where female street prostitution is a major activity in (mainly) residential areas, that forms the most visible and contentious manifestation of prostitution in most British cities. Although there has been a recent rise in the visibility of male (predominantly homosexual) street prostitutes in British cities (see Davis and Feldman, 1997), it is the continued presence of female street prostitution in a small number of notorious inner city 'red-light' districts that has engendered the most fervent arguments as to the 'place' of prostitution in British society. A recent survey of the 39 vice squads established to monitor prostitution in England and Wales suggests that 85% of these squads focus their activities on an area of no more than one square mile (Benson and Matthews, 1995), and areas such as Chapeltown (Leeds), Manningham (Bradford), Balsall Heath (Birmingham) and St. Pauls (Bristol) have been infamous as sites of street prostitution for a number of years (Roberts, 1992). In such areas, street prostitution may co-exist with off-street sex work, yet it is the visible concentration of street workers that lends such locations their notoriety as red-light districts. However, the presence of prostitutes in such areas has often been fiercely opposed by local residents who have employed a variety of means (from lobbying local police and politicians through to forms of direct action) to displace prostitution from their streets, albeit often with little success.

This paper thus attempts to explore geographies of street prostitution, drawing on recent events in two British 'red-light' districts, Manningham in Bradford and Balsall Heath in Birmingham. In both, campaigners have sought to remove female street prostitutes from the area through lengthy pickets, with South Asian male residents in particular literally taking the law into their own hands and arguing that the current regulation of street prostitution was failing to protect them from the 'public nuisance' of street prostitutes and kerb-crawlers. These campaigns (which resulted in an overwhelming displacement of prostitutes from each area) offer a particularly appropriate opportunity to examine how geographies of prostitution are shaped by changing forms of social and legal regulation, with these events encapsulating a number of important themes concerning the past, present and future of prostitution in Western cities. The aims of this paper are thus twofold. Firstly, this paper documents the changing geographies of female street prostitution in two British cities in an attempt to explore the way that the social marginalisation of prostitutes is reflected in their spatial isolation and exclusion. Secondly, by focusing on the role of community activism in this process of marginalisation, it aims to highlight a number of broader geographic themes, particularly those of locational conflict and social exclusion, for as Laws (1994, p.11) argues, considering how processes of marginalisation are manifest in different places can help us think about the way social relations are mediated in and by space.

The spatial regulation and policing of prostitution in Britain

In seeking to explain the distinctive (and highly uneven) distribution of prostitutes in British cities, Ashworth *et al.*, (1988, p. 208) argue that this is (at least in part) an outcome of supply and demand factors, suggesting that 'the selling of sexual services has traditionally involved consumer choice through an element of comparative shopping'. Accordingly, they contend that the concentration of street prostitutes in inner suburban areas can partly be explained as an attempt by sex workers to maximise accessibility for their clientele, particularly car-borne trade. Winchester and White (1988) have taken a similar line in suggesting that areas of street prostitution are contiguous with areas of economic marginalisation, and that these represent established concentrations of 'lower-class' prostitutes catering for a localised and economically marginalised market. However, the idea that street prostitutes cater solely for a local market, with off-street workers catering for tourists or visitors, is regarded as largely erroneous by most researchers of sex work (O'Neill, 1997). For example, police profiles of kerb-crawlers overwhelmingly reveal that the majority are non-local, with evidence from Streatham (London) suggesting that

most tended to come from four to six miles away from the area of street soliciting, with a significant percentage travelling from the capital's outlying suburbs (Matthews, 1993)[1]. Nor do street prostitutes necessarily originate from the local area, and often the converse is true, with sex workers living at large distances from their work in an attempt to maintain a distinction between their family and working lives (Hart, 1995). In the Streatham study, very few prostitutes were found to be resident locally with the majority living between two and five miles away from Streatham (Matthews, 1993).

Evidently then, the location of red-light districts in specific inner city areas is not something that can be comprehended solely through an appreciation of supply and demand relationships, but requires a broader comprehension of how, as a criminalised activity at variance with the prevailing moral order, it is subject to specific legal and quasi-legal regulations which generally limit it to specific areas of (limited) tolerance. In this respect, although popular attitudes towards commercial sex work have varied considerably across time and space, historical overviews have suggested that the majority of societies have made some effort to regulate or prohibit prostitution. Symanski (1981) argues that spatial isolation has been the most usual 'geopolitical' strategy used in the repression of prostitution, with the state tending to tolerate, though seldom encouraging, prostitution in unofficially designated areas. From medieval times onwards, this frequently involved the designation of specific streets, often beyond the city walls, as zones of prostitution, though over time this form of spatial disciplining became more sophisticated as sex work was increasingly hidden from the public gaze in carceral spaces in an attempt to privatise many of the morally offensive physical, psychological and social problems of prostitution (Duncan, 1996, p. 140). For example, drawing on the nineteenth-century correspondence of the obsessive moral hygienist Parent-Duchatelet, Corbin has noted the way that the French authorities sought to contain prostitution by creating an enclosed milieu:

> Invisible to children, honest women and even prostitutes outside the system, enclosure made it possible to carry marginalisation to the limit...This enclosed milieu remained constantly under the supervision of the authorities. Invisible to the rest of society, it was perfectly transparent to those who supervised it. The desire for panopticism, as discussed by Michel Foucault in the case of the prison, found expression in a quasi-obsessional way in...this effort to *discipline* the prostitute (Corbin, 1990, p. 9)

Invoking notions of panopticism developed by Foucault (1978), Corbin thus describes the technologies of domination used to 'normalise' the behaviour of prostitutes, noting that space is where discourses about power and knowledge are transformed into actual relations of power. In France, this regulationist zeal resulted in strictly monitored *maisons de tolerance* (or official brothels) in designated districts (*quartiers réserves*) of most major towns; in Britain, a system of magdelene asylums (backed up by the powers of the Contagious Diseases Acts) was established to encourage the moral reform of prostitutes (Mahood, 1990).

Attempts to restrict prostitution to private space still persist in Germany and the Netherlands through systems of local zoning and state-licensed brothels, which are claimed to offer safer working environments and cut down instances of child prostitution (Edwards, 1996). However, such efforts to contain prostitution in private spaces have rarely been entirely successful and street prostitution has continued to co-exist alongside off-street sex work into the contemporary era. In such public spaces, prostitutes are nonetheless subjected to the surveillance and segregating practices of the police, who have typically attempted to contain prostitution in specific areas where they are able to monitor and control the situation. In Britain, for example, although prostitution *per se* is not illegal, the 1959 Street Offences Act and the 1985 Sexual Offences Act are frequently used to regulate the behaviour of prostitutes and their clients on the streets[2]. The former act makes it illegal for a 'common prostitute' (labelled as such following two uncorroborated police cautions) to loiter or solicit for the purposes of prostitution, while the latter targets 'persistent' kerb-crawlers or those whose behaviour was deemed as likely to cause 'annoyance'. Overwhelmingly, both powers are used in a selective and sometimes *ad hoc* manner by the police—ostensibly in response to public complaints—with wide disparities evident between different police forces as to whether they target prostitutes or kerb-crawlers (Benson and Matthews, 1995).

To understand the uneven nature of the policing of prostitution, which reflects selective decisions by the police forces as to which prostitution laws to uphold, when, where and against who, it is neces-

sary to examine the avowed aims of current prostitution legislation. According to the Home Office, the legal regulation of prostitution does not aim to eradicate prostitution, but attempts "to prevent the serious nuisance to the public caused when prostitutes ply their trade in the streets" (cited in Edwards, 1987, p. 928). Similarly, the Wolfenden Report (1957, p. 23), which preceded the introduction of the 1959 Street Offences Act, argued that it was necessary to control prostitution to allow "the normal decent citizen to go about the streets without affront to their sense of decency". As such, the British judicial system still seems to regard prostitution as private and prurient, considering the public spectacle of street solicitation as an offence against public morality and decency. Yet while current legislation seeks to reduce the visibility of prostitution in the public realm, it is clear that police forces regard this visibility as more acceptable in some spaces than others, with many vice squads unofficially recognising the existence of an area in which prostitution is generally permissible. For example, McKeganey and Barnard's (1996) exhaustive ethnographic study of street workers in Glasgow revealed that the changing definition of a permissible working area was at the heart of the everyday negotiations between police and prostitutes, with the sex workers who transgressed beyond boundaries deemed acceptable by the police undoubtedly charged if caught. Nonetheless, anecdotal evidence suggests the police have adopted a laissez-faire attitude to prostitution in some areas, although, conversely, this attempt to spatially constrain street prostitution also facilitates the arrest of sex workers and their clients if public complaints precipitate a 'crackdown'. Lopez-Jones (1990, p. 658) therefore proposes that it is "the policing of prostitution that has been fundamental in the creation of red-light districts, by effectively making it impossible for clients and prostitutes to meet elsewhere".

Although this containment of prostitution in specified areas may facilitate policing (and, indeed, may allow prostitutes to mark out an established 'beat' or 'patch'), it is often regarded with a high level of animosity by local residents. The experiences of residents in one area of street soliciting (Finsbury Park in London) paints a vivid picture of the nuisance created by street prostitutes and kerb-crawlers, which may be particularly acutely felt by female residents:

> For some, even the simple business of walking down the street, waiting for a bus or going shopping was a hazardous experience. Noise, harassment, frequent obscenities, the spectre of prostitutes and their clients or ponces haggling or arguing in the street — erupting occasionally into overt violence — became a common feature of everyday life. At night, the frequent shouting and screaming was drowned by the irregular piercing tones of car horns (Matthews, 1986, p. 5)

According to the National Vice Squad Survey (Benson and Matthews, 1995), the main complaints received by the police from the public relate to noise, litter and the harassment of local female residents. Increased traffic from kerb-crawlers and sex tourists (voyeurs attracted by the reputation of the area) is also often highlighted as detrimental to the quality of life of local residents, with traffic calming and management schemes only occasionally succeeding in stemming the flow or displacing prostitution to adjacent streets (Lowman, 1992b). Local businesses and shopkeepers may also object to prostitutes soliciting outside their premises, potentially effecting their trade, while Edwards (1991) refers to the impacts of prostitution on a small industrial estate in Wolverhampton, where the first job for workers every morning was to sweep up condoms and related detritus from the entrances of their premises.

It is therefore unsurprising that decisions to enforce prostitution legislation are strongly influenced by public complaints (Benson and Matthews, 1995), with those wielding the most political and social power generally most effective in prompting increased police surveillance and repression. As the literature on the formation of 'urban social movements' suggests, where neighbourhood organisations are already in existence, the likelihood of residents mobilising to successfully lobby local politicians is greatly enhanced (Heinig, 1982). Similarly, it might be expected that where there are higher proportions of home-owners or families with children, neighbourhood activism and political protest would tend to be higher (Cox, 1989). Analyses of the 'turf politics' of prostitution generally bears this out, with Larson suggesting that successful (or partially successful) campaigns to drive prostitutes from residential districts in four Canadian cities were characterised by the involvement of relatively affluent social groups:

> Although the success of groups such as CROWE (*an anti-prostitution campaign in Vancouver*) was partially due to their organisational skills, the lack of success experienced by other equally well-organised working-

> class groups in other cities suggested that social class was an important variable...it was clear that street prostitution did not become an issue until middle-class residents made it a priority (Larsen, 1992, p. 187)

Evidence from a variety of other cities similarly suggests that when prostitution 'spills-over' from inner city districts to suburban areas, this movement is seldom anything but temporary, with established suburban residents often very successful in petitioning the police and local authorities, pressurising them to take action against prostitutes. Symanski (1981), for example, describes the way that the suburbanisation of street prostitution in London in the 1940s, resulting from the punitive policing of raditional red-light districts such as King's Cross, Soho and Victoria, was strongly resisted by established suburban dwellers, with street prostitutes shortly returning back to their traditional 'beats' where they faced less opposition from the local community. Such conclusions support the view espoused by Winchester and White (1988) that, with prostitution characteristically located in inner city areas of low social-economic status, it is only when more affluent gentrifiers (typically articulate middle-class professionals) move to such marginal areas that anti-prostitution campaigns are able to exercise any real lobbying power over police and local politicians.

Therefore, we might hypothesise that the locations of red-light districts in British cities are a broad reflection of the differential ability of social groups to control space, with more powerful groups seeking to identify themselves with things that are culturally valuable, denigrating the powerless by associating them with things that are viewed as objectionable or socially undesirable. Symanski (1981, p.3) thus argues that the visibility of prostitutes tends to be higher amongst those without political power — those deemed socially disadvantaged or disorganised — and, that like other unacceptable people through history, "prostitutes have consistently been forced to live and labour among those with minimal social and political power". He goes on to conclude that the social and legal regulation of prostitutes generally aims to contain them away from affluent areas where they would stand out as unnatural or deviant, restricting them to working in marginalised inner city areas. In a practical sense, then, it is clear to see that although many different strategies have been employed to suppress prostitution (see Lowman, 1992a), these have had little impact on the general level of street prostitution, which has tended to remain controlled and monitored in specific neighbourhoods typified by low social and political organisation. As Farrar (1996) points out, the fact these spaces are often typified by high proportions of non-white residents does much to reinforce white fears and fantasies about racial difference, perpetuating a popular stereotype that vice and ethnic 'otherness' are intimately connected.

'Not on our streets': the politics of prostitution control in the 1990s

While the above description of prostitution as being subject to considerable locational inertia may be criticised for potentially ignoring the ways that the strategic division and sequestration of urban space by the police is constantly challenged by the furtive mobility of the female prostitute (cf. de Certeau, 1984), it is evident that street prostitution has tended to remain in fairly fixed areas of British cities (see also Jackson, 1989, p. 145). Yet in more recent years, prostitutes have been subject to more sustained forms of neighbourhood activism even in these 'marginal spaces', with residents becoming increasing inventive in the nature of their campaigns. These have taken the form of more 'direct' neighbourhood protests, with residents in red-light districts in Southampton, Sheffield, Stoke, Birmingham and Bradford (amongst others) organising community-watch style pickets and street patrols aimed at disrupting the work of street prostitutes, taking registration numbers of kerb-crawlers, cars and handing these to local police. Media interest in these camapaigns has been considerable, particularly as they raise concerns about the boundaries between vigilism and vigilantism (Hughes, 1997), with much of the interest focusing on the ethnic characteristics of protestors, particularly in Muslim areas. Yet campaigns aiming to 'reclaim the streets' are by no means unique, with similar campaigns having been tried elsewhere (e.g. 'Shame the Johns' in Vancouver — see Larson, 1992), but, to a large extent, they have succeeded in their twin aims of removing prostitution while simultaneously highlighting the continuing failure of British prostitution laws to protect residents from a variety of nuisances associated with street prostitution. In response, numerous local authorities began to explore alternative solutions to the seemingly intractable problems of street prosti-

tution, most notably in Edinburgh, where the city council instigated a system of frequent police visits (McKeganey and Barnard, 1996).

In the light of the preceding discussion, these recent protests raise a number of important questions relating to the 'place' of prostitution in British cities, questions that also lie at the heart of geographical debates over citizenship, community and public space. For example, why did prostitution become the target of such vehement local protest at this particular time and how was the local community mobilised to organise these protests? Moreover, accepting Lowman's (1992a) assertion that prostitution is not an opportunistic crime, if the neighbourhood campaigns succeeded in displacing street prostitution, where did it go to? In the remainder of this paper, an attempt will be made to answer these questions by describing the specific 'geopolitical' tactics and strategies pursued by neighbourhood activists and their subsequent effects on the prostitute women on the streets of Manningham (Bradford) and Balsall Heath (Birmingham), recognising that these gendered and racialised 'turf politics' were played out in distinctive ways in different settings. Throughout, the paper draws on field observations collected by the author in 1995–1996, as well as informal interviews conducted with local community activists, police and local politicians. In addition, newspaper accounts (both at the national and local level) were used to provide a framework of events on which this analysis was based, recognising that local newspapers are both a dominant source of information for local residents, and, more importantly perhaps, that media reactions to spatial conflicts constitute a rich source of evidence for exploring the normally unstated relations of place and ideology (Cresswell, 1997)[3]. However, acknowledging that the media only rarely incorporates the opinions and experiences of prostitutes themselves, local health outreach workers in constant contact with sex workers were contacted to provide details of the impacts of the campaigns on prostitute women[4]. This paper does not, however, incorporate the 'voices' of sex workers themselves, in part because of the nexus of problematic pragmatic, organisational and ethical issues which are encountered when attempting to empathise with the lifestyles and practices of this highly stigmatised group — problems that are often excerbated for male researchers (see Barnard, 1992). In this sense, this paper does not claim to offer a 'definitive' account of the geopolitical struggles in the two areas — indeed, to claim this might be considered as symptomatic of an exclusionary male research tradition which marginalises women's knowledges — but rather is an interpretation of the residents' actions from the perspective of a male, middle-class academic which may, nonetheless, provide some insight into the role of space in marginalising female street prostitutes.

Birmingham: the struggle for Cheddar Road

Balsall Heath is located approximately two kilometres to the south of Birmingham city centre, and forms one end of Birmingham's characteristic 'arc' of deprived inner city districts, broken only by the more affluent district of Edgbaston. The area is defined mainly through a number of major arterial roads — notably, the Belgrave Road which separates it from Highgate, an area of 1950s/60s comprehensive redevelopment; the Pershore Road, which separates it from Edgbaston to the west; and the Moseley Road which separates it from Sparkbrook to the east (see Figure 1). The area is characterised by a mix of low-rise council estates and private housing developments which date mainly from the early 1970s, although these are intermixed with large late-Victorian terraces (particularly to the south of the district) which are associated with the area's original development following the sale of the Balsall Heath estate in 1839. Initially, Balsall Heath was a middle-class suburb (Cherry, 1994), though with the rapid expansion of the city's population between 1871–1891, the more affluent population generally moved further out of the city into areas such as King's Heath and Moseley, being replaced mainly by Irish and Jewish immigrants.

Little documentary evidence exists to trace the historic origins of commercial sex work in Balsall Heath, and certainly prostitution was more established in working-class areas of Winson Green, Lozells and Ladywood in late Victorian and Edwardian times (Bartley, 1997). Anecdotal evidence suggested that the trade really began in Balsall Heath in the inter-war years, with around fifty to seventy 'streetwalkers' regularly operating in the area in the 1950s and 1960s. These were mainly prostitutes who lived in other parts of the city, occasionally renting rooms by the hour in some of the larger 'bed and breakfast' properties in Varner

Road and Princess Road. This characteristic division of prostitute's work and home life concurs with the pattern described by Hart (1995) in her study of prostitute/client relationships, whereby prostitutes were seen to negotiate their identity according to the place they inhabited, setting strict boundaries between areas where they would be likely to encounter friends or family and those where they would encounter clients and other sex workers.

This pattern, of non-local prostitutes operating on the streets of Balsall Heath, is generally considered to have changed with the redevelopment of the area in the 1970s, which centred on the demolition and redevelopment of Princess Road and Clevedon Road. As part of this process, Varner Road and one side of Cheddar Road were demolished completely, and turned into an extension to Calthorpe Park. This redevelopment precipitated a number of major changes in the district, most notably the influx of a large South Asian population — mainly of Kashmiri (Mirpur) origin (accounting for 45% of the district population by 1991 — Slater, 1996). Although many of the premises used by prostitutes had been demolished, the rise of the rental accommodation sector connected with the property interests of many local Asian businessmen provided suitable replacement premises. Hence, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the character of prostitution in Balsall Heath began to change as street working was supplemented by a number of (generally more established and older) prostitute women renting properties to operate from on a more permanent basis. Although many of these properties were on Court Road or Mary Street, it was Cheddar Road that became notorious as the focus of prostitution, with many prostitutes advertising by sitting in the bay windows of the terrace properties, creating a

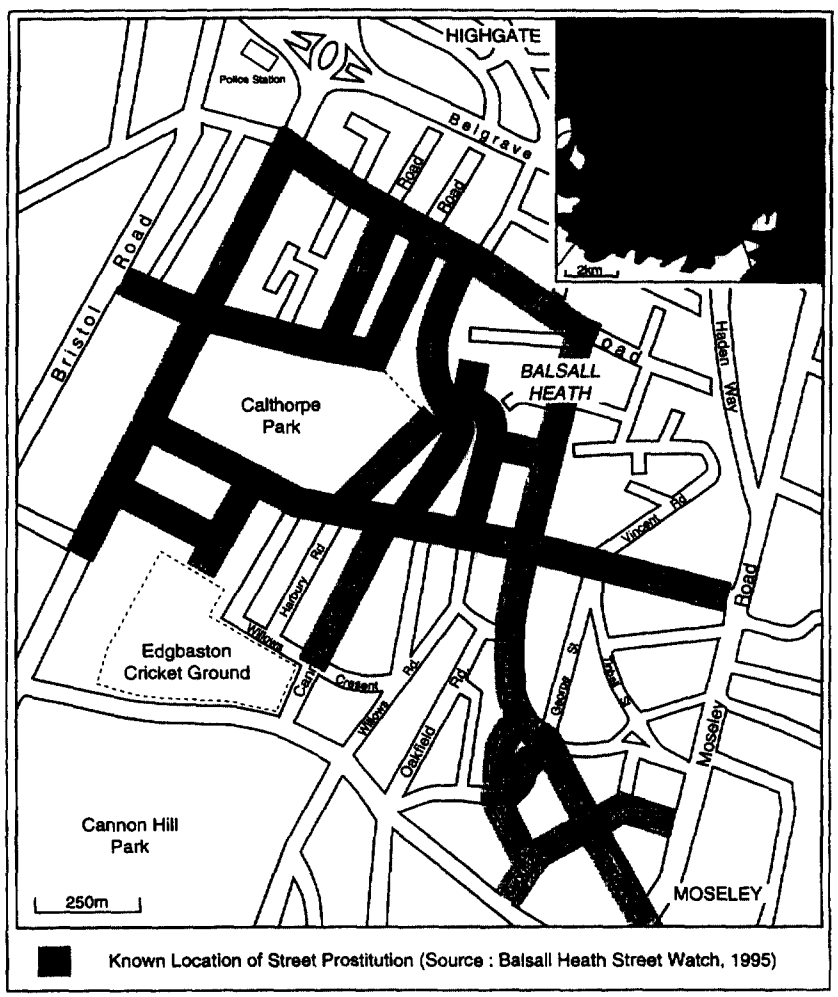

Figure 1.

red-light ambience similar to that traditionally associated with the 'window working' characteristic of Amsterdam's red-light districts (Golding, 1994). The visibility of these window workers was enhanced given that Cheddar Road opened onto Calthorpe Park (and a children's playground); by the late 1980s, around twenty-four of the fifty properties in the street were being used for prostitution. Associated with this was a decline in property prices in the area, with one two-bedroomed terrace house in Cheddar Road sold for £6,000 in 1990 (at a time when equivalent property in Selly Oak, two kilometres away, was on the market for £28,000).

Nonetheless, according to McLeod (1982), the number of prostitutes working on the streets of Balsall Heath still constituted a minority of those engaged in prostitution in Birmingham in the early 1980s. McLeod's estimates suggested that around two hundred of Birmingham's sex workers worked 'on the street', predominantly in Balsall Heath, whilst another six hundred operated 'indoors', whether in residential accommodation, hotels or saunas (using contact magazines, McLeod suggested that less than half of these were in Balsall Heath). Other significant areas of street and indoor prostitution included Rotton Park in Edgbaston to the west, as well as Handsworth to the north-west, yet by this stage Balsall Heath had become locally (and nationally) recognised as Birmingham's red-light district. The role of the press in this process must be recognised as particularly important, with a growing number of press reports throughout the 1980s focusing on the 'vice-plagued suburb of Balsall Heath' with its 'Amsterdam-style brothel row', Cheddar Road (*Birmingham Evening Mail* 2 March 1989). Traffic in Balsall Heath increased significantly with the publication of such articles, as inquisitive and voyeuristic drivers cut between the Moseley Road and Pershore Road along an emerging 'scenic route' incorporating Park Road, Mary Street, Edward Road, Court Road, Clevedon Road and Balsall Heath Road (*Birmingham Evening Mail* 30 September 1992).

Such notoriety is widely understood to have lead to an increase rather than a reduction in the number of street prostitutes working in the area. According to police figures, prostitution in Balsall Heath peaked in 1989, when 1094 individual women were arrested for offences relating to prostitution over the course of the year (Edwards, 1991). Based on the assumption that around one-third of these women would move out and be replaced over the course of that year, Kinnell (1989) suggested that there was a market for around 650 women in Balsall Heath at that time-a considerable rise from McLeod's estimates for 1982. Although Cheddar Road itself had been made a cul-de-sac by the city council in 1989 in an attempt to stem the constant flow of kerb-crawlers and 'voyeurs', over 2,500 cars were recorded in the road in one day, making it Britain's 'busiest cul-de-sac' (*Express and Star* 13 March 1992). Moreover, an unpublished 1992 police survey of cautioned kerb-crawlers found 28% had come from beyond the Midlands, suggesting that the street prostitution was proving a considerable 'tourist attraction'[5]. By way of response, local residents began to pressurise the police, accusing them of complacency (and even complicity) in tackling the nuisances caused by prostitution. In part, the police admitted that they were reticent to come down heavily on prostitution lest it would be displaced to elsewhere in the city — according to members of the local vice squad, the relative isolation of prostitution in Balsall Heath made it easier for them to monitor the overall vice situation in the city. Nonetheless, highly-publicised surveillance operations were utilised on several occasions between 1988 and 1992 in response to local concerns, aimed principally at deterring kerb-crawlers using the powers of the 1985 Street Offences Act[6]. These operations were perceived, in the short-term at least, of making a considerable reduction in the number of prostitutes operating in the area, with many street prostitutes moving to other cities. As a result, the police declared a 'victory over vice' in Balsall Heath on several occasions (e.g. *Birmingham Evening Mail* 2 March 1989, *Birmingham Evening Mail* 27 October 1990); however, it was apparent that within a few weeks of each operation, new (invariably younger) prostitutes were to be found back in the area, sometimes coming from as far away as Cardiff, Leicester or Wolverhampton.

Simultaneously, Birmingham City Council had also began to explore methods of dealing with window work in Balsall Heath. In 1986, representatives of the council had visited Southampton to see how planning powers were being used to prevent women working from private residences. The use of planning powers was particularly encouraged by Birmingham city council for dealing with the window workers, as a single woman operating from a

private premises did not constitute an offence under existing prostitution laws (see Benson and Matthews, 1995). Utilising new powers under the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act, Birmingham city council served fourteen enforcement notices on the owners of houses on Cheddar Road and Court Road which were being used for commercial sex, suggesting that this represented a material change of use from their normal residential purposes to that of a 'business'. Although an appeal was bought by one occupier against the notice, the planning inspectorate fully supported the local authority's use of planning powers to shut houses being used for sex work, thus setting an important precedent. According to the decision letter, the inspector paid no regard to the morality of sex work, but was merely concerned that the number of clients visiting the house did not constitute 'the usual comings and goings of neighbours, friends and domestic visitors' and hence was 'disturbing local residential amenity'[7]. However, perhaps predictably, the use of planning powers to stop 'window work' merely succeeded in displacing many prostitutes onto the streets (Kinnell, 1993), heightening the visibility and potential 'nuisance' of prostitution in Balsall Heath.

It was against this backdrop of twenty years of increasingly visible activity connected with street prostitution that the recent residents' campaign developed. Significantly, the fact that prostitutes and their clients began using the car park of the Willows Road mosque acted as a major provocation to the Muslim population, and although the protest was not exclusively Asian, the action was organised through the elders of the mosque and was predominantly a *male* protest. Hence, although existing neighbourhood groups, particularly the Balsall Heath Action Group and Calthorpe Park Neighbourhood Forum, had often attempted to put pressure on local councillors and police to instigate more punitive policing, this campaign (which began in June 1994) took a much more direct course of action. Armed with placards ('Kerb-crawlers — we have your number', 'It's not a red-light zone, just a green one'), groups of protestors attempted to disrupt the work of prostitutes by picketing street corners throughout the area, taking the registration numbers of kerb-crawlers and forwarding them to the police. Initially, the picketing was concentrated in and around Cheddar Road, yet within a few days, the main organiser of the picket, Raja Amin (a local Asian shopkeeper), had arranged for up to one hundred and fifty pickets to be strategically sited in the nineteen main streets known as being the principal locations for street prostitution (see Figure 1).

At first, the local police (especially Moseley Vice Squad) were sceptical and unsupportive of this community protest, claiming that this form of 'vigilantism' was tantamount to people taking the law into their own hands (*Birmingham Evening Mail* 13 July 1995). Although it was organised as a peaceful protest, the constant tension between street prostitutes, their pimps and pickets did occasionally result in acts of harassment and confrontation, with pickets claiming to receive regular threats from pimps and associates of prostitutes, while prostitutes alleged verbal and physical abuse[8]. However, as it became evident that these pickets and patrols, maintained between 12pm and 2am every day, were causing a dramatic reduction in prostitution (and an immediate 80% reduction in kerb-crawling traffic), the local police co-opted the campaign by insisting that all pickets became registered with them, forming a 'neighbourhood-watch' type group, Balsall Heath Street Watch, in September 1995[9]. Any picket found to have a criminal record was prevented from joining this official group, with the seventy pickets eventually registered required to liaise with police on a daily basis, handing in the official log sheets on which they had made note of the registration numbers of kerb-crawlers in the area.

Over one year later, the street patrols were still present in Balsall Heath, albeit in much smaller numbers. Nonetheless, the continued presence of protestors on the street had its desired effect, and, according to figures from Birmingham's SAFE-HIV outreach project, had caused a two-thirds reduction in the number of prostitutes in the district over the course of the year. Those remaining were engaged in a more or less constant 'cat and mouse' game with protestors, forced to work either in the early hours of the morning, or along roads adjacent to the former core area of prostitution (e.g. Speedwell Road). More generally though, it is evident that the geographies of commercial sex work in the city as a whole changed in response to the community actions, with the displaced sex workers forced to work different city 'beats' (particularly in the Rotton Park district of Edgbaston) as well as off-street in a number of massage parlours and saunas in nearby Selly Oak. On a broader scale, it appears

that the activities of the pickets has resulted in a wider displacement of Birmingham's street prostitutes, with police and health workers in the other cities of the 'Midlands circuit' (Wolverhampton, Walsall, Coventry, Leicester and Northampton) reporting an influx of Birmingham workers over this period (Benson and Matthews, 1995).

Bradford: reclaiming the streets

Given the perceived effectiveness of the Balsall Heath campaign, it was perhaps not surprising that it spawned a number of imitation campaigns, most notably in Manningham, Bradford. Manningham is an inner city area to the north of the city whose development was closely associated with Bradford's woollen and textile industry in the nineteenth century, particularly with Lister's mill, whose 250ft chimney (reconstructed in an Italianate style in 1873) still dominates the skyline. Jackson (1992, p. 197) writes that Lister's influence on Manningham was comparable to that of Titus Salt's on Saltaire, at one time employing 7,000 people who, in the main, lived locally in company-built housing. Today, the area remains characterised by a high proportion of rented accommodation, the majority of which dates back to the nineteenth century. Significantly, the district is the most important area of settlement for Asian people in Bradford, with the white population only accounting for 26% of the total in 1991. This is largely a result of the deliberate recruitment policies pursued by mill and factory owners in the 1950s and 1960s, which targeted migrants from the Pakistani provinces of Mirpur, Campbellpur and Peshwar, stereotypically regarded by employers as a source of cheap, hard-working labour prepared to work long hours and night-shifts (Jackson, 1992). Today, however, with the decline of the textile trade, the district has the highest rate of unemployment in Bradford, with long-term unemployment four times higher than the city average and 58% of households lacking central heating[10].

Again, it is difficult to trace the origins of prostitution in the district, but anecdotally, many elder local residents suggest it was the influx of single young immigrant males in the 1950s that encouraged street prostitutes to relocate from the city centre Ivegate district. Initially, street prostitution was predominantly located in the mixed business and commercial area along Lumb Lane, but as the number of sex workers increased, this area of street soliciting spread northwards to more residential areas around Bertram Road, St. Paul's Road, St. Mary's Road, Church Street and Skinner Lane (see Figure 2). As in Balsall Heath, the visibility of street prostitutes increased gradually through the 1970s and 1980s, although the abduction and murders of two Bradford street prostitutes by Peter Sutcliffe (the 'Yorkshire Ripper') prompted some prostitutes to leave the area in the early-1980s to work 'safer' patches in the Midlands and London. Throughout this period, police and local authority tactics to regulate and contain street prostitution in Manningham were similar to those pursued in other British cities. Prior to the passing of the 1985 Sexual Offences Act, this mainly revolved around the periodic cautioning and arrest of street workers to keep their numbers at relatively 'acceptable' levels, rather than multi-agency work designed to help prostitutes leave the profession. For example, when the local chair of a Bengali community group (Jalal Choudray) organised a limited rent strike and petition involving fifty households in 1983, this was followed by increased police patrols and activity on the streets (*Bradford Telegraph and Argus* 11 July 1983). A more extensive petition in 1988 prompted similar actions, although by this stage the police were able to target kerb-crawlers using the powers of the 1985 act, sending cautioning letters to the households of those spotted kerb-crawling through the district (*Bradford Telegraph and Argus* 4 February 1988). These 'crackdowns' on prostitution were organised by Toller Lane Vice Squad with the police maintaining a visible presence on the streets in marked cars in a way that was not possible in other more volatile red-light districts (e.g. Chapeltown in Leeds) where West Yorskhire police considered that high-profile policing would have been detrimental to community relations (Benson and Matthews, 1995).

However, by 1990, it was estimated that there were more prostitution-related arrests per capita in Manningham than any other area of street soliciting in Britain, with 1361 arrests for soliciting in that year alone (Edwards, 1991). At the time, there was an established hard-core of around 30 street workers every night in Manningham, this figure rising to an estimated 50 at weekends (Butcher and Chapple, 1993). Although police action attempted to minimise the visibility of these street prostitutes, restricting them to working on and around Lumb Lane, the high cost of such punitive policing meant

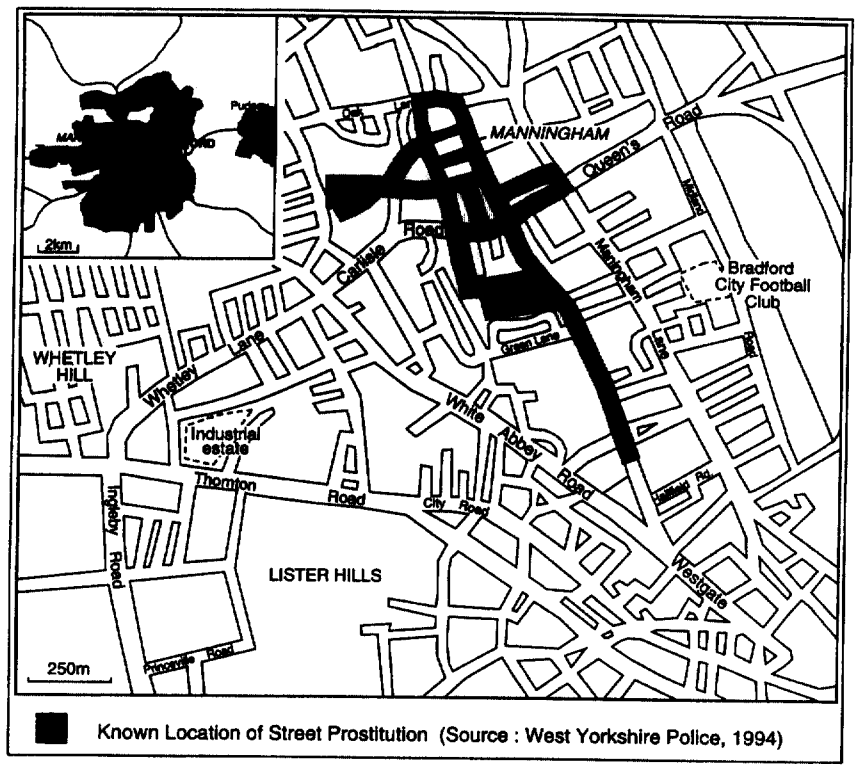

Figure 2.

that it was difficult to contain it in that area alone, prompting a growing number of complaints from residents as prostitution 'spilt over' into other residential districts. One of the strongest calls for action came in the form of a 1,000-signature petition organised by a local vicar, Alan Kitchin (*Bradford Telegraph and Argus* 28 August 1992). This itself was cause of some controversy, with many of the Asian community subsequently distancing themselves from the campaign when he begun to argue in the local press for the legalisation of prostitution in a non-residential 'toleration zone'. This idea of establishing a recognised zone for street prostitution was not new, having been pioneered in Utrecht in Netherlands, where a *gedoog-zone* was set up in 1986 in a secluded road on an edge-of-town industrial estate (Golding, 1994). In this area, prostitutes are allowed to solicit between the hours of 7 p.m. and 2 a.m., taking clients to a specially constructed and monitored car park, while local social workers provide on-site health and legal support. Bradford City Council was the first local authority to respond favourably to this idea, which was accordingly proposed by the West Yorkshire police force as an alternative way of dealing with prostitutes and kerb-crawlers at the 1992 meeting of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities. Although enthusiastically received, the government subsequently argued that it had no intention of decriminalising or legalising activities connected to prostitution either 'as a matter of general application or in specific geographic areas'[11], and it is only more recently that Sheffield has explored the feasibility of designating its own toleration zone to move prostitution from a residential to an industrial district[12].

With the possibility of creating a Toleration Zone impractical in the short run, a new sergeant at Toller Lane Vice Squad applied for Urban Crime Fund money in January 1992, resulting in a widely-publicised Overt Vice Initiative aimed at the long-term removal of street prostitutes. Following the approaches adopted to street prostitution in Streatham, Luton and Southampton (Matthews, 1993), this comprised a multi-agency solution to the problems associated with prostitution, combining social services support for prostitute women, traffic management to cut down kerb-crawling traffic and punitive policing. This meant that additional funding was available for police surveillance, with one

high visibility van (marked as a Vice Squad vehicle) plus two covert cars monitoring the streets 16 hours a day throughout July 1992. These patrols were aimed at targeting kerb-crawlers and pimps rather than prostitutes, who were encouraged to seek advice from the newly-established Action Control Empowerment (ACE) program funded by Bradford City Council. However, because of technical and planning difficulties, the planned work to construct permanent road blocks to stop kerb-crawlers touring the districts was delayed until spring 1993. Nonetheless, traffic surveys by the Traffic Support Department of the West Yorkshire Police (April 1992–April 1993) revealed a one-third reduction in the amount of slow-moving (i.e. kerb-crawling traffic) on Church Street even before these works were complete, ostensibly because of the high-profile policing campaign (*Yorkshire Post* 10 May 1993). Yet, as a subsequent assessment of the Overt Vice Initiative suggested, while the high-profile van had a direct deterrent effect while on patrol, the overall result was that it merely displaced prostitution within the area or over time (Walker *et al.*, 1994). The Bradford Working Women's group shared this assessment, arguing that the action was forcing prostitutes to stay out later and take unnecessary risks. Hence, although there was a slight reduction in street prostitution, questionnaires suggested that 77% of local residents still regarded it as a serious or the most serious problems facing the area, with 43% of women reporting having been approached by kerb-crawlers on at least one occasion. Significantly, 45% of Asians considered that the police initiative had been a failure as opposed to 34% of for whites Walker *et al.*, (1994)[13].

However, the immediate impetus for the recent residents' action was the screening of a six-part TV drama series *Band of Gold* in March 1995. This series, written by Kay Mellor after a visit to Manningham, attracted some fifteen million viewers with its portrayal of prostitutes' lives working their 'beats' around Lumb Lane, and received praise from local prostitute support groups (Gibbins, 1995). However, many local residents began to complain about a new influx of prostitutes and kerb-crawlers attracted by the Manningham's increasingly national reputation as a centre for street prostitution. In turn, this resurrected many complaints about police inaction against street prostitutes, and sparked the organisation of a similar street picket to that in Balsall Heath, the Manningham Residents' Association, organised through the elders of the Jamiyat Tablighul-Islam mosque on Southfield Square. This protest was again principally male, and largely Asian, and although initially more *ad hoc* in organisation than that in Birmingham (and not recognised by police), did succeed in displacing prostitutes and kerb-crawlers from the traditional red-light area around Lumb Lane towards the Thornton Road. However, against a backdrop of exacerbated tensions between pickets, prostitutes and police, an insignificant argument about a group of pickets playing football in the road escalated into substantial rioting and unrest over the weekend of June 9–11 1995, later described as the worst outbreak of rioting in Bradford's history (*The Times*, 12 June 1995). One of the chief organisers of the picket, Mohammed Ansari, later argued that the picket had been 'hijacked by young hotheads' who were more concerned with highlighting issues of police racism and victimisation (*Bradford Telegraph and Argus* 4 November 1995).

Unlike previous attempts at removing street prostitution from Manningham through punitive policing, this community protest, maintained continuously over a number of months in a high-profile manner, did succeed in removing street prostitution away from residential areas. Yet the fact that prostitute women are now soliciting in industrial areas to the south of the Thornton Road (in the neighbouring Listerhills district) again demonstrates that such actions do not necessarily remove the demand or supply for sexual services, but tend to displace existing street trade. The more recent move of some prostitutes to working on the University campus (where improved street lighting designed for student safety offers a more secure working environment) again supports this displacement thesis (*Yorkshire Post* 1 October 1996). The fact that some former sex workers from Bradford are now reported to be working in Doncaster, Norwich, Keighley, Leeds and Nottingham (amongst other places) further suggests that prostitution is not necessarily an opportunistic crime that can be 'designed out', with prostitutes often adapting to changing local circumstances by simply moving to other areas (albeit frequently under the duress of pimps).

Interpreting displacement: community activism and the exclusionary urge

High-profile neighbourhood activism, such as that directed against street prostitution in Balsall Heath and Manningham, is by no means unique, although traditionally the majority of these types of protest have been in neighbourhoods where suburban dwellers have fought to halt the siting of locally-unwanted land uses (LULUs) such as factories, power stations or hazardous waste facilities. Conventionally, such opposition, commonly referred to as NIMBYism (the 'not-in-my-back-yard' syndrome), has been explained as a reaction to the perceived negative externalities (particularly environmental and aesthetic pollution) which might be caused by such developments, and the negative impact this might have on local property prices (Lake, 1993). Such economic impacts are, to some extent, quantifiable; what is less measurable is the extent to which the NIMBY syndrome can be taken as evidence for a more complex mixture of popular anxieties about populations regarded as 'other'. It is only more recently, for example, that geographers have also begun to document pervasive opposition to community care facilities or welfare services for the mentally ill, the disabled and people with AIDS. For example, Dear and Wolch (1987) identified widespread opposition to the creation of drop-in centres and hostels for the mentally ill following the de-institutionalisation of mental health care in Toronto, and suggested that this vituperative opposition was resulting in the fragmentation and failure of the welfare system to provide adequately for such populations (an estimated 25% of Britain's homeless are ex-mental patients).

Drawing on psychoanalytical theories about the importance of preserving self-identity (literally, the boundaries of the self) Sibley (1995) has argued that this urge to exclude 'threatening others' from one's proximity is connected to deeply-engrained (and often subconscious) desires to maintain cleanliness and purity. Following, Douglas (1966, p. 41) argument that 'dirt is matter out of place', he has explored the ways in which this abject fear of the self being defiled or polluted is projected (or mapped) onto specific individuals or groups who are depicted as deviant or dangerous. He thus argues that spatial exclusion has been the dominant process used to create social boundaries in Western society, and the key means by which hegemonic groups, normally white, middle-class and heterosexual, have been able to marginalise and control those who do not match their ideas of what is an acceptable way of living or behaving. Recently, this 'exclusionary urge' has perhaps been most vividly demonstrated in the way in which public space itself has become increasingly regulated so that groups and individuals who do not conform to 'normal' ways of behaving in public space (e.g. the homeless, rowdy teenagers, beggars etc) have had their access to public space limited. Mitchell (1996) has thus argued that public space, idealised as being a democratic space in which all society can exercise particular rights of citizenship, is in itself a space of exclusion.

The events in Manningham and Balsall Heath seem to crystallise many of the debates surrounding the nature of public space and the 'policing' of that space. As with other social groups who find their presence in the public realm contested, the forms of spatial regulation effecting prostitutes are increasingly enacted by forms of 'community' surveillance rather than through police power. Moreover, as has been the case in the social construction of the homeless as disrupting the *moral order* of the street (and related talk of 'Zero Tolerance'), these confrontational and exclusionary community actions were informed by a similar notion of prostitutes as deviant 'others', offering sexual services outside the socially-sanctioned institutions of domesticised monogamy and ostensibly disrupting the moral order of society. Hence, although the nuisance and noise created by prostitutes and kerb-crawlers was stressed by a number of residents as the cause of their protest (and there are numerous examples in both locations of non-prostitute women being pestered by kerb-crawlers), it is difficult to accept that the level of this nuisance alone would be sufficient to motivate the widespread community protests witnessed. Rather, as a police-commissioned survey of Manningham's residents' attitudes to prostitution concluded:

> Most of the discontent about prostitution arises from indirect rather than direct contact. Indeed, both prostitutes and kerb-crawlers seem to be able to discriminate with a fair level of accuracy between 'players' and 'non-players'...it follows that what really animates residents is the offence of knowledge of the trade rather than any direct encounters or harm. It makes them feel uncomfortable that indications of sexual activity are visible in what to them are inappropriate times and locations (Walker *et al.*, 1994, p. 22)

The suggestion here is that the majority of soliciting and kerb-crawling is carried out in a relatively unobtrusive manner, with few negative consequences for local residents who, although they may be aware of the transactions ongoing in their neighbourhood, are rarely confronted by prostitution *per se*. Rather, it is the labelling of their neighbourhood as one in which street prostitution occurs that tends to create anxiety amongst residents. As current geographic studies of incivility suggest (e.g. Herbert, 1993), while prostitution itself may not have a substantial impact on neighbourhood quality, like graffiti or litter, it may signify to people that an area is vulnerable to crime, setting in motion a dynamic of neighbourhood decline.

It is this fear of street prostitution instigating other forms of criminality and immorality that appeared as crucial in motivating local residents to seek to displace prostitutes and kerb-crawlers from their streets. The organiser of Balsall Heath Street Watch, Raja Amin, argued that one of the main aims of the campaign was to 'stamp out the other crimes associated with prostitution' (*pers com*), claiming that prostitutes constitute an integral part of a criminal subculture. This was also a pervasive theme in press reporting of the campaigns, with sometimes salacious media stories making a connection between the presence of prostitutes on the streets and the occurrence of other crimes, particularly drug-related ones. Invoking the myth of the 'junkie-whore' (Roberts, 1992), it was argued that the actions of protesters were "hitting hard at the strong and volatile link between vice and drugs as dealers began to lose their customers, the prostitutes" (*Birmingham Evening Mail* 27 July 1994). Similar stories of drug-dealers from Mosside, Manchester, forced to give up trafficking to Manningham, were also given prominent coverage in Bradford's local press, while other stories played up the undercurrents of violence inherent in street prostitution, suggesting that the connection between commercial sex, violence and crime is inevitable (*Yorkshire Post* 13 May 1995).

In this respect, the local and national media appeared to play a significant role in supporting these campaigns, actively perpetuating a series of myths about red-light districts which reproduced stereotyped ideas of the prostitute as 'polluting'. In turn, these ideas were echoed in the attitudes expressed by residents, pickets (and even some prostitutes) that selling sex is immoral, deviant and dangerous. In part, such ideas may be related to the 'moral panic' that has surrounded the transmission of HIV-1 (Roberts, 1992; Goode and Ben-Yehouda, 1994). Based on the assumption that sex workers have a high number of sexual contacts, prostitutes have often been portrayed as a pivotal group in the transmission of HIV-1, an assertion supported with reference to the high incidence of HIV-infection among prostitutes in parts of sub-Saharan Africa. Nonetheless, British studies have suggested that, because of awareness of safer sexual practices, as well as the comparatively low epidemiological risk of female to male transmission, such assertions are erroneous (Faugier, 1994). For example, one reputable study of 228 female prostitutes in London revealed only two were infected with HIV-1, whilst 98% of all prostitutes claimed to always use condoms with commercial clients. Nonetheless, the story of a child blowing up a discarded condom left by a prostitute was cited by protesters in both Birmingham and Bradford as a direct spur to their campaigns, and the descriptions of prostitutes as 'dirty street scum' or 'diseased human scavengers' were not uncommon (*Birmingham Evening Mail* 27 July 1995).

It therefore appears that the desire to exclude prostitutes from both Manningham and Balsall Heath, 'purifying' the neighbourhood in the process, relied upon the stereotypical social representation of sex workers as dirty, devious, dangerous and diseased, and the drawing of a boundary between acceptable (ordered) and unacceptable (disorderly) behaviours:

> The notion that everything has its place, and that things (e.g. people, actions) can be in place or out of place is deeply engrained in the way we think and act...when individuals or groups ignore this socially produced common sense, they are said to be out of place and defined as deviant. Frequently, this labelling of out-of-place is metaphorical, based on analogies which themselves refer to common sense expectations (Cresswell, 1997, p. 334)

As Cresswell argues, metaphors of displacement used to describe certain groups or behaviours as 'out of place' include consistent references to waste matter and dirt (cf. Douglas, 1966), distinguishing such groups from 'normal' purified populations. As such, these metaphors of displacement cannot be dismissed as simple poetic flourishes, but, as the examples of community activism in Balsall Heath and Manningham demonstrate, are

indicative of more deeply-rooted exclusionary desires.

Conclusion

The negative reactions to street prostitution witnessed in Balsall Heath and Manningham, manifest in community attempts to regulate their working practices through street pickets, demonstrate the apprehension and anxiety that many people experience about commercial sex work, which they subsequently seek to distance themselves from. In both these cases, it was evident that street prostitutes were being scapegoated as a polluting influence, detrimental to local amenity and quality of life. This was reflected in the local discourses, built up through the intersection of diverse metaphors of displacement, which produced a seemingly common sense view that commercial sex work is unnatural and deviant, linking it to wider problems of criminality, deprivation and environmental pollution. Although many residents' complaints about the nuisances caused by street soliciting and kerb-crawling were no doubt legitimate, it appears that the campaigns were provoked by a more deep-rooted moral anxiety about the presence of prostitutes on the streets. In short, local apprehensions about drugs, environmental degradation and crime appeared to be projected onto the stigmatised figure of the street prostitute, with commercial sex work mistakenly identified as a cause, rather than a symptom, of the problems which afflicted these marginal inner city areas.

Given that prostitutes have always been subject to stigmatisation, and that there has been little substantial legal reform of prostitution laws for thirty years, this still poses the question as to why these community pickets against prostitutes in 'traditional' red-light districts began at this particular time. Crucially, neither of these areas appear to have been affected by gentrification, which Winchester and White (1988) hypothesised as a major impetus to anti-prostitution protests, remaining largely economically and socially marginal with high proportions of rented accommodation and a relatively transient population. Nonetheless, the proportion of owner-occupation is rising in both, giving local residents more incentive to safeguard (and enhance) the exchange value of their principal asset. More important though is the fact that both locations are occupied by a sizeable (and growing) Muslim population, which is now well-established with strong community networks (organised mainly through the mosques). Interviews with local residents suggested that street prostitution was seen to posit a strong challenge to the *collective* identity of the local Muslim population, whose use of the term 'prostitute' as a pejorative term to describe any 'non-conforming' Muslim woman has been well-documented (see Walker *et al.*, 1994). Against a backdrop of growing Asian dissatisfaction with local party politics (particularly in Birmingham, which still has not had any Asian MPs), as well as strained relations with local police, these community pickets have been a way for local (male) Muslims to assert their religious and moral values in pubic spaces, simultaneously uniting community elders with less religious younger Muslims in a common cause. In this sense, the success of the pickets in removing prostitution from their streets stands as a remarkable testament to the political organisation and community identity of British Muslims in these two localities (see Solomas and Back, 1995).

In the process, these community pickets have also succeeded in highlighting the extent to which British prostitution laws are largely inoperable given the time and resources available for policing prostitution, suggesting that the time is right to explore alternative approaches (Hubbard, 1997). From one perspective, the fact these community pickets have had more impact on the location of prostitutes in their respective cities than any police intervention over the last thirty years suggests that multi-agency approaches involving co-operation between police, local authorities and the public may be successfully pursued as a long-term solution to regulating prostitution and kerb-crawling. Yet some important caveats need to be added to this conclusion, not least of which is the fact that even when presented in terms of 'community safety' discourses, street pickets constitute an inherently aggressive and masculinist claim to public space which perpetuates a series of gendered distinctions in terms of access to the public realm. Moreover, although some argue that multi-agency approaches can successfully 'design out' prostitution (see especially Matthews, 1986, 1993), it is generally agreed that a high level of displacement is unavoidable. The evidence above bears this out, suggesting that the decline of street prostitution in Balsall Heath and Manningham has not ended the involvement of

most of the women in sex work, but has merely displaced them, whether on a local or national scale. In this sense, whether the intervention is punitive policing or community activism, without proper 'exit strategies' designed to help prostitute women explore alternative career paths, it seems that displacement or deflection will remain the overwhelming result of anti-prostitution measures. Matthews (1993), however, questions whether displacement is in itself a negative outcome of initiatives designed to tackle prostitution in residential areas, and, following Barr and Pease (1990), suggests it is important to distinguish benign and malign forms of displacement. Specifically, he argues that the deflection of prostitution away from the centre of residential districts towards non-residential and industrial areas constitutes benign displacement; minimising the negative social impacts, if not the overall level, of these activities.

Whether such views adequately represent the views of sex workers themselves is more debatable. Few prostitute women regard their displacement to unfamiliar working environments as benign, as such actions may break up peer networks and disrupt contacts with established and reliable clients. In fact, forcing prostitutes to work more covertly in isolated areas away from residential populations may be postulated as a major factor heightening their vulnerability to violence and exploitation. As Kinnell (1993, p. 11) argues, "the physical location of the prostitute appears to affect her exposure to rape and other forms of violence very strongly", and it seems inevitable that risks of abuse, harassment and sexual violence would increase in more marginal areas without the proper support of police and social services. Hence, given the history of the regulation of prostitution (whether legally enforced or not) it seems that without changing underlying social and economic conditions, neighbourhood campaigns will make little impact on the existence of prostitution, but will merely serve to change its spatial distribution in ways that reflect general social prejudices against sex work.

Notes

1. Information from an unpublished police survey presented to Birmingham City Council working party on prostitution (1992) suggested that as many as 55% of kerb-crawlers to Balsall Heath came from outside Birmingham. For more detailed descriptions of the social characteristics of kerb-crawlers/clients, see Faugier (1994); McKegany and Barnard (1996).
2. The situation is further complicated by the fact that a variety of other acts, including the 1824 Vagrancy Act, 1361 Justices of the Peace Act and various sections of the 1994 Criminal Justice Act, have also been used to regulate street prostitution.
3. A detailed context analysis of newspaper reporting on sex work in both the local (primarily the *Bradford Argus*, *Yorkshire Post*, *Birmingham Evening Mail* and *Birmingham Post*) and 'quality' national press (mainly the *Independent*, *Guardian* and *Times*) was conducted covering the period 1986-1996.
4. Interviews were primarily conducted with outreach workers from Birmingham's SAFE-HIV project, funded by Birmingham Department of Public Health Medicine to offer sexual health advice, drug counselling and legal advice to prostitutes, as well as Bradford Streets and Lanes Project. Further details about these organisations can be found in O'Neill (1997).
5. Information from unpublished police survey presented to Birmingham City Council working party on prostitution, 1992 (see above).
6. Covert operations Larnem, Salacity, Saint and Portfolio resulted in 846 arrests of women for soliciting and 350 men for kerb-crawling in the period June 1989 to September 1990.
7. Planning inspectorate decision letter 10th October 1994 (reference T/APP/C/94/P4605/633044).
8. One questionable strategy adopted by the pickets was to hinder the work of the SAFE-HIV outreach minibus, with local protesters regularly demanding free condoms intended for prostitutes.
9. Promoted by the Home Office, and launched nationally in 1995, the Street Watch initiative has been described by Hughes (1997, p. 157) as the most 'ill-conceived' public-police partnership, revolving as it does around vague notions of 'walking with purpose'.
10. OPCS Census of Population 1991 results for University Ward, Bradford.
11. Home Office Minister David McLean, cited in *Hansard* 1994, column 289, in response to a question about the legal status of street prostitution by Lynn Jones, MP for Birmingham Selly Oak.
12. Proposed as part of the South Yorkshire Forum on Prostitution's multi-agency strategy to address street prostitution in Sheffield, December 1986.
13. This survey of 120 households was carried out by Leeds University Centre for Criminal Justice Studies in 1993, focusing on those roads directly affected by street prostitution.

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