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Abstract

Modern international trafficking in forced labor took hold during the 1850s, and crossed into the twentieth century as a seemingly intractable global phenomenon. Contemporaries described this worldwide enterprise as the “white slave trade.” As shorthand for sex-trafficking, “the white slave trade” has a very long pedigree. The first cross-national, public-private coalition against trafficking in women and children was forged in the late nineteenth century by the London-based National Vigilance Association. This coalition generated the foundational treaties and directional momentum for international anti-trafficking projects across the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.

TRAFFICKING IN THE PAST

Trafficking in persons is that very distinct transactional phenomenon whereby individuals are accessed and entrapped through predatory, duplicitous manipulation, and then lured and propelled into vicinities and circumstances for purposes of gross exploitation not otherwise and elsewhere obtainable. Three hundred years ago, the English common law equivalent was “Spiritting & Trepanning.” *Spiritting*, a variant of “kidnapping,” denoted the all-important element of transport, of physically transplanting an individual from a familiar “here,” into a less familiar, more inimical “there,” beyond the sight, sound, and reach of those most able and willing to intercede. *Trepanning*, from the Old English verb *trappen*, denoted the all-important element of entrapment, with victims brought unawares into a position of difficulty or danger through beguilement, deceit, or artifice (OED 1989).

Infinite in its particulars, human trafficking has nonetheless been discernible to societies across time, space, and culture because its perpetration occurs through a unique cluster of elemental human wrongs:

- Betrayals of intimacy and social trust;
- Manipulation and seduction of desire;
- Entrapment, emotional, financial, and otherwise;
- Bodily constraint as the necessity arises;
- Intended, anticipated, or foreseeable gross exploitation in ways and to degrees otherwise unobtainable;
- Physical transport from one socio-legal vicinity to another, more unfamiliar and intimidating to the victim.

Modern international trafficking in forced labor - including forced sexual labor - took hold during the 1850s. Quickly gathering momentum, geographic sweep, entrepreneurial sophistication, and impregnable footholds, it crossed into the twentieth century as a seemingly intractable global phenomenon featuring patterns, practices, routes, and markets still very much in evidence today. Access to online newspapers, periodicals, books, and official reports spanning several centuries now clarifies that contemporaries in these earlier eras consistently described and deplored this multifarious worldwide enterprise as one or another “white slave trade.”

Liquid labor - tractable workers who appear and disappear upon command, who do what is ordered, and take what is offered - have historically been encapsulated as “white slaves.” To quote the eminent Frederick Douglass: a wage laborer, “flung into competition with a class of laborers who work without wages” was a “white slave,” because his masters take “from him, by indirection, what the black slave has taken from him, directly, and without ceremony. Both are plundered, and by the same plunderers” (Douglass 1855, 239-40).

Transporting legions of impoverished Asian peasants into the Americas as a “substitute for slavery,” was “a white slave trade” (Chronology 3 Dec 1852; 22 Mar 1856; 19 Aug 1860).¹ When parents signed over their children to socially trusted others, who then transported those children to distant countries “to go out begging under various pretences, punishing them with the most reckless, and often with the most ingenious, cruelty” - this was “white slavery” and “a white slave trade” (Chronology 26 Dec 1873). When immigrants were lured into turpentine fields, coal mines, and plantations, their wages whittled down by inflated charges for board and daily needs, local police and courts on call to chase them down as

¹ “Chronology” refers to Appendix I of this article.

absconding debtors or thieves - they became “white slaves” (Chronology 11 Aug 1884; 15 Sep 1888; 10 Mar 1895; 21 Oct 1906). When novice prostitutes were lured into brothels and saloons, then “afterward debarred all liberty,” their earnings whittled down by inflated charges for board and daily needs, local police and courts on call to chase them down as absconding debtors or thieves - they too became victims of “a system of white slavery” (Chronology 19 Jul 1858).

As shorthand for the cross-border movement of women and children for deployment in hyper-exploitative commercial prostitution, “the white slave trade” has a very long pedigree. As indicated by a 27 August 1856 *New York Times* article entitled “The White Slave Traffic,” this phrase was a geo-culturally specific reference to the “infamous traffic” that had “for centuries made the Kuban [River] a highway of cruelty,” bringing women from the Caucasus across the Black Sea into the “slave-markets of Constantinople and the other cities of the Ottoman Empire.”

This “harem trade” was part of a far more extensive traffic in forced labor. “*Slave*” is derived from *Scalvus*, a Medieval Latin racial name for *Slav* (OED 1989). The conquest of Constantinople in 1204 during the Fourth Crusade gave Latin merchants access to the Aegean and Black seas (Davis 1986, 53). Rival Genoese and Venetian merchant colonizers built up a profitable trade in white slaves, transporting captives from the Caucasus and Balkans across the Black Sea (Hobson 2004, 49).

These entrepreneurs were “quick learners,” who “bought and transported anything for which they could find new markets - grain, cheese, salt, fish, wine, sugar, alum; Senegalese gold; fine goods from the Orient; Moorish slaves from Spain and pagan or Christian slaves from the Balkans, Greece, and the Black Sea” (Davis 1986, 53). Colloquial and inherited languages came up short when contemporaries set about naming this new style of trucking and bartering. The verb - to traffic - came first: *trafficare*, with its noun of action, *traffico*, following soon thereafter. In common currency among Northern Italian city states by the early fourteenth century, *trafficare* (“to do, across”) was a neologism coined to capture the ambiguities and ambivalences of proto-modern capitalist profit-seeking in and around the Mediterranean (OED 1989). “Trafficking” emerged over ensuing centuries as an encapsulation of parasitical, mercenary profit-seeking across shifting and ultimately unreliable moral horizons.

Traffic flows shifted in the 1470s, a decade or so before Christopher Columbus set sail on his momentous voyage. The Ottoman Turks annexed the Crimea and closed the Dardanelles to Latin merchants, cutting Genoa and Venice off from their Black Sea colonies. Tartars in the Crimean Khanate - an entity in south Russia centered around the Don River - took control of the Black Sea trade in white slaves, preying upon Slavic and Caucasian tribes from the mid-1470s up

through the liquidation of the Khanate by Catherine the Great in the 1780s. Tartar predations supplemented and eventually supplanted Ottoman annual quotas from Balkan and Anatolian subject populations for boy-slaves, put to use as military janissaries, civil functionaries, agricultural laborers, and industrial workers (Rodriguez 1997). At the western reaches of the Ottoman Empire was a branch line of the white slave trade, conducted by the Barbary corsairs in North Africa (Davis 2003).

Circassia, located in the northwest quadrant of the land bridge between the Black Sea, to the west, and the Caspian Sea, to the east, emerged over many centuries as the principal source of females exported to Turkish and Arab markets for sale as wives, concubines, and personal slaves. In its glory days, Circassia straddled both banks of the Kuban River, and covered an area larger than Denmark; on modern maps, Circassia is Karachay-Cherkessia Autonomous Province, neighbor to Chechnya, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia (Shenfield 1999, 1). Mid-nineteenth century mainstream familiarity with the Caucasus, Balkans, Turkey, and the harem trade was occasioned by the Crimean War in the 1850s. In the post-Cold War era, this same region has emerged as “a major transit and source area for trafficking in women to the Middle East, Europe, and North America” (Lehti and Aromaa 2006, 198-199).

As the areas of recruitment for the “white slave trade” expanded and diversified across the nineteenth century, so too did the locus and reach of buyers, sellers, and procurers. By the late nineteenth century, procurers were gathering up recruits from the one million-plus German emigrants who had by then settled in southern Russia. Conscripts, along with seasoned procurers, were to be found in large numbers among Jews in the “Pale of Settlement,” a proto-concentration camp which successive Russian rulers carved out through repeated partitions of Poland (Bristow 1983, 54-69). Russian wars of conquest also triggered the cumulative emigration of millions from the Caucasus into Turkey, the Balkans, Western Europe, and the United States (Jersild 1997, 102). Having a fuller sense of this cultural and historical geography lends greater credibility to turn-of-the-century reports of large-scale trafficking networks operating out of Hamburg, Leipzig, and Vienna (*New York Times*, 23 Jan 1893: 2).

With global mass migration came a proliferation of “white slave trades.” As international trafficking in forced labor expanded and diversified from the 1850s into the twentieth century, so too did its nomenclature, giving rise to “brand names” of a sort (e.g. padrone trade, coolie trade, *der Mädchenhandel*), along with more precise labels for the various means used to hold and manage victims (e.g. peonage, servitude, bonded labor, fictive adoption, baby farming). Exponential increases and geographic spread registered as an ever harsher, ever more exploitative labor regime, with workers subjected to ever more intensive,

dehumanizing, and degrading terms and conditions. Monographic studies of prostitution in various geo-cultural locales in this era have converged around the insight that almost everywhere, “the importance of sociability between prostitutes and their clients effectively declined; greater emphasis was placed on sexual services” as “blatant commercial exchanges” (Gilfoyle 1999, 121, 130).

Reports surfaced in Britain in the early 1850s that local underage girls were being recruited - in the main, through seduction and false promises - for placement into Continental *maisons tolerance* (*Times* 10 April 1852: 4). Victims were typically “seducible, though not licentious,” an unctuously Victorian phrase that evidently had in mind young women already engaged in casual prostitution who were nonetheless still novices in the complexities of sexual commerce. Their self-presumption of knowledge proved personally disastrous, as they entered into arrangements at a distance they would never have consented to “had they known the conditions to which they were going and the life” that awaited them (Crowdy 1927, 159). This one-by-one, two-by-two procurement from Britain filled the void created as French and Belgian women rejected state-sanctioned brothels in favor of more lucrative, free-wheeling public spaces (Gilfoyle 1999, 121).

Toward the close of the 1850s, German-language newspapers in the United States reported an ongoing “white slave traffic” in young girls, ages eight to fifteen, put to work during days “as street beggars, with accordions, guitars, or tambourines,” and by night, “prostituted to the worst class of roués.” Money they might amass was taken from them by force, and to venture any complaint on this score was to risk being “cast aside.” They had “no redress against beating, plundering, and personal violation” (Chronology 6 Oct 1859). Procurers were frequenting four or five villages in the area of Stuttgart, buying “up debts which poor, simple-hearted peasants owe.” When families could not make payment on demand, they were persuaded to sign contracts “apprenticing” their daughters to agents for employment abroad, with full assurances that the girls could earn what amounted to “a handsome annual income” in their native land (Ibid).

By the late 1860s, the Italian Beneficent Society of Paris was short on resources and even shorter on patience, utterly overwhelmed by the “swarms of young vagabond musicians who yearly cross the Alps and encumber the streets of this and other European cities.” Each year brought an ever larger influx of these “wretched children,” hailing from the mountainous regions of southern Italy. Typically, families back home were manipulated and induced by false stories of great riches to sign contracts for the labor of their children. Parisian ordinances meant to target this phenomenon seemed only to worsen the plight of victims. Children picked up for vagrancy were returned to *padrone* keepers, who beat and starved them for the inconvenience, and so police enforcement dwindled; with the most abused and deprived children thereby made practically immune from official

interference, abuse and deprivation intensified. By the 1880s, this “traffic in white children” had assumed monumental proportions in Paris, London, Berlin, St. Petersburg, New York, and Chicago (Chronology 9 Apr 1868; 1 Jul 1873; 26 Aug 1879; 10 Mar 1895).

Alongside and intermingled with *La Tratta dei Bianchi*, was a traffic in Italian and Southeastern European contract laborers, induced and entrapped into slave-like employment and debt-bondage in Europe, the United States, South America, and Australia (Chronology 11 Aug 1884). When Chinese laborers were barred from entering the United States in the 1880s, employers turned to “immigrant entrepreneurs” operating “coercive networks” (Peck 2000). In response to heightened alertness at borders, procurers began commissioning “young Italian laborers returning home for a visit” to inveigle “young peasant girls” to return with them under promise of marriage (Cordasco and Pitkin 1981, 15).

INTERNATIONAL ANTI-TRAFFICKING INITIATIVES

The first cross-national, public-private coalition against trafficking in women and children was forged in the late nineteenth century by the London-based National Vigilance Association (NVA). This coalition, in turn, generated the foundational treaties and directional momentum for international anti-trafficking projects across the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. Standard timelines on the NVA begin in the late 1860s and 1870s, when opposition to the Contagious Diseases Acts coalesced under the principal leadership of Josephine Butler.

Beginning in October of 1898, NVA secretary William Alexander Coote made a brisk tour of European capitals to promote the establishment of NVA affiliates. Upon his return, the NVA convened an international congress of delegates. Over 100 representatives from at least eight nations gathered in London, 22-24 June 1899, for the purpose of taking “steps to suppress” the “international traffic in girls,” also known as the “white slave trade” (Chronology 14 Jun 1901). With this in mind, delegates constituted themselves as the International Union for the Suppression of the White Slave Trade, and created an International Bureau to serve as the Union’s permanent secretariat. In a brief item, the *New York Times* described this gathering as, “the first organized attempt of the governments of Europe to act as guardians of their unprotected female subjects” (Chronology 22 Jun 1899).

Turning down the volume on what these abolitionists were saying brings more fully into view what they were doing, the social technologies and organizational strategies they employed. Congresses, conferences, federations, unions, associations, secretariats, international bureaus, commissions, advisory experts, and so on - these were the building blocks of an innovative, cross-border

associational movement among governments and peoples that first took hold in Western Europe and North America during the 1840s, crested around 1919, then ebbed to a long, slow pause in the late 1930s. Scanning the few years leading up to and following the 1899 NVA-hosted gathering in London, we get a good sense of the scope and topography of this internationalism: the suppression of the African slave trade and liquor traffic (1889, 1899); protection of labor in factories and mines (1890); repression of epidemic diseases (1893, 1894, 1897, 1903); private international law (1893, 1894, 1900, 1904); protection of artistic and literary property (1896); arbitration and peace (1899); monetary policies (1893), and so on.

Out of step with mainstream trends, the NVA was nonetheless leagues ahead of detractors when it came to strategic politicking and cross-border organizing. The International Union for the Suppression of the White Slave Trade established during that 1899 gathering in London was a variation on generic models already in operation. However, the speed and agility with which William Coote put things together points more to “reverse engineering.” Having observed how treaties and executive agreements had emerged over the last several decades in various realms of everyday life - banking, railroads, public hygiene, and so on - Coote and his colleagues very likely worked backward: an inter-governmental diplomatic conference could be summoned and organized upon presentation of resolutions from a sizeable, public-private associational congress, and a congress of this sort could be produced by making a quick but purposeful tour of European capitals.

Following the 1899 Congress, Coote teamed up with a French legislator to lobby the latter’s government to host a diplomatic conference. This inter-governmental conference was held 15-25 July 1902, and official delegates from fifteen countries, “elaborated projects for a convention and for an administrative arrangement.” More particularly, attendees generated and signed two interlocking documents: a *Draft Convention* and a *Draft Arrangement* (Reinsch 1907, 616).

The *Draft Convention* was front and center, viewed by participants as the gathering’s principal accomplishment. It called for State Parties to revise national criminal codes and extradition treaties to permit and facilitate prosecution and appropriately severe punishment of:

Any person who, to gratify the passions of others, has hired, abducted or enticed, a minor female - with or without her consent - for immoral purposes;

Any person who, to gratify the passions of others, has by fraud or by the use of violence, threats, abuse of authority, or any other means of constraint, hired, abducted or enticed a woman or a girl of full age for immoral purposes.

The *Draft Arrangement* was more along the lines of an executive agreement for cross-border administrative harmonization, not expected to require action by

domestic lawmakers (Reinsch 1907, 582-83; Reinsch 1909, 30). Seeking to afford effective protection “to minor females, and to women of full age who have suffered abuse or compulsion,” signatories agreed:

To establish or name a central authority to coordinate all information relative to the procuring of women or girls for immoral purposes abroad. This central authority was to communicate with counterparts across borders with relevant information.

To have in place lawful mechanisms and procedures for mounting a watch at major railway stations, ports of embarkation, and travel hubs, for persons directing or exercising authority over women and girls destined for an immoral life.

To ensure that declarations would be taken from foreign-born victims, in order to establish their identity and civil status, and to discover who has caused them to leave their country.

To provide victims seeking repatriation with temporary shelter and assistance as needed.

To maintain regulatory oversight of agencies engaged in finding employment for women or girls abroad.

On 18 May 1904, the 1902 *Draft Arrangement* was formalized and signed by senior Paris-based diplomats as: *[The] Arrangement international en vue d'assurer une protection efficace contre le trafic criminel connu sous le nom de 'Traite des Blanches.'* In English-language versions this original title was melded into the preamble, in favor of a more law enforcement oriented title: *The International Agreement for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic* (Abbott 1935; Reinsch 1907). Meanwhile, the 1902 *Draft Convention* became bogged down in differences on the age of female majority and German concerns about transmission of criminal warrants (Reinsch 1911, 36). A marathon conference in Paris (18 April-4 May 1910) finalized and formalized the 1902 *Draft Convention* as: *[The] Convention internationale relative a la repression de la traits des blanches.* This was rendered in English as: *The International Convention for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic.* The 1902 *Draft Convention* thus became the 1910 *Convention*.

We have quite logically assumed that the 1904 *International Agreement* came first, followed six years later by the 1910 *Convention*, with the latter somehow intended to “fix” the former by doing more and better. To the contrary, both were hammered out in July of 1902, by attendees of the very first inter-governmental conference on the subject. The initiative and agenda for that 1902 gathering came from the 1899 Congress and various follow-up working meetings

during 1900-1902. In all of this, collective energies were harnessed to getting governments to come together and “universally...forbid the trade in all its branches,” and establish mechanisms for “an assimilation of laws and interchange of executive assistance as may render the purveyors of this unholy traffic amenable to law whenever” and wherever “they may be caught.”(Chronology 14 Jun 1901). The original two-part Convention-Arrangement, when reunited and rendered in plain language, reflects and embodies this rationale.

Viewed separately, the 1904 *International Agreement* and the 1910 *International Convention* do not amount to much. However, when reunited as originally envisioned, their interlocking provisions have a distinct symmetry and wisdom. To begin with, it was quite an accomplishment to get in place provisions directing signatories to create or designate a Central Authority legally empowered and administratively tasked to maintain direct contact with counterparts across international borders on specific cases and more generally. These Central Authorities may now be understood as the precursor to “government networks” that “link together domestic government officials from different countries in similar fields or spheres of responsibility,” and “provide an effective means to harness national regulatory systems in the pursuit of common, international goals” (Slaughter and Burke-White 2006, 334). Original understandings of these Central Authorities envisioned them working closely with national and international voluntary organizations, something akin to networked governance with a strong civil society component.

Establishing expectations and permission for horizontal inter-governmental cross-border communication and coordination generated a norm both necessary and useful for those NGOs seeking to mount a comprehensive anti-trafficking campaign. By this proviso, it became some very specific person’s job in each signatory state to receive and answer inquiries from domestic and international NGOs. This was especially helpful for individuals and non-state actors who spoke, wrote, and acted in the fervent idioms of religion. Officials of the day were inclined to view correspondence from a return address like “One Amen Corner” with suspicion and derision, and so charging an elected or appointed official to take due note of all correspondence on the “white slave trade” helped to keep the public domain open to non-secular advocacy groups.

No less important were the provisions for mounting vigilance at major ports and railroad stations. This was very much made to NVA order, as it provided state sanction for activities such groups had already initiated and were looking to expand. Without state sanction “station workers” looked a lot like busy-bodies, their activities subject to insult, ridicule, and recrimination. Indeed, almost immediately following the diplomatic conference in Paris during July of 1902, England’s Home Secretary accepted the NVA’s offer to put the basics of the *Draft*

Arrangement (1902) into action through a six-month program (NVA 1903). By 1910, national committees in London, Liverpool, Buenos Aires, and Egypt, along with agencies such as the Jewish Association for the Protection of Women and Girls, had obtained state sanction for station work, declaration taking, repatriation assistance, and legal counsel. These activities, in turn, opened the way to generating detailed reports and statistics documenting cross-border trafficking, reports of the sort now issued by the United Nations, Anti-Slavery International, and Human Rights Watch. It also becomes apparent from the intensive schedule of abolitionist congresses, conferences, and preparatory meetings from 1899-1914, that anti-trafficking groups skillfully stage-managed pressure campaigns within and across countries to gain support and momentum for multilateral cooperation among governments. This included a U.S. speaking tour by William Coote, and follow-up creation of the US-NVA and state-level affiliates across America (Cordasco and Pitkin 1981, 161).

The 1904 *International Agreement* strikes most commentators today as rather tame and tepid, and so it is surprising to read in contemporary newspapers that signatory governments had combined to take “drastic measures” in order “To Stop [the] Trade in Women” (New York Times, 18 July 1905: 2). What explains the discrepancy? The unanticipated hiving off of the *Draft Arrangement* from the *Draft Convention* - and delays in finalizing the latter - had curious, unfortunate consequences. Governments and activists began deploying the 1904 *International Agreement* to justify and sanction sweeping changes in domestic law and policy. Among State Parties, executive proclamations and news announcements of the 1904 *International Agreement* generally overstated the magnitude of law-enforcement obligations incurred, and understated the humanistic intent of provisions for repatriation and victim assistance.

For example, German news accounts apparently stated that the “strict watch” on major stations and ports was for “persons sending white slaves abroad.” Explanations of repatriation provisions gave little indication that officials would or should consider a victim’s personal wishes and circumstances (Chronology 18 Jul 1905). When proclaimed in Canada (1909), provisions for victim assistance took on a punitive tone: “The Governments undertake to place provisionally the victims of the traffic in institutions, and, as far as possible, send back to their own countries those who ask it” (Chronology 25 Jul 1909).

Executive overstatement among signatory governments was - in part - a pragmatic front-loading of the more far-reaching *Draft Convention*, which insiders knew was in the pipeline. There was also and more importantly the domestic dividend that governments and interest groups reap when legislatures, regulators, and administrators sit down to work out a regimen for domestic compliance to treaties. For European principals, the 1904 *International Agreement* came into

force on 18 July 1905, some fourteen months after the Paris signing ceremony. France, Spain, and Belgium were already amending domestic penal codes using model legislation drafted at the 1899 Congress and the 1902 diplomatic conference. In Britain, Parliament had already invoked the *International Agreement* to create a new infrastructure for immigration, including provisions for expulsion and involuntary repatriation (Chronology 19 Apr 1905; Bartley 2000, 393).

Things took an especially curious turn in the United States, as suggested by this 2 March 1905 *New York Times* headline: “Against White Slave Trade; Senate Ratifies Treaty - All Countries to Enact Repressive Laws.” Readers learned that:

The Senate in executive session to-day ratified and made public a treaty with all nations for the repression of the trade in white women. All the contracting nations agree to enact laws for the punishment of any person enticing a woman from one country into another, even with her consent. The treaty is to apply even when the various acts which are constituent elements of the offense have been committed in different countries.

It thus becomes apparent that Senators understood themselves to be endorsing U.S. adherence to the combined Convention-Arrangement (U.S. Senate 1902; U.S. Senate 1905).

Even after Senate approval, the executive branch did not act on this for some years, apparently accepting the view of many that compliance would require “an elaborate scheme of legislation affecting the police authority of the several states and invasive of their constitutionally reserved rights” (Abbott 1935). Secretary of State Elihu Root was put to work “perfecting a system whereby this Government can lend its aid in spite of the fact that it has no Federal police. This system involves the assistance of the police of the seaport cities and the immigration officials and Inspectors, particularly those stationed on the Atlantic Coast” (Chronology 7 Jun 1908). In June of 1908, without checking back with Congress, President Theodore Roosevelt used the Senate’s early 1905 endorsement of the combined Convention-Arrangement as constitutional grounds for making the U.S. a party to the *International Agreement*. When the 1910 *Convention* opened for signatures, the U.S. declined to participate. Nonetheless, American lawmakers reaped an impressive, even breath-taking, domestic dividend from the 1904 *International Agreement*, including the 1910 White Slave Trade Act (Mann Act), and a small Department of Justice investigative bureau later known as the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

CONCLUSION

We must regard ourselves as citizens of the world: and, indeed, circumstances [have] now brought the nations of it much nearer to one another than they formerly were (“British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society.” Times, 19 May 1845: 8)

Ongoing debates about global trafficking - its reality, causes, dimensions, and recommended remedies - are very much grounded in readings of the past. Polarized positions staked out in these debates are historically leveraged, so that over time “the past” becomes less and less informative and useful in the everyday pursuit of pragmatic, effective counter-trafficking strategies. Recent feminist scholarship shows a renewed and perhaps even revisionist curiosity about pre-World War I anti-trafficking campaigns (Halley 2006). As things stand, however, academics and activists are generally dismissive of those projects. The long-ago abolitionists who galvanized those initiatives are condemned for: (1) failing to broaden their concerns beyond white European females trafficked for prostitution; (2) refusing to concede that prostitution might be consensual; (3) targeting and stigmatizing migrants.

These criticisms are largely misdirected. Why only “white” women? When long-ago abolitionists presumed to speak about the plight of women in Asia and Africa, they were ridiculed by contemporaries as ethnocentric, culturally intolerant busybodies. This dilemma was spelled out by a Netherlands delegate during a 1921 League of Nations conference. When he had challenged the misleading racialism of “white slavery” at a prewar Brussels gathering, his government censured him, explaining that there was: “no traffic in women in the Indies, none at all; these are illusions, utopias, Western ideas, because the Oriental woman has no such ideas; prostitution does her no harm whatever, and later she marries. It is a well-recognized form of earning money, and women do so of their own free will” (League 1921, 55-56).

There was also the increasingly complicated question of who had “standing” to speak about such and such a thing, person, event, or issue. In the era before the NVA anti-trafficking coalition laid the foundations for the modern international human rights movement, the fact of shared ethnicity, race, or nationality was the most rhetorically tenable basis for demanding government action on behalf of victims outside of one’s own extended family. So too, although contemporaries often understood the linkages across issues - prostitution, poverty, migration, labor, gender - it proved politically perilous for advocacy groups to venture comprehensive, expansive projects that trampled into neighboring areas of expertise - medicine, political economy, education, international law, and so on.

As to supposed abolitionist refusals to concede that prostitution might be consensual, for most, this was a tactical position or stance rather than a deeply held belief or perception. Groups mobilized against large-scale trafficking in the decades before World War II repeatedly made the point that victims were often women who had initially gone abroad intending to pursue prostitution. Experience proved, however, that the most sought-after conscript in this business is that individual who, having once said “yes” to the general proposition, cannot then say “no” to the particulars as they are later presented. As prostitution was afforded greater public tolerance, legal sanction, and geographic mobility, novice prostitutes became ever more vulnerable to trafficking and hyper-exploitation. Their easy availability and itinerancy simultaneously generated a supply of potential victims near to hand, and intense employer demand for experienced sex workers who could be overworked, underpaid, held to service, and prevented from moving on. As it was then, so it is now: A practicing prostitute is “trafficked” so as to extract and extort from her what she would otherwise withhold. The point is to have her when, where, and how, one wishes to have her.

As for targeting and stigmatizing migrants, trafficking in persons is an open-border phenomenon, the more open the borders the more prolific the trafficking. This is a point easily missed and misconstrued in the turgid waters of public discourse. Surges in human trafficking trigger widespread “rational moral distress,” not merely because of the intrinsic ambiguities involved but also - and even more pointedly - by the proliferation of illegitimate arguments (Rivera-López 2006, 41). Reasonable people of liberal temperament become immobilized, feeling caught between loathsome traffickers and loathsome abolitionists. Unable to say “yes,” and unwilling to say “no,” their paralysis unleashes a contagion of frightened and vindictive revulsion that - from a distance - looks like nothing more and nothing less than a “moral panic.”

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APPENDIX I:

CHRONOLOGY OF THE TRAFFIC IN PERSONS, AND ANTI-TRAFFICKING INITIATIVES, 1850-2000

2000	UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons
2000	Modern-Day Slavery (NEW YORK TIMES, Sep 9)
2000	U.N. Warns that Trafficking in Human Beings Is Growing (NYT, Jun 25)
1999	ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention
1998	Britain Calls Child Sex Trade Summit (INDEPENDENT, Aug 4)
1995	International Community Acts to Combat Child Sex Exploitation (IRISH TIMES, Jun 1)
1992	U.N. Says Prostitution of Children is Growing (NYT, Feb 19)
1989	British Group Finds Slavery is Flourishing (NYT, Jul 5)
1984	Hong Kong Battling Child Smugglers (ASSOCIATED PRESS, Dec 6)
1981	U.N. Gets a Report on African Slaves (NYT, Aug 27)
1980	Thousands of Aliens Held in Virtual Slavery in U.S. (NYT, Oct 19)
1979	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women
1979	Millions of Children in India Drudge for a Pittance (NYT, Dec 9)
1976	U.N. Reports Slavery Exists in Africa and Latin America (NYT, Aug 29)
1975	U.N. Aide Asks Inquiry on Forced Prostitution (NYT, Jun 27)
1967	British Group Finds Evidence of an Increase in Human Slavery (NYT, Apr 7)
1966	Slavery Remains Issue, U.N. Finds; Practice Said to Persist in Parts of Africa and Asia (NYT, Apr 17)
1962	Slavery in Saudi Arabia Ended by Faisal Edict (NYT, Nov 7)
1957	White Slave Traffic Revival (TIMES, Dec 21)
1956	Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery
1956	Shall We Oppose Slavery? (NYT, Aug 18)

1956	Anti-Slave Code Backed: U.N. Draft Pact is Approved by Ten-National Panel (NYT, Feb 7)
1954	U.N. Group Requests Reports on Slavery (NYT, Apr 29)
1953	Slavery Growing, U.N. Report Finds (NYT, Mar 29)
1951	Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others
1951	Italy Cracks Down On Child Slave Rings (CHICAGO DAILY TRIBUNE, Aug 27)
1951	Slavery Held Persisting (NYT, May 10)
1950	U.N. Unit Approves Prostitution Curb (NYT, Oct 6)
1950	U.N. Will Collect Facts on Slavery (NYT, Mar 7)
1947	The New Slavery (NYT, Dec 11)
1946	Prostitution Fight is Mapped in U.N. (NYT, May 10)
1933	Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women of Full Age
1933	The Traffic in Women. Russian Refugee Victims (TIMES, Feb 3)
1931	Slavery Problem Confronts League (NYT, Aug 26)
1930	Convention Concerning Forced or Compulsory Labour
1928	Children Sold as Slaves in Chinese Famine (CAYUGA CHIEF, Jun 8)
1927	Slavery Still Raises International Issues. Traffic in Human Beings Has Not Been Completely Suppressed (NYT, Oct 9)
1926	New Fight on Slavery Begun by the League (NYT, Jun 6)
1925	Convention to Suppress the Slave Trade and Slavery
1924	The New 'Slavery' (NYT, May 18)
1921	International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children
1920	Finds White Slave Trade Reviving Since the War (UTICA HERALD, Dec 1)
1916	The New Slavery (NYT, Dec 15)
1914	Popular Gullibility As Exhibited in the New White Slavery Hysteria (OUTLOOK, Feb)

1913	White Slave Traffic in India (TIMES, May 28)
1913	White Slave Traffic in Italy, (TIMES, Jan 16)
1912	Egypt is Market for White Slaves (DULUTH NEWS TRIBUNE, May 28)
1910	International Convention for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic
1909	To Crush White Slavery (NYT, Jul 25)
1908	To Stop White Slave Trade. Government is Planning Co-operative Measures with European Nations (NYT, Jun 7)
1906	Grand Jury Indicts Agent for Peonage. Sent Aliens to Slavery...Southern Turpentine Companies (NYT, Oct 21)
1905	To Stop Trade in Women (NYT, Jul 18)
1905	New British Aliens Bill. Government Determined to Deal with the Organized Traffic (NYT, Apr 19)
1904	International Agreement for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic
1903	The New Slavery (NYT, Jul 18)
1902	Slavery in the South. How Traffic in Human Beings Is Maintained In Defiance of Law (NYT, May 31)
1901	National Vigilance Association (TIMES, Jun 14)
1899	For the Protection of Girls (NYT, Jun 22)
1895	Padrone System...Maiming Boys and Forcing Them to Beg (DAILY INTER OCEAN, Mar 10)
1892	Trafficking in Girls (NORTH AMERICAN, Oct 19)
1892	War on the Padrone System; A Number of Children Arrested Last Night for Begging (DAILY INTER OCEAN, Mar 2)
1891	Slaves in West Virginia (CHICAGO TRIBUNE, Mar 16)
1890	Slave Labor in New York; What Has Been Learned of the Evils of the Padrone System (ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS, May 18)
1889	The White Slave Trade of Circassia (DAILY EVENING BULLETIN, Aug 10)
1888	Padrone Labor in the Coal Mines (FRANK LESLIE'S, Sep 15)
1884	Italian Slave Labor (GALVESTON DAILY NEWS, Aug 11)
1882	Slavery in Hong Kong (NYT, May 20)

1881	Importation of European Girls Into India (TIMES, Aug 19)
1880	The Turkish Slave Trade (DAILY EVENING BULLETIN, Jul 23)
1880	Child Traffic in Hong Kong (NYT, Jan 8)
1879	Slavery At Hong Kong (NYT, Nov 6)
1879	The South's New Slavery (NYT, Oct 10)
1879	Importing Beggar-Girls (ST LOUIS GLOBE-DEMOCRAT, Aug 26)
1877	White Slavery in Egypt (ST LOUIS GLOBE-DISPATCH, Apr 1)
1873	The Coolie Trade. The Slavery of the Present (NYT, Jul 19)
1873	The White Slave Trade in Italy (TIMES Dec 26)
1873	White Slavery—Traffic in Children (NYT, Jul 1)
1870	Peonage in the East Indies (DAILY EVENING BULLETIN, Jan 3)
1868	The Traffic in Italian Boys (TIMES, Apr 9)
1867	Slave Trade on the Nile (BANGOR DAILY WHIG, Jul 18)
1866	The Coolie Traffic. The Slave Trade of the Nineteenth Century (NYT, Jul 1)
1865	Peonage (NORTH AMERICAN GAZETTE, Jul 28)
1860	The White Slave Trade and the Black. New Measures to Suppress the African Trade and Increase the Chinese (NEW YORK HERALD, Aug 19)
1859	A Horrible Kind of Slavery (DAILY MORNING NEWS, Oct 6)
1858	Vice in New York (LOWELL DAILY CITIZEN, Jul 19)
1856	The White Slave Traffic (NYT, Aug 27)
1856	Horrible Traffic in Circassian Women (NYT, Aug 6)
1856	The Slave Trade, Black and White (CHARLESTON MERCURY, Apr 11)
1856	The African Slave Trade (BALTIMORE SUN, Mar 22)
1854	Slavery in Turkey (NYT, Dec 26)
1852	A Substitute for Slavery (FREDERICK DOUGLASS' PAPER, Dec 3)
1850	Peonage in New Mexico (OHIO OBSERVER, Aug 7)