International reorganisation and traffic in women

Venues of vulnerability and resistance

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From a European perspective it appears, at times, as if the enterprise of trafficking in women is a problem that arose with the fall of the Berlin wall and the consequent opening of the former Eastern-block countries. Women from the east are described as welling into western European brothels and street prostitution, in masses previously unheard of. Trafficking in Asia, on the other hand, is often historicised and dated back to the 1960s, the Vietnam War and the US military presence in the region. These descriptions of trafficking in women are, however, presentist assumptions, which premier an understanding of trafficking as a result of recent geopolitical affairs between nations, regions and races. However, trafficking in women is not only a contemporary phenomenon. Foreign women, illegal aliens, trafficking for the purpose of prostitution – these issues were burning questions in the late 19th century. The suppression of the illegal and criminal traffic in women for the purpose of prostitution has a long history and the problem of trafficking in people goes hand in hand with a number of other social changes, why the association of trafficking with other geopolitical conflicts (north–south, poor–rich, citizen–non-citizen), is not unfounded.

This article fills a gap in the histories describing the struggle to end trafficking and prostitution. The two main focal points of previous research are most often the movements against state regulated prostitution dated to the late 19th century and the fight against so called "white slavery", on the one hand, and on the other hand, the modern traffic and prostitution that emerged due to the concentration of large troops of armed forces during the Vietnam War in the 1960s. The period in between is seldom recognised as a time of great women's/feminist activity on the issue of prostitution and traffic in women. The cultural historian Mark Connelly states that the attention on prostitution displayed by numerous large organisations "dissipated [in the 1920s] almost as rapidly as it had emerged two decades earlier".[1] Also Judith Walkowitz, professor of modern European culture and social history, overlooks the international work performed in the interwar era even if she wishes to reconnect the past and the present. She takes a leap from the purity movement of the late 19th century to the present time, leaving the interwar period unre-

cognised.[2] Connelly's claim is reproduced regularly, but it abridges the period of an intensive fight against prostitution, white slavery and trafficking in women, from both ends. The start of the era can certainly be traced back to the days of British abolitionist Josephine Butler in the 1870s and not in the 1900s as Connelly suggests, and, as this article will show, the feminist investment in prostitution or trafficking were definitely not lacking in the late 1920s and 1930s.[3] Importantly however, the venues of the struggle changed from the national to the international, which was in line with a general reframing of the women's movement, following the successes made on the national level, for example regarding the abolishment of the state reglementation of prostitution in several European countries. Here Connelly's observation that "after 1920 prostitution never again became the dominant *national* issue" is quite accurate.[4] He argues convincingly from his North American perspective that the moral uproar surrounding prostitution is closely connected to the development of the American society from a rural-minded, decentralized and principally Anglo-Saxon and absolutist society to a predominantly urban, centralized, multi-ethnic society.[5]

The move to internationalism has been described as an abandoning of domestic feminist activism.[6] It is, however, connected to another great social reorganisation, the foundation and establishment of international organisations on a world-scale, such as the League of Nations. The relationship between states went through a transition that posed new challenges, not only politically but also concerning social issues such as prostitution and trafficking. Reglementation and prostitution were still considered to be issues of national interest, despite the persistent argument of those working with the issues, that national laws could either deter or encourage traffickers, and thus incite or divert a criminal activity. "It has been more and more generally acknowledged that national and international traffic cannot be separated", Mlle Forchhammer reports to the League of Nations.[7]

An obvious forum for international work was the League of Nations and Geneva, where the major international women's organisations set up headquarters. While most feminist/women's history research on the League focus the organised women's movement activities, this study will look at the work done within the official fold of the League. In the 1920s a situation developed where the initiative for social and legal change on the matter was still held by the women's movement, but where the investigation and the implementation of change was partly moved into the hands of international experts and politicians. Some of these experts were women, some even feminists, but not all.

The aim of the article is to show how the transition of the issue of prostitution developed from being mainly of national (even nationalistic) interest, to becoming a matter of international concern. The first section

maps the abolitionist movement and the abandoning of the term "white slave" in favour of "traffic in women" at the turn of the 20th century. This shift in terminology opened for an internationalisation of the fight against trafficking, which is dealt with in the second section. Section three introduces the work of the League of Nations on the matter of traffic and investigates the explanatory frame given in the League reports. Lastly, the fourth section gives an example of how international political upheaval could render women vulnerable to trafficking at a specific historical moment.

From "white slavery" to "traffic in women"

Trafficking, and the fight against it, was not a novel phenomenon in the 1920s. Previous to the 1920s, trafficking for the purpose of prostitution was termed "white slavery". The shift in terminology is interesting because it marks a number of changes in the understanding of the world – questions of race and ethnicity, sexuality, and internationalised world politics, are crystallized in the abandonment of "slavery" in favour of "trafficking".

The abolitionists opposed legislation that legalised prostitution in any way, for example through state reglementation, or through the licensing of brothels. According to Abraham Flexner, the author of the influential report *Prostitution in Europe* (1914), abolitionism does thus not refer to the belief that prostitution itself could be eradicated, but that legislation making it possible should be abolished.[8] The discourse of slavery denotes the close connection between the struggle against the exploitation of black slaves and the sexual exploitation of white women. It is a case of transferring the language of one social struggle to that of another, and, as it happens, "white" slavery makes its entrance at the time of the legal abolition of "black" slavery. As late as 1988 Kathleen L Barry suggested a return to the terminology of "female sexual slavery" to describe "all situations where women or girls cannot change the immediate conditions of their existence [...] and where they are subject to sexual violence and exploitation".[9] The discourse of slavery arouses moral indignation, which is exactly what the early struggle against white slave trade sought for. The British abolitionist Josephine Butler (1828–1906) is the front-figure of the European abolitionist movement and the middle class women's engagement in the issue of prostitution was somewhat shocking for their contemporaries. One member of the British parliament even calls it the "revolt of women".[10] In 1869, first the National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act was formed, but due to the association's policy of not accepting women members, a second organisation emerged, the Ladies' National Association (LNA). Its foremost task was to repeal reglementation and the Contagious Disease Act (CTA), according to which

prostitutes were subjected to regular medical examinations in order to establish that they did not carry venereal diseases. The CTA was repealed in 1886. The repeal was not the result only of the successful work of the National Association and the LNA, but as much a response to "social purity crusades and [...] police crackdowns".[11] In her article "The Politics of Prostitution", Judith Walkowitz outlines the problematic association between the feminist interests and the sexually repressive politics of the moral right. Josephine Butler was well aware of the risks of allying with the moral right and warned against the repressive character of the social purity movement, which not only battled prostitution, but soon became hostile towards sexuality itself.[12] Butler's sympathies and passion always lay with the prostitutes and their hardship.[13]

Thus the idea of white slavery emerges from the work of the repeal movement. Activists claimed that there was an extensive coercion of British girls and women into prostitution abroad. This was coupled with the intention of raising the legal age of consent from 13 to 16, why the rhetoric also included a scare of British under aged, and under-class, girls sexually exploited by the decadent aristocracy.[14] When the lobbying for a raise in the age of consent failed, the movement sought assistance from the popular press. Josephine Butler and Cathrine Booth (of the Salvation Army) instigated a series of articles in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in the summer of 1885 on the alleged atrocious treatment of innocent women and girls.[15] A series of scandalous articles run under the title "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon", which caused a massive public outcry in favour of repressive legislation.[16] Thus the term "white slave" was widely spread along with the idea of innocent white women in the hands of dark men. There is in fact an extensive literary and artistic genre, dating back to the late 18th century, that portraits white women at the mercy of foreign men. Perhaps the most predominant and striking is the Western erotic obsession with the Muslim harem.[17] Another example is the explosion of literature in North America on prostitution through the official Vice Reports, which surveyed the activities of the red-light districts of major US cities, and the emergence of a genre described by Mark Connelly as "captivity literature".[18] The latter describes how women are held captive by foreign men and forced to prostitution. It bears, according to Connelly, the mark of earlier literature describing white settlers captured by native Indians on the frontiers. Through both the reports and the fiction respectable readers were allowed a peek into the titillating horrors of vice, from a respectable distance, of course.

Internationalisation

In 1875 an international organisation was formed, the British, Continental and General Federation for the Abolition of the Government Regulation

of Prostitution (hereafter Federation), which held its first international congress in 1877.[19] The reason for internationalising the abolitionist movement was the belief that regulation promoted not only prostitution but also intensified traffic in prostitutes to areas where it was legal. The movement for the suppression of white slave traffic organised congresses in Paris 1899 and 1902, and, as a result, the International Agreement for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic (hereafter Agreement), was signed in May 1904 by the delegates representing twelve nations. These nations were Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Portugal, Russia, Spain, and Switzerland.[20] The primary interest was to promote administrative measures and appoint authorities responsible for handling traffic in women on a national level. Of concern were the tightening of border-control associated with "criminal traffic" and the establishment of the identity (and civil status) of those trafficked. Furthermore it was of interest to investigate what caused women and girls to leave their homes, as was the wellbeing of the women, for whom repatriation eventually awaited.[21]

Another step was taken, when the International Convention for the Suppression of White Slave Traffic (hereafter Convention), was signed by 13 countries in May 1910. The Convention was ratified by the same nations as the Agreement, including Austria–Hungary and Brazil, excluding Norway. The aim was somewhat different from the questions guiding the Agreement. The Convention advocated stronger measures to make the procuration of women punishable by the national laws of each country. The Convention does not deal with the practicalities of suppressing traffic in women, but rather with the international state co-operation required for the extradition and punishment of offenders (procurers, souteneurs etc.). The Convention identifies the trafficked person as a woman or girl under age or over age (21 years) who has been "led away" for "immoral purposes" or in order to "gratify the passions of another person".[22] The Convention rules unlawful the recruitment of women or girls by enticement or procuration, by fraud, by violence, by compulsion, through abuse of authority, or other means – including trafficking *with the consent* of an under aged girl or woman.[23] During these years a number of comprehensive studies were conducted both in Europe and the US, the before mentioned *Prostitution in Europe* by Flexner, numerous Vice Reports that mapped and investigated "vice" in the cities of the US, and in Germany Erich Wulffen's *Der Sexualverbrecher*, to name but a few.[24]

Josephine Butler's attention refocused after every success in her fight against what she perceived to be exploitation of women. When the CDA was repealed she turned her energies to raising the age of consent, thereafter her interest reoriented towards "sisters" in, the then British colony, of India, where the CDA was still in effect.[25] Of course new questions emerged with an international agenda. If class had been the stumbling-

block of the national movements, now race entered the equation. The International Council of Women and the International Women's Suffrage Alliance voiced criticism of the term "white slave" in the years around 1910, because it hid the prostitution of women of colour.[26] When the discourse of traffic in women is introduced the moral and political context is quite different from the days of white slavery. Certainly European women, and institutions like the League of Nations, tended to view the rest of the world in the dominating discourse of colonialism. In this sense women's work for the liberation and emancipation of other women can be regarded to be classist, racist and imperialist. Such accusations and observations have been part of the feminist and social reform movement throughout their histories. Undoubtedly, the social reform movements as well as the feminist/women's movements of the late 19th and early 20th century consisted mainly of upper and middle class women who primarily financed their own political activities through their families' wealth.[27] As the political scientist Mervat Hatem has shown, for example, both Egyptian and European women tended to relapse into stereotypes when trying to understand each other. Hatem shows how the observations of both parties were restricted to external appearances, which depicted Europeans as free and publicly visible, while Egyptians were secluded and unfree in their harems. As Hathem rightly observes this relapse into the immediately observable hides the *different* limitations and restrictions experienced by the other.[28] She writes:

> By accepting the contention that they were superior to women of other cultures, European women's attention was diverted from the fact that they continued to be subordinate to European and other men…[29]

However, a one-sided focus on the failures to operate in a manner which is totally free of preconceptions or biases veils the very real and earnest attempts to provide for and assist others. A considerable change can in fact be detected in the abandoning of the terminology of white slavery for the term traffic in women. Historian Leila K. Rupp claims that the shift in language "did not eliminate the racial and imperial overtones of the older phrasing".[30] On the contrary, I would argue, the abandonment of "white" showed an increasing awareness, and a willingness, to reframe the issue of traffic in women in a global context. In fact, as Antoinette Burton argues in her article "The White Woman's Burden", western women played a part in both sustaining and resisting or undermining imperialism.[31]

The Reports from the League of Nations

The 1920s was a time of overwhelming social and political reconfiguration following the Great War. Through the geopolitical changes in Europe and

the establishment of the League of Nations, which had been in preparation for some 300 years according to the League historian F P Walters, the women's movement accordingly turned its interest from the national to the international, and from feminism to humanism.[32] Feminists debated the shift from feminism to humanism in terms of women's interest for the common good, and the word feminism reeked of anti-male sentiments and the, at times, violent struggles for suffrage.[33] It seemed, furthermore, as if the national problems could now be solved, considering that women held political power on the same footing as men. On the international level certain central questions for women, predominantly concerning the affluent and mobile middle classes, were still unsolved, for example the question of women's right to retain their nationality at marriage.[34] This issue exemplifies the problem of national contra international legislation. The League was reluctant to interfere in matters, which could be considered issues of national interest. It was, however, obviously a question that had to be solved on the level of state cooperation in order to achieve a coherent legislation.

In June 1921 an international conference was hosted by the League in Geneva, which was attended by 34 nations. The conference asked that "white slave traffic" should be replaced by "Traffic in women and children", "thus making it clear that measures adopted should be applied to all races alike".[35] The prominent place of the trafficking issue in the Covenant of the League is due to the assiduous work by women's organisations. The first draft of the Covenant presented in February 1919 does not include any mention of it. Through the work of the International Council of Women and the International Suffrage Alliance the question was inserted as Article 23c of the Covenant. In 1923 the Traffic in Women and Children Committee was founded.[36]

The fact that trafficking was written into the League of Nations covenant is, in it self, remarkable. It demonstrates the fact that feminist interests were highly visible in the League and shows how successfully women's/feminist organisations lobbied the League from the start. The covenant also includes an article guaranteeing women and men equal status as employees at all levels of operation, and equal pay.[37] The appointment of delegates was, however, a task for the national governments and in practice few women served as full delegates to the assembly. But women were certainly present both in the League, for example as technical advisors, and in the gatherings of international feminist and women's organisations in Geneva. The League was well aware of the fact that it held great support among women, not the least due to the strong female participation in the peace movement.[38]

Grace Abbott, an American abolitionist and a League representative of the United States, submitted a memorandum to the council's advisory committee on traffic in women and children, in which she recommended

that it should instigate an investigation on the traffic in women and children for the purpose of prostitution.[39] Abbott calls for international co-operation in updating the facts of the inquiry *Importation and Harbouring of Women for Immoral Purposes*, which had been commissioned by the United States Senate.[40] The League agreed that a general study would be of value and suggested that a group of experts be appointed to carry out a thorough investigation in co-operation with the governments of the countries concerned.

The number of investigations into a variety of issues of international interest emanating from the active period of the League of Nations, of just over twenty years, is vast. The practical work of the League was divided into six committees and the trafficking of women fell into the category of the fifth committee, sometimes disparagingly referred to as "La Commission Sentimentale", which dealt with social issues.[41] Inquiries of interest for the article at hand are the two major surveys on trafficking in women. The results of the first inquiry were published in 1927, *Report of the Special Body of Experts on Traffic in Women and Children: Enquiry Into the International Organisation of, and Certain Routes Followed by, the Traffic Between Various Countries of Europe, North Africa, North America, South America and Central America*, totalling 270 pages including appendixes (hereafter Report I). The second report, *Enquiry Into Traffic in Women and Children in the East*, was published in 1932, totalling 556 pages (hereafter Report II). These ambitious enquiries gather information from all parts of the world, the first mainly dealing with the "west" and the second with the "east".

The first group of experts consisted of Princess Christina Giustiniani Bandini, Mr S W Harris, M Hennequin, Dr. Paulina Luisi, M Isidore Maus, A de Meron, Dr. William F Snow (chair), H E M Sugimura.[42] The American Bureau of Social Hygiene financed the investigation by a generous donation of seventy-five thousand dollars.[43]

The questions guiding the investigation were:

1. Whether any considerable number of foreign women were found to be engaged in prostitution in any of the countries visited.
2. Whether there was a demand for foreign women in any country, and what, if any, were the factors which contributed to create such a demand.
3. From what surroundings women were obtained, and whether they went to foreign lands of their own accord or whether their movements were influenced by other persons.
4. Who are the traffickers and their associates.
5. From what countries the women came, by what means were they induced to go, and by what routes they travelled.[44]

A travelling group of experts was sent out "to make personal and unofficial investigations" and the material collected witnesses of a highly ambitious team working under the supervision of the chair of the commission, Dr William S Snow.[45]

The second report followed the frame set by the first one, simply directing the searchlight to the east, focusing traffic between Asia and other continents as well as traffic within territories of Asia. The conclusion is that the movement of women from the occident to the orient is frequent, while hardly any oriental women are trafficked to the occident.[46] The travelling commission consisted of Bascom Johnsson (chair), medical doctor Alma Sundquist and Karol Pindor.[47] One important detail distinguishing the second report from the first is its emphasis on the fact that the inquiry was limited to international aspects. This is mentioned twice in the introduction, but in the second instance it is mentioned a lengthy quotation follows, where the commission explains that some aspect of international traffic are indistinguishable from national traffic, why no clear demarcation between the two can be made.[48] However, trafficking tends at times to be equated with prostitution in general. Undoubtedly these are nearby phenomenon, but a distinction was important as it was crucial not to be viewed as meddling in national issues, or as the second report states, it "will avoid going into certain questions which might involve interference with local customs".[49] The reference here is mainly to customs such as geishas and concubines. However, the cautious statement in the introduction is contradicted by the suggested actions from the commission, which includes further international cooperation, the highlighting of the role of legal brothels for international traffic, and the extended collaboration between authorities, missions or private organisations.[50]

The way the League of Nations realized the mapping of trafficking, and its suggested measures to end it, has abandoned the racial connotations and it is therefore concerned with all traffic in women. The expert group approaches its task in a remarkably sensitive and open-minded manner. None of the scandalous and titillating anecdotes so characteristic of previous reports can be found. And a surprisingly wide variety of witnesses are heard, the procurers, the souteneurs, the madams, the brothel keepers, the prostitutes, the dancers, the drug addicts, the women who climb socially by marrying their (former) clients. These voices complement official statistics, statements by lawyers, police and social workers, and government officials. The variety of the sources of information makes it possible to create a highly diversified, and more coherent, understanding, than official statistics alone could offer. In fact, official government statements and statistics are often contested by those working more closely with prostitution such as voluntary organisations, or those in the trade, the souteneurs, madams and the prostitutes themselves.[51]

Thus the League of Nations took a non-moralising stand on the issue

of prostitution and trafficking. Throughout the reports and investigations the procurers and traffickers, if anyone, are considered criminal or immoral, not the women. There are also obvious rejoinders to the days of white slavery. Report I warns against the unfortunate indistinction between rumours, sensational journalism and the facts of trafficking.[52] The report explains:

> We do not wish to give the impression that all or most of these [prostitutes] were unsuspecting and defenceless women who had been decoyed to a foreign country in ignorance of the real purpose of the journey. The methods which were attributed at one time to the agents of the so-called White Slave Traffic, stories of which still linger in the popular imagination in a highly-coloured form, have changed.[53]

Supply, demand and restricted movement

What is then trafficking in women, how is it conducted, and perhaps most interestingly, what social and economic circumstances was trafficking a reaction to, according to the League of Nations reports? The following is a selection of some issues where the League's report may shed light on the discussion on trafficking today. Abbott identifies three categories of trafficked women, (1) adult women who willingly let themselves be recruited and trafficked, on the one hand, and on the other hand, (2) young girls and (3) adult women who are procured by use of force or fraud for the purpose of prostitution.[54]

The Leagues report defines international traffic as "the direct or indirect procuration and transportation for gain to a foreign country of women and girls for the sexual gratification of one or more other persons".[55] This is a wide definition that includes the transportation of "girls to become mistresses of wealthy men" – it also covers certain cases of women entertainers and artists if they were procured with false promises of wages that turn out to require prostitution. The definition of a prostitute is notoriously difficult and it is of course of interest to different agencies to define it either widely or narrowly. There is also a national traffic, the report observes, that is traffic from one region to another in the same nation-state, but international traffic differs by the fact that national borders are passed, why greater control is gained over the women who are exploited, for example by withholding their passports and travel documents. Trafficked women are, furthermore, described as "cater[ing] for men of foreign race".[56] Reading the reports, however, this seems to be more true in some cases than in others.

The demand for prostitutes arises when there is a surplus of men. This can be natural, according to the report, but it is most often created by artificial movement of large groups of people. For example, between the years 1911–1924 over 1,2 million men immigrated to one specific South

American country, while only fully 0,5 million women did.[57] There can of course be several different reasons for the occasional or seasonal movements of large populations of men. US sailors and soldiers provide a temporary market in the harbours and areas they visit, and the souteneurs were well aware of fluctuations in the market, thereby being able to meet the demand on any occasion – "prostitutes of all nations follow the troops to make as much money as they can", the report states.[58] Another reason for the influx of men in a region can be the employment of seasonal labour in industrial settings where men are separated from their wives, or more temporary influx of men. The report mentions a gymnastic fête in Geneva, which caused a temporary raise in demand, and therefore supply, of prostitutes.[59] Tourism is another reason for seasonal change in the local markets. Mexico, Egypt, Algiers and Tunis are mentioned as centres of what we today might call sex tourism.[60]

The control of trafficking was from the start connected to the control of the movement of peoples. The US Senate report on importing women for illegal purposes has as its primary motive the identification of groups of immigrants that are likely to end up in prostitution. Mark Connelly shows effectively how the American purity movement is shadowed by racist overtones directed chiefly towards the new immigrant groups of Jewish, Italian and eastern European decent.[61] The development of an international cooperation between national police forces was simultaneously developing and deepening at the turn of the century. International work was originally focused on a common political interest of mapping and suppressing revolutionary anarchism in the 1890s and trafficking became the second major issue of what would later become the Interpol.[62] One may thus conclude that illegal entry into national territories was becoming a central issue of the police forces. At this stage the white slave traffic emerged as an opportunity to take on an international criminal network type of operation, and fight it. Mathieu Deflem's conclusion is, however, that the way the fight against trafficking was conducted counteracted the effective struggle against this sort of criminal conduct. By placing the legislation and initiative on an international political level the national police forces were left outside the immediate effects of decisions taken.[63]

Women who were suspected to be trafficked were debarred and repatriated. In the US in 1924, 163 foreign prostitutes were debarred from entering, and a further 186 prostitutes were deported. 139 of these were Mexican, 78 were English, 32 were French, 16 were Irish, and 17 were Scotch.[64] In Switzerland the deported and debarred women come from Germany and Italy, and of those expelled from the Netherlands the majority came from neighbouring countries. In Egypt the number of debarred minors was astonishingly high, 64 in 1920, 140 in 1921, 288 in 1922, and 474 in 1923. According to the League's report this is not due to a high demand of under aged girls, but most of these young women

were Greek refugees. The statistics from Alexandria does not separate the two – women trafficked for the purpose of prostitution and women refugees.[65] This shows how closely related the suspicion of prostitution and vigilance against trafficking was to other attempts to regulate migration. A woman travelling on her own was suspicious, whatever the motives for her movement might have been. Paulina Luisi, who served on the board of the League of Nations traffic in women commission, warned in an article in 1924 that the legislation to protect young women travelling alone tended to limit the freedom of movement of all women.[66] Different measures were taken to make women's travelling safe, among them safe-houses and organisations who met up with women arriving in new cities.

Who takes whom?

As the League reports reveal the number of reasons why women were trafficked, fraudulently or consenting, are many. For those who knowingly let themselves be transported to other countries economic reasons were the most reasonable explanation and they were often prostitutes in their own countries before being trafficked. For those fraudulently coerced the situation was of course different. Some joined travelling dance or theatre groups just to find themselves set up in brothels abroad.

Traffic in the east (between different eastern countries) is characterised by the fact that prostitutes travel to foreign countries exclusively in search of clients among their own countrymen and as a rule they did not accept clients of other races. Prostitutes thus follow flows of temporary or permanent migration, labour, military troops and even pilgrimage.[67] The same applies to occidental prostitutes in the Middle East and Far East, and those trafficked between different Middle Eastern countries, with the exception of becoming mistresses of wealthy men – in which case nationality lacked importance.[68] Following the orderly fashion in which race was a determining factor for who took whom there was no need for provocative soliciting of the kind found in the west. The report therefore concludes that: "Nowhere in the East has the Commission found attempts to provide exotic novelty to brothel clients by offering them women of alien races".[69] This is clearly a retort to the earlier fantasies of white women as sex-slaves in the orient and it stands in stark contrast to the trade around the Mediterranean Sea, where no distinction is made on behalf of the race of the client.[70]

The demand for occidental prostitutes in the commercial centres of the Middle and Far East was directly dependent on the proportion of unmarried occidental men, businessmen, traders, colonial clerks and administrators. This surplus of European men led to a demand for European women. The report summarises, "intercourse [sic!] with prostitutes was often the only opportunity open to such men of *meeting women of their race*".[71] Traf-

ficking in women is thus clearly a racial and, as we might say today, cultural, issue to be dealt with both nationally and internationally. It could even be considered of nationalistic interest that women of the "right" race were made available in the colonies. Similar motives clearly guided the advocates of the CDA in Britain in the late 19th century when the supply of "healthy" women for the men stationed at garrisons far from home was of central concern. Thus the demand for prostitutes in the east decreased because of better opportunities for occidental family life, that is, when men of European origin could bring wives from their home country to the distant outposts. Another important reason for the decrease in the demand for occidental women in Asia was the extensive supply of Russian women, who we will turn to now.[72]

A case study

The most serious problem in the east concerned Russian women in northern China and Manchuria. This was not traffic in the ordinary sense, but rather the result of unforeseen political turmoil. In the aftermath of the revolution in 1917 many Russians found themselves exiled against their will. Those previously employed by Russian companies in northern China were now without work or income and after the revolution masses of refugees crossed the border. The women of both these groups risked ending up in prostitution, albeit by quite different routes and under different circumstances.

One group of women came with the masses of peasant Russian refugees who found themselves stranded in northern China after having crossed the border in the winter when the rivers were frozen. Chinese convoys made a living out of leading refugees across the border at safe crossings. Notably, this illegal transportation of humans is not termed traffic or smuggling of people at this time.[73] The peasants then tried to reach Russian settlements further in the country where they hoped to find employment among their countrymen. Many were of course deceived and conned out of their savings, or money would simply run out, and they were stranded in some Chinese village where they would soon be indebted to the locals. The whole party was not allowed to continue until the debt was paid off and the women were often left behind while the men continue south in hope of finding work, in order to be able to fetch the women later. After a while, if no one claimed the women, the Chinese men would regard them as their property and either take them as wives, concubines, servants, or prostitute them for profit.[74] Such Russian prostitutes could be found in most northern Manchurian villages, the report tells.

The second group was economically and socially more privileged than the peasant refugees. The doors being closed to most other countries even for affluent Russians, many of the upper classes fled to the north Chinese

city of Harbin, which was founded by the Russians around the turn of the 20th century as a headquarters for the Chinese Eastern Railway. The city had a large Russian military presence during the Russo-Japanese war, it was also a place of anti-Bolshevist enterprises and activities following the revolution. It thus fills many of the characteristics of a city with a great demand of prostitutes as it harboured migrant workers, soldier and foreign businessmen. At the time of the report Harbin hosted nine purely Russian licensed brothels with approximately 100 women, plus several non-Russian brothels. Many women came from the well-educated classes and some were Tsarist notables. The local Russians tried to find work for them in high-class establishments such as the Harbin Railway Casino, where they worked as waitresses-entertainers and hostesses.

The Russian brothels chiefly catered to "the bachelors of the foreign commercial communities" – attracting "them by the same standard of cleanliness as other occidental brothels in the East".[75] They were expensive, exclusive, and clean. The popularity of Russian women increased the demand for their services all over China and Harbin soon became a centre of distribution of women to other Chinese cities. As such this was a question of national traffic within the borders of China, but the race and origin of the women gave reason to regard it as part of international traffic in women, the report argues.[76] With the large-scale influx of Russian women the demand for women of different European and American nationalities diminished: "the demand for these women in the different Asiatic countries is decreasing, and, provided efforts to check traffic are maintained, there is no need to fear a revival of the conditions of twenty and thirty years ago".[77] All commercial communities of China with large foreign populations were characterised by a surplus of men and the influx of Russian prostitutes radically changed the situation: "A type of western woman of recognised charm and many good qualities invaded the bachelors' exile".[78] Some of these women ended up happily married to Anglo-Saxon, German and Scandinavian men, the reporters summarise, but for many more, a life in prostitution awaited.

Concluding remarks

I have argued in this article that the reorganisation of the world following the First World War can be viewed as offering venues of both vulnerability and resistance. The traffic in women during the interwar era was closely connected to colonial structures interlinked with growing internationalisation of business, and what could be called an open labour market. However, "globalisation" if such a term is allowed in the interwar period, can not be clearly defined as either "good" or "bad". While social and political turmoil rendered some women especially vulnerable to traffickers, simultaneously international cooperation, such as the League of Nations,

supplied the organisation and network necessary for effective work against the very same phenomenon. This work was carried on after the Second World War by the United Nations, and still is, as the traffic of people seems to be a growing problem yet again.[79]

The fight against trafficking developed out of national movements against prostitution but the international aspirations required a rethinking of the racial (and at times racist) assumptions of the early movement. As the term white slavery is abandoned the streams of traffic in other parts of the world, other than Europe and North America, were made visible. When trafficking is addressed by the League moral and racial questions are back-grounded for the benefit of a thorough social analysis. The Leagues report offers a rich material on the global social issues of the time. However, no explicit point is made in the report about what could be seen as the "sacrifice" of some women (the Russians) for the benefit of others (other occidental women), an issue dealt with by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* a few years later.[80]

But the question, as well as he phenomenon, still remains – who takes whom? There are several similarities between the debate on trafficking and prostitution in the 1920s and 1930s, and today. The social and racial aspects, which I have chosen as examples here, differ perhaps the most. Even if Russian women were singled out here, the second report finds the same preference for intraracial intercourse all over the east. Chinese women are trafficked to the Chinese railway workers around the South Sea,[81] Japanese women to cater to Japanese men in commercial centres with many Japanese businessmen,[82] Persian women to the Persian pilgrims in Mecca.[83] The social structure of the east seems to have made men, both foreign and local, turn to women of their own kind. This was not the case in Europe, South America or North Africa, according to the report. What was the difference? Were the races and cultures perceived to be more similar, and therefore more compatible? The answer is probably that old colonies and centres of commerce with longstanding connections to Europe and North America had established enclaves of respectable and suitable white women with whom the young bachelors could socialise. Thus the need for trafficking for social purposes diminished.

This social aspect of trafficking, of finding company of your own race and culture, today no longer goes under the heading of traffic and its racial connotations are quite the opposite. The women trafficked illegally are definitely not transported in order to socialise with men of their own nationality in brothels, dance halls or social clubs. Phenomena such as "mail order brides" build on the opposite assumption – that there is something beyond race and culture that unites predominantly affluent western men with non-western women. Thus, notably, it is not a question of supplying men with women of their own race, the idea is rather to supply western men with women who "appreciate" them, and with whom they

are compatible.[84] This is a recurring fantasy of the marriage-migration of both Russian and Asian women to Europe and North America. In the background looms, of course, the debate on the emancipation of the western women – has it made them incompatible with western men? Such interpretations can be found both in popular fiction, such as Michael Houellebecq's novel *Platforme* and in interviews with men who seek future brides abroad.[85] This will have to be, however, the topic of quite another article.[86]

Summary

International reorganisation and traffic in women: Venues of vulnerability and resistance. By Katarina Leppänen. This article fills a gap in the histories describing the struggle to end trafficking and prostitution. The two main focal points of previous research are most often the movements against state regulated prostitution dated to the late 19th century and the fight against so called "white slavery", on the one hand, and on the other hand, the modern traffic and prostitution that emerged due to the concentration of large troops of armed forces during the Vietnam War in the 1960s. The period in between is seldom recognised as a time of great women's/feminist activity on the issue of prostitution and traffic in women.

The aim of the article is to show how the transition of the issue of prostitution developed from being mainly of national (even nationalistic) interest, to becoming a matter of international concern. The first section maps the abolitionist movement and the abandoning of the term "white slave" in favour of "traffic in women" at the turn of the 20th century. This shift in terminology opened for an internationalisation of the fight against trafficking, which is dealt with in the second section. Section three introduces the work of the League of Nations on the matter of traffic and investigates the explanatory frame given in the League reports. Lastly, the fourth section gives an example of how international political upheaval could render women vulnerable to trafficking at a specific historical moment.

Notes

1 Mark Connelly, *The response to prostitution in the progressive era*, (Chapel Hill, 1980), 153.

2 Judith Walkowitz, "The politics of prostitution", in *Feminism and sexuality: A reader*, ed. Stevi Jackson & Sue Scott, (1980; New York, 1996).

3 Connelly's perspective is North American where the purity movement peaked somewhat later than in Britain.

4 Connelly, 153. Emphasis added.

5 Ibid., 6. The decline in street prostitution is only partly the result of ardent work of the purity movement, Connelly argues. Just as important for the disappearance of the public nuisance is society's general adaptation to the presence of women in public life and wage-labour, at work in factories, in department stores, and taking part in recreational activities.

6 Carol Miller, "Geneva – the key to equality: Inter-war feminists and the League of

Nations", *Women's History Review* 3, no. 2 (1994), 219.

7 Mlle Forschhammer, *Traffic in women and children*, (Geneva, Document from the 11th session on traffic in women and children, 10 October, 1932), 1.

8 Abraham Flexner, *Prostitution in Europe*, (New York, 1914), 286. Josephine Butler on the other hand saw the abolishment of prostitution as the aim of the movement, cited in Edward J. Bristow, *Vice and vigilance: Purity movements in Britain since 1700*, (Dublin, 1977). Bristow also comments on the disinterest of making clear distinctions as it would reduce the poignancy of the white slave discourse, ibid., 86.

9 Kathleen Barry, "Female sexual slavery: The problem, policies and causes for feminist action", in *Prostitution*, ed. Roger Matthews and Maggie O'Neill, (Dartmouth, 2003), 442.

10 Quoted in Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian society: Women, class, and the state*, (Cambridge, 1980), 1.

11 Ibid., 7.

12 Walkowitz, "The politics of prostitution", 292.

13 See for example Jane Jordan, *Josephine Butler*, (London, 2001).

14 Walkowitz, "The politics of prostitution", 291.

15 Ibid., 289.

16 For an analysis of the effects of the Maiden Tribute see Bristow.

17 Fatima Mernissi, *Scheherazade goes west: Different cultures, different harems*, (New York, 2001). Mernissi maps the erotic orientalism of both fine art and popular culture.

18 Connelly, 117.

19 *Report of the special body of experts on traffic in women and children: Enquiry into the international organisation of, and certain routes followed by, the traffic between various countries of Europe, North Africa, North America, South America and Central America*, (Geneva, 1927), 7. Later know as the International Abolitionist Federation.

20 For a survey of the Federation's work in Sweden see Ulla Manns, *Upp systrar, väpnen er! Kön och politik i svensk 1800-talsfeminism*, (Stockholm, 2005).

21 1904 Agreement articles 1-4, reprinted in *Report I*, Part 1.

22 Convention articles 1 and 2, reprinted in Ibid.

23 Ibid. Emphasis added.

24 Erich Wulffen, *Der sexualverbrecher: Ein Handbuch für Juristen, Verwaltungsbeamten und Ärtze: Mit zahlreichen kriminalistichen Orginalaufnahmen*, (Berlin, 1910).

25 See e.g. Mervat Hatem, "Through each other's eyes: The impact of the colonial encounter of images of Egyptian, Levitine-Egyptian, and European women, 1986–1920", in *Western women and imperialism: Complicity and resistance*, ed. Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel, (Bloomington & Indianapolis, 1992).

26 Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of women: The making of an international women's movement*, (Princeton, N.J., 1997), 151.

27 Ibid.

28 Hatem, 37.

29 Ibid., 56.

30 Rupp, 151.

31 Antoinette Burton, "The white woman's burden: British feminists and 'the indian woman', 1865–1915", in *Western women and imperialism: Complicity and resistance*, ed. Nupur Chaudhuri & Margaret Strobel, (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1992), 12.

32 See Francis Paul Walters, *A history of the League of Nations*, vol. 1, (London, 1952).

33 Karen M. Offen, *European feminisms 1700–1950: A political history*, (Stanford, California, 2000).

34 Women's Consultative Committee on Nationality was established in 1931. *League of Nations documents, official journal*, (February 1931), 231–232. See also Paula Pfeffer, "A whisper in the assembly of nations: United States participation in the international movement for women's rights from the League of Nations to the United Nations", *Women's Studies International Forum* 8, no. 5 (1985).

35 *Report I*, Part 1, 1. September 1921, signed by 33 states.

36 Forschhammer, 1.

37 The covenant is reprinted for example in Walters.

38 See for example Rupp.

39 See *Report I*, Part 1, 9. The Memorandum dated March 21st, 1923, reprinted as Annex II to the report, 50. The League committee includes both women and children in the title of both the committee and its reports. The international convention of 1921 states that the contracting parties should take mea-

sures to "discover and prosecute persons who are engaged in the traffic of children of both sexes" (Annex VI, ibid). It is however women and under aged girls in the sex-trade who make up the majority of those trafficked. Grace Abbott's memorandum also talks of the "international traffic in women and girls" (ibid.). A separate committee for child welfare was established. Without neglecting the existence of trafficked children, I have however opted for the shorter and more manageable terminology of "traffic in women".

40 United States Immigration Commission (1907–1910), *Steerage conditions, importation and harboring of women for immoral purposes, immigrant homes and aid societies, immigrant banks*, (Washington, 1911).

41 Quoted in Rupp, 215.

42 Substituted by M. le Luc, M. Nativel and M. Suzuki on some meetings, *Report I*, Part 1, Annex 1, 49.

43 Ibid., 5.

44 Ibid., 10.

45 Ibid., 50.

46 *Enquiry into traffic in women and children in the East* (1932), 21.

47 Notably the commission included both Grace Abbott, the instigator of the first report, and the famous German feminist Gertrud Baümer, ibid, 6. For an analysis of the work done by medical doctor Alma Sunduist in Sweden see Hjördis Levin, *Kvinnorna på barrikaden: Sexualpolitik och sociala frågor 1923–36*, (Stockholm, 1997).

48 *Report II*, 11, 14. The second inquiry was also financed by the American Bureau of Social Hygiene in New York, the sum being $ 125.000.

49 Ibid., 14.

50 Ibid., 4.

51 How official estimated numbers are weighted against information gathered on site in the case of in Brazil can be seen in *Report I*, Part 1, 11–12.

52 Ibid., 9.

53 Ibid., 18.

54 Ibid. Annex II, 50.

55 Ibid., 9.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid., 12.

58 Ibid., 13.

59 At the time of writing this article The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW) launched a campaign against the exploitation of women in Germany during the World Cup Football Games, 2006, called "Buying Sex is Not a Sport: No to Germany's Prostitution of Women during the World Cup Games."

60 *Report I*, Part 2, 77.

61 Connelly, 118.

62 Interestingly enough the Russian-American feminist Emma Goldman wrote a blazing attack on both traffic in women and the persecution of revolutionary anarchists, see Emma Goldman, *The traffic in women and other essays on feminism*, (1917; New York, 1970).

63 Mathieu Deflem, "Wild beasts without nationality: The uncertain origins of Interpol 1898–1910", in *Handbook of transnational crime and justice*, ed. Philip Reichel, (Thousand Oaks, CA, 2005).

64 *Report I*, Part 1, 11.

65 Ibid., 12.

66 Rupp, 152–53. Originally published in Jus Suffragii 19 nr 9, June 1924.

67 *Report II*, 21–22, 81–82.

68 Ibid., 22. Note also that the language of east/west and orient/occident avoids questions of race or nationality, even if the divisions have been problematised today.

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid., 24. The issue of who women cater to is complex, see also *Report I*.

71 *Report II*, 24. Emphasis added.

72 Ibid. Demand could also be met by women of "mixed Asiatic and European blood".

73 Ibid., 30. The UN defines smuggling and trafficking as follows: "The smuggling of migrants, while often undertaken in dangerous or degrading conditions, involves migrants who have consented to the smuggling. Trafficking victims, on the other hand, have either never consented or, if they initially consented, that consent has been rendered meaningless by the coercive, deceptive or abusive actions of the traffickers" http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/trafficking_victim_consents.html#how, visited Tuesday, 7 March 2006.

74 Ibid., 30–31.

75 Ibid., 32.

76 Ibid., 35–36.

77 Ibid., 21.

78 Ibid., 35.

79 For the continued work of the UN on women's issues see Hilkka Pietilä, *Engendering the global agenda: The story of women and the united nations*, (Geneva, 2002).

80 **Simone de Beauvoir,** *The second sex*, (1949; London, 1997).

81 *Report II*, 50–51.

82 **Ibid., 68.**

83 **Ibid., 84. See also ibid., 81–82. The** traffic to Mecca was actively curbed during the 1920s by for example the Persian Government.

84 **For an analysis of the social and economic** implications of mail order brides see for example Yu Kojima, "In the business of cultural reproduction: Theoretical implications of the mail-order bride phenomena", *Women's Studies International Forum* 24, no. 2 (2001).

85 **Michel Houellebecq,** *Plateforme*, (Paris, 2001). Translated into English with the title *Platform*, 2003.

86 See also Katarina Leppänen, "Vem tar vem? Tankar kring ras, sex och kulturbevarande under ett sekel", in Johan Kärnfelt, ed., *I skuggan av samtiden*, 2006.