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This is a copy of the final published version of an article published in Anti-Trafficking Review, issue 7, 2016, pp.115—138, www.antitraffickingreview.org

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Looking Beyond ‘White Slavery’: Trafficking, the Jewish Association, and the dangerous politics of migration control in England, 1890-1910

Rachael Attwood

Abstract

This article seeks to revise Jo Doezema’s suggestion that ‘the white slave’ was the only dominant representation of ‘the trafficked woman’ used by early anti-trafficking advocates in Europe and the United States, and that discourses based on this figure of injured innocence are the only historical discourses that are able to shine light on contemporary anti-trafficking rhetoric. ‘The trafficked woman’ was a figure painted using many shades of grey in the past, with a number of injurious consequences, not only for trafficked persons but also for female labour migrants and migrant populations at large. In England, dominant organisational portrayals of ‘the trafficked woman’ had acquired these shades by the 1890s, when trafficking started to proliferate amid mass migration from Continental Europe, and when controversy began to mount over the migration of various groups of working-class foreigners to the country.

This article demonstrates these points by exploring the way in which the Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women (JAPGW), one of the pillars of England’s early anti-trafficking movement, represented the female Jewish migrants it deemed at risk of being trafficked into sex work between 1890 and 1910. It argues that the JAPGW stigmatised these women, placing most of the blame for trafficking upon them and positioning them to a greater or a lesser extent as ‘undesirable and undeserving working-class foreigners’ who could never become respectable English women. It also contends that the JAPGW, in outlining what was wrong with certain female migrants, drew a line between ‘the migrant’ and respectable English society at large, and paradoxically endorsed the extension of the very ‘anti-alienist’ and Antisemitic prejudices that it strove to dispel.

Keywords: human trafficking, ‘white slavery’, sex work, migration, Jewish, England, history

Please cite this article as: R Attwood, ‘Looking Beyond “White Slavery”: Trafficking, the Jewish Association, and the dangerous politics of migration control in England, 1890-1910’, *Anti-Trafficking Review*, issue 7, 2016, pp. 115–138, www.antitraffickingreview.org

Introduction

Jo Doezema has made an exceptional contribution to our understanding of the intimate link between historical and present-day representations of trafficking in the sex sector. She has thrown light on the continued significance of ‘the myth of “white slavery”’ that was used by anti-trafficking advocates in Europe and the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. ‘White slavery’, Doezema argues, was a discursive construction hinged on the idea that trafficked women are naïve and innocent victims (or ‘white slaves’), often young and working class, who have been forced into organised sex work by ‘evil foreigners’. As the dominant means of representing trafficking in anti-trafficking circles, it entrenched a distinction between ‘good, unwilling trafficking victims’ and ‘bad, complicit trafficked others’, which stigmatised women who chose or consented to migrate for sex work as unworthy of protection and worthy of punishment. The re-emergence of ‘white slavery’ in anti-trafficking discourses in the 1980s, Doezema continues, has caused this dangerous distinction to prevail in key representations of trafficking, and to carry on endangering sex workers and compromising their rights.¹

While cogent and lucid in many respects, Doezema’s pioneering analysis is, however, missing some important shades of grey—especially when it comes to historical representations of trafficking. In this article, I seek to challenge Doezema’s work on three fronts. Firstly, I will demonstrate that ‘white’ was not the only colour used by early anti-trafficking advocates to paint ‘the trafficking victim’. Secondly, I will show that distinctions between unwilling and complicit trafficked women were just one of many detrimental distinctions made by these advocates when representing trafficking, and that ideas of nation and ‘foreignness’, class, and gender cut in many directions and carried many significances in influential depictions of trafficking. Thirdly, in doing so, I will suggest that we need to look beyond ‘white slavery’ and examine historical constructions of trafficking more closely in order to understand contemporary anti-trafficking discourses. I draw my evidence from a case study of historical representations of trafficking in England—a country that Doezema refers to as one of the first strongholds and a principal breeding ground of ‘white slavery’ rhetoric. I hope that, by shining light on the limits to Doezema’s theory in such a key territory, scholars will turn to other supposed historical centres of ‘white slavery’

¹ J Doezema, *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters: The construction of trafficking*, Zed Books, London, 2010; *Idem*, ‘Loose Women or Lost Women? The re-emergence of the myth of white slavery in contemporary discourses of trafficking in women’, *Gender Issues*, vol.18, 1999, pp. 23–50.

rhetoric—not least the United States—and confront the discourses used by early anti-trafficking activists with a fresh, critical perspective.

For most of the period spanning the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—the very period that Doezeema suggests was the heyday of ‘white slavery’ rhetoric—‘white slavery’ had virtually no purchase in constructions of trafficking in England. Nor did representations of ‘trafficking victims’ as unwilling innocents who were in no way responsible for entering organised sex work. Certainly, ‘white slavery’ rhetoric did exercise great influence in isolated moments of controversy in England between 1880 (the year when the country’s first trafficking scandal erupted) and 1914, and did, during these moments, prompt the distinction between non-consenting and consenting trafficked women that Doezeema describes. However, from around 1890, the key groupings in the national and international anti-trafficking movements mobilised considerably different enmeshed ideas of race, class, gender, and sexuality to those that featured in ‘white slavery’ discourses, and made considerably different distinctions, with no less a dangerous outcome for trafficked women. Ironically, these groupings were influenced by similar impulses that Doezeema suggests were behind configurations of ‘white slavery’—the desire to restore community identity in the face of the ‘damage’ supposedly wrought by women vying for increasing sexual and economic independence, and negating their ‘natural role’ as the guarantors of domesticity and national prosperity, by immigrants, by foreigners and/or by ‘foreign’ belief systems.² However, the parties they exalted or demonised when representing trafficking were not the same, and the injurious consequences of their representations, were, if anything, broader and more acute. This discursive departure is intimately linked to the fact that, by 1890, trafficking in the sex sector had started to proliferate amid mass migration from Continental Europe, and anxiety had begun to mount over the increasing influx into England of certain groups of working-class foreigners.

I will expand upon these points by analysing the way in which one of the key pillars of England’s early anti-trafficking movement, the Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women (JAPGW), represented the very women and girls it claimed to be committed to protecting from being trafficked. I focus on the Association’s discourses relating to trafficking in England, including annual reports, public addresses, and published warnings, between 1890 and 1910—the period in which the Association’s anti-trafficking programme took shape.

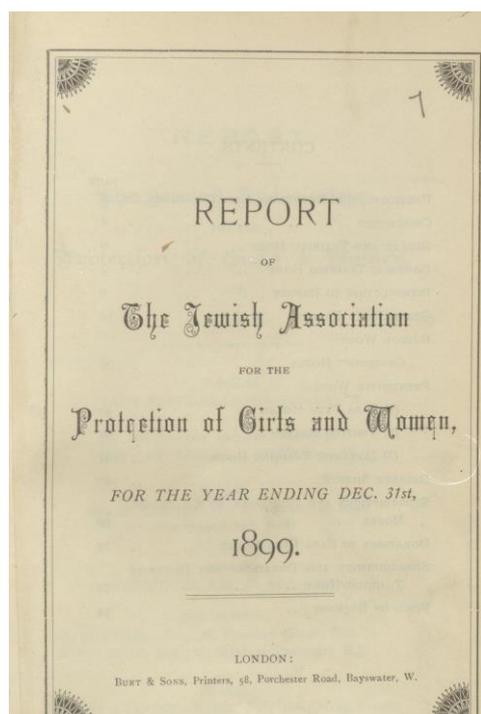


Figure 1.

My argument regarding the Association is a simple one: while making a great practical contribution to the English and the global anti-trafficking movements, the JAPGW represented trafficking as a largely victim-instigated crime—a form of ‘self-slavery’ as opposed to ‘white slavery’—and, in doing so, caused considerable damage, on an ideological front, to not only trafficked women, women ‘at risk’ of being trafficked, and women migrating to engage in sex work, but also the migrant population from which these women came. The JAPGW, a group composed of wealthy members of the Anglo-Jewish community, portrayed working-class female migrants who travelled to the country alone in search of work as the women who were most likely to succumb to trafficking. It cast them as intellectually and morally deficient ‘others’ who, by leaving home, negating their ‘womanly duty’ as wives and mothers, and entering England in search of a better life, had rendered themselves susceptible to abuse. They had, according to the JAPGW, all but served themselves up to the skilled opportunists who orchestrated trafficking, by daring to access freedoms and resources to which they were not, as poor foreign women, entitled. Curiously, whilst acknowledging the different circumstances through which women found themselves selling sex abroad, the Association did not, as we might today, rigorously distinguish between women at risk of being trafficked, migratory sex workers, and women who elected to enter sex work post migration, when conceptualising ‘trafficking’. In its eyes, all women engaging in sex work away from their home countries, whether they had elected to do so or not, were women who had got themselves caught up in some form of third party-orchestrated ‘immoral traffic’.³ The Association, as such, defined women at risk of ‘being trafficked’ as women who were likely to fall into some form of organised sex work abroad, through their moral shortcomings but not necessarily purely through their agency.

The JAPGW did identify different shades of women at risk of being trafficked among the female Jewish migrant population. The more economically and sexually independent a working-class female migrant was, the more ‘foreign’ and culpable for any harm caused to her person it considered her to be. This, however, was one of the minor distinctions the JAPGW established in its discourses. A major distinction forged by the Association was between working-class female migrants, as liabilities who had no place in England, and respectable English women, as their moral and intellectual superiors who would not, and could not, render themselves prone to being trafficked for they ‘knew their place’. Another key distinction was

² *Ibid.*

³ *JAPGW Annual Report, 1904*, pp. 7–8.

between what it saw as the ‘deserving’ and the ‘undeserving’ foreign poor, based on its interpretation of the level of culpability of women at risk of being trafficked. A final fundamental distinction it made was between all working-class migrants in England and respectable English society as a whole. By representing ‘the female foreigner prone to being trafficked’ in such a pointed manner, the JAPGW effectively corroborated and extended the prejudices against foreign migrants—the ‘anti-alienist’ sentiments—that were simmering in turn-of-the-century England. It underlined the supposed common sense of restricting the immigration of ‘undesirable aliens’ (those not deemed sufficiently wealthy, healthy, and ‘respectable’ to avoid being a burden upon state and society). Paradoxically, it also made inroads into undermining the Association’s overarching goal of protecting the reputation of England’s wider Jewish community.

Thus, for at least twenty years, the ‘white slavery’ rhetoric was abandoned by a dominant force in England’s early anti-trafficking movement. The sympathetic figure of the ‘young and helpless’ English ‘white slave’ that had been used in the early 1880s by anti-trafficking advocates such as Alfred Stace Dyer to portray what was a minor traffic between England and the licensed brothels of the near Continent, was not fit for purpose by the 1890s. Nor was the Manichean separation that had been forged between the English ‘white slave’ and the ‘Continental debauchés’ orchestrating her exploitation.⁴ The majority of trafficked women (at least according to the JAPGW’s definition of the term) were foreign. Moreover, fears over immigration and the perceived damage caused to English society by foreigners combined with fears regarding women’s independence in such a way as to prompt groups like the JAPGW to deny ‘the working class female migrant’ victim status firstly, for being foreign, and, secondly, for striking out on her own away from her home country. Finally, the fact that many trafficked women and migratory sex workers were Jewish made it politically dangerous for the JAPGW to express much sympathy for them. Indeed, it is likely that members of the Association chose to define ‘trafficking’ so broadly to emphasise how much of a grave foreign problem they faced.

England’s first non-denominational anti-trafficking organisations have been the subject of a number of excellent critical analyses.⁵ The JAPGW, however, has not received the same treatment. In this article, as well as revising Doezema’s argument, I will add a new angle to the insightful analyses of the JAPGW conducted by Edward Bristow, Lloyd P Gartner, and Paul Knepper respectively, which tend to commemorate the JAPGW’s anti-trafficking initiatives, rather than interrogating the group’s representations and rhetoric.⁶ Before embarking on this analysis, however, some background information about the nature of trafficking in England during the period in question is required. So too is more detail about the JAPGW, the pressures it faced as a Jewish group in turn-of-the-century England, and the motivation behind its anti-trafficking programme.

Trafficking in England

By the 1890s, prevailing circumstances had enabled a series of trafficking networks to take root across the world. In 1873, the so-called ‘Long Depression’, a global downturn that would last nearly twenty-five years, set in, bringing reduced industrial growth and widespread unemployment to many European countries.⁷ Over the next decade, a series of pogroms erupted against Jews in the Pale of Settlement (the area to which most Jews in the Russian Empire were circumscribed), and Tsar Alexander III enacted laws that *inter alia* further restricted Jews’ economic activity. This discrimination lasted three decades and occurred alongside simmering Antisemitism across a number of Continental European countries.⁸ To many, especially the young, leaving for places that promised better financial prospects, and of course, safety, became a necessity. Facilitated by developments in transport technologies, mass-migration began from Europe in the 1880s. Within the throng were hundreds of female migrants who travelled, often under the auspices of third parties, to work in the organised commercial sex industries that were thriving in many of the destinations favoured by migrants, including New York, Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires, and in key sites of the British Empire such as Alexandria, Johannesburg, and eastwards, Bombay (Mumbai), Calcutta (Kolkata), Rangoon (Yangon), Colombo, Singapore and Hong Kong. Many of these women were exposed to sexual abuse and coercion by those organising their sex work, and/or by those paying for sex with them.⁹

England was a prime conduit in westward trafficking networks, housing the major passenger ports of Hull, London, Southampton, and Liverpool. It was also, albeit on a small scale, a place where women were recruited for onward

⁴ A S Dyer, *The European Slave Trade in English Girls*, Dyer Brothers, London, 1880, pp. 33–34.

⁵ S A Limoncelli, *The Politics of Trafficking: The first international movement to combat the sexual exploitation of women*, Stanford NJ, Stanford University Press, 2010; P Bartley, *Prostitution: Prevention and reform in England, 1870-1914*, Routledge, London 2000, pp. 155–73; J Laite, *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens: Commercial sex in London, 1885-1960*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2012, pp. 100–115; R Attwood, ‘Stopping the Traffic: The National Vigilance Association and the international fight against the “white slave” trade (1899–C. 1909)’, *Women’s History Review*, vol. 24, no. 3, 2015, pp. 325–50.

⁶ E J Bristow, *Prostitution and Prejudice: The Jewish fight against white slavery, 1870-1939*, Clarendon, Oxford, 1982, pp. 111–324; L P Gartner, ‘Anglo-Jewry and the Jewish International Traffic in Prostitution, 1885 – 1914’, *AJS Review*, vol. 7-8, 1982, pp. 129–178; P Knepper, ‘British Jews and the Racialisation of Crime in the Age of Empire’, *British Journal of Criminology*, vol. 47, 2006, pp. 61–79.

⁷ F P Miller, A F Vandome and J McBrewhster, *Long Depression*, Saarbrücken, VDM Publishing, 2009.

⁸ B Nathan, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish encounter with late Imperial Russia*, University of California Press, Berkeley CA, 2004.

⁹ There is a rich literature on the trafficking activity witnessed at some of these locations, for example H Fischer-Tiné, ‘“White Women Degrading Themselves to the Lowest Depths”: European networks of prostitution and colonial anxieties in British India and Ceylon Ca. 1880-1914’, *Indian Economic & Social History Review*, vol. 40, 2003, pp. 163–90; P Levine, ‘The White Slave Trade and the British Empire’, *Criminal Justice History*, vol. 17, 2002, pp. 133–46; D J Guy, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, family and nation in Argentina*, Lincoln NE, University of Nebraska Press, 1991; Bristow, 1982.

transportation to overseas brothels, as well as a destination for trafficked women to engage in sex work. Much of this type of trafficking activity took place in London and particularly London's East End, where most East European Jews, then the country's biggest immigrant group, had settled. Some also took place in cities such as Manchester, Liverpool, and Leeds that had sizeable immigrant populations.¹⁰ England, moreover, housed two of the leading forces in the international fight against trafficking. The first was the National Vigilance Association (NVA), a multid denominational group, whose male luminaries, from 1899, founded and dominated both the nascent International Congress set up to tackle trafficking, and the Congress' permanent body, the International Bureau for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons.¹¹ The second was the JAPGW, which as well as participating in the Bureau, oversaw a significant Jewish anti-trafficking network at home and abroad via its Gentlemen's Committee.

The JAPGW

What became known as the JAPGW was founded in 1885 by Lady Constance Battersea, the daughter of Sir Anthony de Rothschild, a banker and landowner at the apogee of the Anglo-Jewish elite. It was established in response to the lack of provision in London for Jewish girls from the poor immigrant community who had found themselves in supposedly adverse moral circumstances, be it engaging in sex work, having a child outside of marriage, and/or showing signs of general 'waywardness'.¹² Battersea and a group of women also from the wealthy, well-connected 'cousinhood' of England's assimilated Jewish community, embarked on a charitable programme focused on 'prevention, and as far as possible, redemption'.¹³ They organised an expanding group of 'training homes' and reformatories, and a lodging house for newly-arrived female Jewish migrants. Battersea was given considerable practical assistance by her cousin, the philanthropist and religious scholar Claude Montefiore. Both followed Reform Judaism, a progressive variation of Judaism that emphasised women's role in religious life, and cast 'Jewishness' as a spiritual and cultural, rather than a racial, status.¹⁴ These ideas, however, as we shall see, had limited resonance in the Association's principal representations of trafficking. From its early days, the JAPGW engaged in anti-trafficking work of sorts, hiring a dock agent to meet passenger liners arriving in London, and interrogate and, where needed, offer its services to lone, female Jewish migrants who were in 'default of destinations', with 'undecipherable addresses' or en route to another country.¹⁵ In 1889, it established a Gentlemen's Committee to co-ordinate this work. The JAPGW deemed the practical fight against trafficking a distinctly 'male pursuit'. Battersea on occasion spoke on the topic of trafficking alongside members of the Gentlemen's Committee at conferences organised or attended by the JAPGW. However, the sexual division of labour within the Association was such that Battersea's female colleagues were typically tasked with coordinating the care and instruction of Jewish migrant girls in the JAPGW's many homes—a role that was deemed appropriately maternal, domestic, and respectable for women of their station. The association's men, in contrast, were to take on the supposedly more dangerous, difficult, and public role of overseeing front-line anti-trafficking work, planning a preventive strategy, helping ensnare traffickers, and lobbying for legal amendments. Under Arthur Moro, another cousin, the Gentlemen's Committee soon placed agents at key ports and railway stations across the country. It established branches and/or gained the support of Jewish communities in all major port cities, and in cities that housed large Jewish immigrant populations.¹⁶ The Gentlemen's Committee also strove to bring about convictions of traffickers and pimps, and lobbied for tighter laws to punish these parties. From around 1899, the Association organised short-lived Jewish anti-trafficking initiatives in Johannesburg, Alexandria, and Calcutta, and in 1900 founded a successful branch in Buenos Aires.¹⁷ In 1910, the JAPGW manifested its authority among fellow Jewish anti-trafficking groups by hosting the first Jewish International Conference on trafficking in London.

Pressures and Motivations

The JAPGW was an Association under pressure. The increasing number of Jewish immigrants settling in the country engendered acute localised hostility, particularly in London's East End, an already poverty-stricken district. The impact of the newcomers on the local housing and labour markets, and the supposedly exploitative practices of immigrant landlords and sweatshop owners, riled many East End residents, and in 1902 spawned the first populist anti-immigration group, The British Brothers' League. Middle-class anti-alienists, including Arnold White, invoked generations-old Antisemitic calumny, and especially images of (male) Jews as venal parasites, to argue that Jewish immigrants represented a noxious 'race apart' that needed to be excised from England. In his 1899 diatribe *The Modern Jew*, White warned, '[i]f the Jew be essentially parasitic in character and habits; if he can only live by exploiting the vices or preying on the weaknesses of others;...then the

¹⁰ For illustrative cases of both international trafficking activity and trafficking activity within Britain see *National Vigilance Association (NVA) Annual Reports of the Executive Committee*, 1890–1914; NVA, Minute Books of the Executive Committee, 1886–1914; Records of the NVA, The Women's Library@LSE, London, 4NVA/1/1/01-05; *Jewish Association for Girls and Women (JAPGW) Annual Reports*, 1898–1914; JAPGW, Minute Book of the Gentlemen's Sub-Committee for Preventive Work, 19 January 1890–8 November 1896, Papers of the JAPGW, Jewish Care Archive, Hartley Library, University of Southampton [hereafter JAPGW, HL], MS173 2/2/1.

¹¹ Attwood, 2015; Limoncelli, 2010.

¹² Lady C Battersea, *Reminiscences*, London, Macmillan, 1922, pp. 418–9.

¹³ *JAPGW Annual Report*, 1899, p.8; *JAPGW Annual Report*, 1908, p. 14.

¹⁴ Battersea, pp. 409–25.

¹⁵ See *JAPGW Annual Report*, 1898, pp. 8–9.

¹⁶ *JAPGW Annual Report*, 1899, pp. 16–23.

¹⁷ *JAPGW Annual Report*, 1899, pp. 23–4; *JAPGW Annual Report*, 1904, pp. 22–6; *JAPGW Annual Report*, 1905, pp. 23–4, 30.

conclusion is irresistible that...the [Jewish] race is disqualified from settlement among civilized communities'.¹⁸ The 1905 Aliens Act, which denied entry into the country, or sanctioned the expulsion, of foreign subjects who had attained serious criminal convictions, who were impoverished or who were in ill-health, did not suppress these prejudices, and prompted focus on 'the criminal alien'.¹⁹ Antisemitism was not stirred simply by the experience of immigration. Drawing upon deep-rooted ideas of Jews' avarice, treachery, and secret influence, the prominent Liberal JA Hobson and many of his peers blamed the South African War of 1899-1902 on 'a class of financial capitalists of which the foreign Jew must be taken as the leading type'.²⁰ This occurred alongside more pronounced manifestations of hatred towards Jews in France, Germany, Austria, and, of course, Imperial Russia.

One might be forgiven for thinking that the JAPGW embarked upon its domestic anti-trafficking operations, first and foremost, out of concern for the welfare and good name of all Jews in England, in the face of this mounting threat, especially given that Jewish people had long held a reputation for chastity and moral purity.²¹ These impulses doubtlessly influenced its agenda. As Claude Montefiore put it in 1902, 'The fact...that Jews and Jewesses were doing their utmost to combat this horrible trade would...be the best antidote for anti-Semitism [sic]'.²² However, the Association's campaign against trafficking—both in practical and ideological terms—is better understood as a politicised mechanism of 'Jewish community control', directed by Anglo-Jewry at the section of the impoverished foreign Jewish population it deemed most problematic—lone female labour migrants. Based upon a double standard of sexual morality that was by no means exceptional in English society of the day, its campaign was started when immigration was unregulated, and continued, from 1905, alongside state-run immigration restriction, to suppress the danger seemingly posed by these women and so safeguard the place of the assimilated Jewish elite in England.

From the vantage point of Anglo-Jewry, the Jewish (im)migrant population, fresh from the *shtetls* (rural Jewish villages) of Eastern Europe, speaking Yiddish, wearing the 'old fashioned' garb of Orthodox Jews, carrying the religious and social habits of their hitherto 'peasantish' lives, seemed decidedly foreign, ostensibly and morally, and therefore potentially dangerous. That its number was rumoured to be involved in crime, anarchy, and organised vice, and, crucially, was poor (a status that was itself racialised in turn-of-the-century culture) compounded this impression.²³ Therefore, to secure their elevated status within the country, members of the Anglo-Jewish elite were compelled to act, publically and boldly, to police the Jewish migrants it held responsible for trafficking. They wanted to show through their actions and words that good English Jews ought not be tarred with the same brush as the bad foreign Jews embroiled in organised vice, and were as appalled and determined to act against trafficking as others in respectable society. The JAPGW's representation of the Jewish women it deemed prone to being trafficked makes it plain which migrants the Association considered among the most detrimental to the country and most dangerous to Anglo-Jewry's privileged position. To be clear, the Association did not focus on female Jewish migrants because it saw them as the most vulnerable members of the country's wider Jewish community *per se*. Rather, it focused on them because it saw them as the persons most likely, through their very presence in England, to cause upset to English Jews. The JAPGW did recognise that women of all denominations could be and were being trafficked for sex work. To it, trafficking was never simply a 'Jewish problem'. However, bearing in mind its remit and the ideas of gender that coloured the outlook of the Gentlemen's Committee, the JAPGW focused its actions and words on the female Jewish migrants participating in trafficking.

Potential Victim #1: The foreign fledgling

The type of female Jewish migrant the Association held most at risk of being trafficked, and the type upon whom it focused by far the most attention, discursively and practically, was the foreign fledgling. She, according to the Association, was a benighted, unworldly young woman, if not a girl, who had left her family and her village in the Pale of Settlement on a whim, in the hope of a bright new life abroad. She was likely to fall victim either by being duped by the romantic proposals and extravagant offers of a trafficker in her home country or by embarking overseas through her misguided ambition, unaccompanied and unprepared, only to later succumb to similar overtures. She was not cast as a potential 'white slave' whose innocence and purity had been taken advantage of by an unscrupulous individual, as in the discourses of trafficking that had prevailed in England in the early 1880s when trafficking was supposed to be a foreign scourge on English 'white slaves'.²⁴ Instead, she was cast as a credulous foreign 'other' whose natural mental and moral defects had rendered her prone to abuse. This is evident in the Association's observations of young women who had been trafficked. 'The victims are often very weak, ignorant and helpless', it proclaimed in its 1904 Report, '...constantly devoid of moral fibre, lacking religious teaching, of low education'.²⁵ An aspect of the representation of the foreign fledgling the JAPGW particularly laboured in its

¹⁸ A White, *The Modern Jew*, New York, Frederick A Stokes, 1899, pp. 12—13. See also D Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European disorder, c.1848 – c.1918*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 214—5; D Feldman, 'The Importance of Being English: Jewish immigration and the decay of Liberal England' in D Feldman and G Stedman Jones (eds.), *Metropolis, London: Histories and representations since 1800*, London, Routledge, 1989, pp. 56—84.

¹⁹ 1905 Aliens Act, 5 Edward VII, c.13; D Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social relations and political culture 1840-1914*, Newhaven NJ, Yale University Press, 1994.

²⁰ J A Hobson, *The War in South Africa: Its causes and effects*, London, Nisbet, 1900, p. 189.

²¹ *JAPGW Annual Report*, 1908, p. 29.

²² Minutes of Council, 11 February 1902, JAPGW, HL, MS 173, 2/3/1.

²³ M Rozin, *The Rich and the Poor: Jewish philanthropic and social control in nineteenth-century London*, Brighton, Sussex Academic Press, 1999; Feldman, 1989.

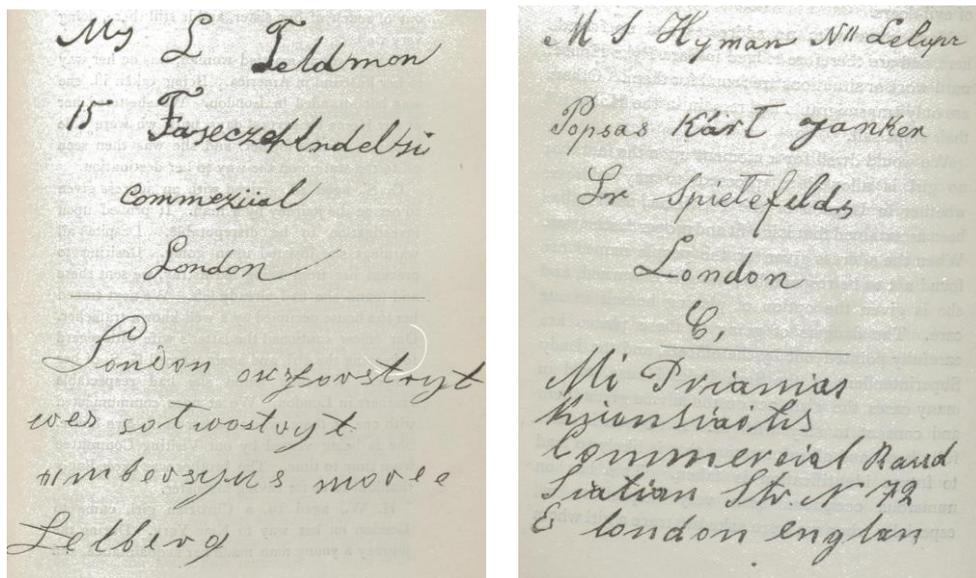
²⁴ For a key example of the use of the 'white slavery' metaphor see Dyer, 1880.

²⁵ *JAPGW Annual Report*, 1904, pp. 7—8.

annual report was her materialism and vanity. In 1905, the Association highlighted the role of ‘dazzling promises of good situations and large wages’ in poor Jewish girls being trafficked from the Pale of Settlement, and in 1908 it described how procurers working among London’s foreign Jews ‘get hold of girls of sixteen and seventeen years of age, and by flattery, presents and promises induce them to misconduct themselves and finally to leave their homes’.²⁶

The Association also emphasised the role of the *stille huppah* (a marriage conducted away from officialdom) in its explanation of how the foreign fledgling often found herself a victim of trafficking. In Orthodox Judaism, wives were to obey their husbands, and the dissolution of marriages by women was prohibited. Estranged wives were effectively ostracised from the religious community.²⁷ In 1907, it revealed to its subscribers, ‘[w]e have mostly to deal with foreign girls, who do not understand the requirements of the English law with regard to marriage, and if one of them has not been in this country long and has had no proper guiding hand to help her, she sees nothing wrong in the proposal of a Stille Chuppa [sic], which is probably the commencement of her downfall...When the proposal is made to the girl to travel to some foreign country, she dare not refuse’.²⁸

The supposed intellectual and moral deficiencies of the foreign fledgling, not to mention her sheer ‘foreignness’, were emphasised by the JAPGW in nearly every one of its annual reports during the period, through illustrations of the undecipherable or, as it called them, ‘imperfect’ addresses given to the Association’s travellers’ aid workers by young female migrants. ‘It might be thought that when the girls arrive with the addresses written out and safely treasured, the Dock Agent’s work would be a comparatively simple one’, the JAPGW declared when reflecting upon its work in 1898, ‘but this is not always the case. It would puzzle many of our readers if they were asked to conduct a girl to: No.5, Quns Beldnksgs, Goshe St Betinalen, gren Rout E, London England...It required some ingenuity on the part of Sternheim [the JAPGW’s London dock agent] to recognise the [address as]: Queen’s Buildings, Gossett Street, Bethnal Green Road’.²⁹ In otherwise un-illustrated volumes, the JAPGW often also went to the trouble of printing facsimile copies of crudely written and phonetically-spelled addresses with accompanying commentary. (See Figures 2 and 3) At no point did the JAPGW encourage empathy regarding the fact that female Jewish migrants were used to writing Yiddish in Hebrew script (if they could write at all). These girls’ difficulty with written English was interpreted by the Association as a mental deficiency.



Figures 2 and 3.

Significantly, the foreign fledgling was portrayed as likely to fall into the hands of the trafficker not simply because she had left home in search of a better life, but because she had been allowed to do so. The Association attributed her susceptibility to being trafficked to her ‘faulty upbringing’ or ‘poor parentage’, casting a combination of national difference and class difference as equating to innate inferiority.³⁰ Addressing the 1910 Jewish International Conference, Moro bemoaned the ‘ignorant and credulous parents’ of the girls targeted by procurers in the Pale of Settlement, not least because they ‘lend a too-willing ear to the representations’ of the procurers.³¹ Similarly, the Association included tables in its annual reports showing the extent of the burden of what it termed ‘unprotected’ migrant girls that it had to bear each year. (See Figure 4)

²⁶ JAPGW *Annual Report*, 1905, p. 25; JAPGW *Annual Report*, 1908, p. 15.

²⁷ See D Englander, ‘Stille Huppah (Quiet Marriage) among Immigrant Jews in Britain’, *The Journal of Jewish Sociology*, vol. 34, 1992, pp. 85–109.

²⁸ JAPGW *Annual Report*, 1907, pp. 21–3.

²⁹ JAPGW *Annual Report*, 1898, p. 52.

³⁰ JAPGW *Annual Report*, 1904, pp. 7–8; *Vigilance Record*, August 1891, pp. 80–1.

³¹ Moro cited in JAPGW, *Jewish International Conference on the Suppression of the Traffic in Girls and Women, 1910*, London, JAPGW, 1910, pp. 93–4.

	1899.	1898.	1897.
Total number of unprotected girls assisted	655	364	315
Girls left at the Home in default of destinations, or because of imperfect addresses	145	93	60
Girls conducted to ships, railway stations, or to addresses in London	510	271	255
Non-Jewesses assisted (included in the above figures)	70	41	30
Unprotected children assisted (ages varying from 3½ to 12)	25		

Figure 4.

Along with providing general travellers' aid services at ports and railway stations, the JAPGW's solution to this supposed burden was to give select foreign fledglings temporary assistance before sending them back home or on to a suitable destination.

Importantly, while the JAGPW strove to police what it saw as the most problematic section of the Jewish migrant population and so safeguard Anglo-Jewry, the way in which the Association represented women at risk of being trafficked was not first and foremost rooted in its identity as a Jewish group. Rather, the JAPGW's representations emanated above all from its identity as an upper middle-class, socially conservative English

grouping. The core assumptions and prejudices that found expression in the JAPGW's representations were echoed by the bourgeois executive of the country's Christian-leaning (yet officially multid denominational) anti-trafficking group, the NVA. The *Vigilance Record*, the NVA's journal, regularly featured stories of 'naïve' foreign girls, implicitly from Christian backgrounds, who had walked into the clutches of traffickers, often on the promise of 'plenty of money, jewels, and fine dresses' in a new life abroad.³² Indeed, the JAPGW, along with the NVA, drew heavily upon discourses of the threat posed by women's independence, and by girls' 'wayward' desires and materialism that had resonance in English society, thanks largely to middle-class moralists and commentators.³³ According to Sally Ledger, fears over working-class women's independence were particularly acute at the turn of the century owing to mounting female participation in militant trade unionism.³⁴ The JAPGW, moreover, rehearsed large parts of discourses of the sexual danger of women's mobility that had resonated in England regarding domestic labour migration from the late eighteenth century, and regarding English girls' foreign labour migration since the country's first international trafficking scandal in 1880.³⁵ It simply replaced 'the English woman or girl' with 'the Jewish female migrant' as the subject of each discourse and ramped up the severity of the 'threat' in question based on the significance it attached to the Jewish migrant's foreignness.

Potential Victim #2: The immoral migrant

Albeit at the very margins of its discourses, the JAPGW identified another type of foreign Jewish woman susceptible to being abused through 'trafficking'—the immoral migrant. This figure was cast as a sexually experienced woman who had travelled to England from the Pale of Settlement, with a third party, specifically to pursue her 'vocation' in vice. She was a more cognizant, calculating, corrupt, and, therefore, dangerous cousin of the foreign fledgling—the very worst of the genus of young working-class female foreigner and a figure far removed from 'the white slave'. The NVA was a vociferous supporter of legislation to restrict immigration into England and frequently included vitriolic descriptions of 'vicious alien prostitutes' in its public discourses. The JAPGW, however, given its driving motivation and its desire to morally police (im)migrant Jewish women and girls without relying on state intervention, was more cautious when referring to its foreign co-religionists who had migrated to engage in sex work. It made discrete, if unambiguous, references to the fact that some trafficking victims were 'sometimes not unwilling to be victims'.³⁶ The JAPGW did recognise that, despite their will to enter prostitution, immoral migrants were at risk of being coerced into, and held in an exploitative form of commercial sex. Indeed, whether these women were technically, according to today's categories, migrant sex workers, trafficked sex workers, or migrants entering sex work, the Association considered them to be 'victims' of an 'immoral traffic' simply by virtue of their movement between countries and their engagement in sex work. Its 1904 annual report acknowledged that '[s]ome girls go knowingly [abroad with traffickers]...But they, too, are victims. They know nothing of the misery, debasement and slavery awaiting them'.³⁷ However, the Association did not portray the immoral migrant's potential victim status as equivalent to that of the foreign fledgling, given that the immoral migrant had, in its eyes, all but volunteered for being sexually abused and was totally vice-ridden. In its 1906 report, the JAPGW, without a word of supplementary comment let alone criticism, drew its members' attention to a resolution made at the 1904 International Congress on the White Slave Traffic regarding the need for Congress member-states 'hindering the recruiting in their respective countries of the foreign feminine element of evil'.³⁸

Indeed, the Association clearly viewed the immoral migrant as detrimental to, and unwanted in both Anglo-Jewish society and English society at large. The Association spared its most damning indictments of this type of potential trafficking victim for its private discourses and advocated only one solution: repatriation. While certain of its number endorsed the state restricting the immigration of 'vicious' or 'criminal' aliens, the JAPGW saw this repatriation as its own responsibility, and state intervention as a last measure if its efforts failed. Nearly a decade before the Aliens Act, members of the Association resolved at an internal meeting, '[s]ome steps must be taken to prevent the constant arrivals of [foreign girls...leading

³² See for example *Vigilance Record*, August 1903, pp. 3–4; *Vigilance Record*, February 1904, p. 3; *Vigilance Record*, April 1902, p. 38.

³³ See P Cox, *Gender, Justice, and Welfare: Bad girls in Britain, 1900-1950*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2003, pp. 1–16, 37–50; Bristow 1982, p. 35.

³⁴ S Ledger, *Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1997, pp. 47–8.

³⁵ LA Jackson, *Child Sexual Abuse in Victorian London*, Routledge, London 1999, pp. 14–15.

³⁶ *Vigilance Record*, December 1903, p. 90; *Vigilance Record*, May 1906, p. 38; *JAPGW Annual Report*, 1904, pp. 7–8.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 22–3.

³⁸ *JAPGW Annual Report*, 1906, p. 31.

immoral lives]. ...[T]he names and addresses of girls who come over here...who are living immoral lives should be sent to the Rabbis of their own towns and they be requested to take every step they can to prevent others from following them to England'.³⁹ Unlike certain foreign fledglings whose onwards journey to their country of origin or to a respectable address was deemed necessary but not urgent, the JAPGW resolved that the only solution for immoral migrants was for them to be immediately removed from England and sent back home.

As with the foreign fledgling, the JAPGW suggested that the immoral migrant was likely to succumb to trafficking not only because of her own flaws but because of her pedigree. However, no reference was made to her parentage. Her shortcomings were suggested to be innate and immutable. Again, here, the Association drew upon ideas that already had resonance in respectable English society—this time regarding the innate corruption and malignancy of 'the prostitute', and adjusted the ideas according to the meaning it gave to the immoral migrant's status as a foreigner. While notions of the fallenness of 'the prostitute' had currency in Orthodox Jewish culture, the JAPGW based its representations, above all, on ideas of female sex workers that were embedded in turn-of-the-century English culture. A few JAPGW members including Constance Battersea took a more sympathetic view towards foreign Jews working as sex workers within England than the one promoted by the Association at large, and advocated the rehabilitation rather than the direct removal of these women.⁴⁰ The opinions of the feminist, women's rights-oriented fringe of the Association, however, had little resonance in the group's key anti-trafficking actions and representations. The same can be said of women's voices.

The JAPGW did relate the flaws it considered to blight each type of woman at risk of being trafficked to the poverty and discrimination rife in her home country. At the 1910 Jewish International Conference, Chief Rabbi Hermann Adler averred in support of the Association's work: 'We cannot be surprised if ill-treatment, oppression...and consequent fear of starvation drive men and women to reprehensible means of earning a livelihood'.⁴¹ Equally, at the same conference, JAPGW members considered the role of Orthodox Jewish laws and customs, particularly surrounding sex and marriage, in precipitating trafficking. However, such structural factors were portrayed as merely exacerbating the two types of potential trafficking victims' inherent shortcomings.⁴² The Association declared regarding the foreign fledgling in its annual report the year after the conference, '[e]xtreme poverty and miserable environment on the one hand, the seductive tongue and the vision of pleasure and plenty on the other. It is easy to imagine which is likely to appeal more to a hungry, weak-minded or desperate girl'.⁴³

One might infer that, by effectively stigmatising foreign trafficked women as various shades of immoral, undeserving aliens, the JAPGW was positioning trafficked English women as pure, non-consenting 'white slaves' who merited the nation's support and succour. This, however, was not the case. The JAPGW did not rehearse 'white slavery' rhetoric because it simply did not believe that trafficking was an Englishwoman's burden. While the association, like the NVA, would inform its members about the perils of allowing their daughters to travel abroad alone or befriend strangers, such reminders did not come with the expectation that these daughters could or would ever be in a position to succumb to traffickers. In its eyes, true Anglo-Jewish girls, and indeed true English girls, were not potential trafficking victims for they did not have the 'foreign' moral deficiencies required to occupy such a dangerous category. They were the moral antithesis of foreign female migrants. They were naturally respectable, respected themselves, and knew that their place was at home, contributing to the nation as wives and mothers. This can be seen in the fact that the Association focused almost exclusively on trafficking cases involving migrant women. It can also be seen in the Association's depiction of trafficking as a problem that English or British subjects acted against, rather than participated in. The JAPGW's 1907 annual report registered how it was 'gratifying to find that our Association is recognized, both at home and abroad, as a standing protest of British Jews against an evil which they seek to suppress'.⁴⁴ Similarly, the Association saw the nation's men, to say nothing of the nation's women, as morally incapable of organising trafficking. Montefiore proudly declared on behalf of the JAPGW that '[n]o English Jew had so far forgotten his duty to England as to be engaged in this traffic'.⁴⁵ Thus, while both the original proponents of 'white slavery' rhetoric and the JAPGW distinguished between trafficked women (or women at risk of being trafficked) using particular concepts of sexual innocence and complicity, the Jewish Association did not do so to separate pure and unwilling trafficking victims from impure and complicit prostitutes, as in 'white slavery' rhetoric. Rather, it mobilised its ideas of innocence and complicity to establish the level of guilt and the lack of deservingness of women at risk of being trafficked, separating bad from less bad rather than good from bad, and moral blackness from grey rather than white from black.

While this short article is concerned with representations of women deemed prone to being trafficked, it bears mentioning that the JAPGW spent relatively little time discussing 'the trafficker' in its public discourses, and what little attention Association members did focus on him (because they invariably typecast the principal accomplices in trafficking as male) was negative but not entirely damning. Although the JAPGW cast 'the trafficker' as 'the most cowardly, the meanest, and the most despicable of his kind...the enemy of the human species', it also acknowledged his prowess as an extremely accomplished businessman.⁴⁶ It painted him as a foreign entrepreneurial mastermind who had defected to the dark side and

³⁹ Third Minute Book of the General Committee, 6 November 1896, JAPGW, HL, MS 173, 2/1/3.

⁴⁰ Battersea cited in JAPGW, *Jewish International Conference*, pp. 131—2.

⁴¹ Chief Rabbi Adler cited in *ibid.*, p. 93.

⁴² See *ibid.*, pp. 90—100.

⁴³ *JAPGW Annual Report*, 1911, p. 24.

⁴⁴ *JAPGW Annual Report*, 1907, p. 41.

⁴⁵ C Montefiore cited in *The Suffragette*, 11 July 1913, p. 660.

⁴⁶ S Singer cited in *Vigilance Record*, July 1905, p. 56.

was therefore loathsome but whose business skills were, in isolation, superlative. At the 1910 Jewish International Conference, Arthur Moro spoke of ‘the extraordinary intelligence, energy, ingenuity and enterprise now employed by the traffickers in successfully conducting their detestable trade’ and confided with fellow delegates, ‘I have often thought wistfully of the benefit which would accrue to our people if these qualities, so admirable in themselves, could be put to better use’.⁴⁷

Consequences

Trafficking, then, was misrepresented by one of the country’s dominant authorities on the subject as a ‘foreign problem’ inflicted upon respectable England. It was cast as a problem that was caused first and foremost by foreign working-class women and girls who, to varying degrees, had rendered themselves prone to sexual abuse on account of their inborn moral inferiority, their primitivism, and their inappropriate behaviour. The reasoning behind this was simple, if highly prejudicial: the more agency a woman exercised outside the home, in terms of her labour and/or sexual relations, the more morally deficient she must be, and the more susceptible to, and culpable for injury sustained to her person she was—especially if she happened to be working-class and, most importantly, foreign. It is no coincidence that the JAPGW seldom referred to English girls as potential trafficking victims.

By setting out these rules, the JAPGW, in turn, forged a damaging distinction between the ‘deserving’ and the ‘undeserving’ foreign poor that was cut through by xenophobia, class bias, and misogyny. According to the JAPGW’s representation of trafficking, in aspiring for a better life abroad, foreign fledglings attempted to transgress the boundaries prescribed by respectable English society for their sex and class, and so needed extensive moral instruction by respectable (English) parties before they could be considered capable of remaining in the country as ‘desirable subjects’—a job that the JAPGW only on occasion deemed worth doing. In vying to sell their bodies abroad, immoral migrants consciously transgressed these boundaries, and their immorality and danger could not be remedied. They were ‘undesirable aliens’ who needed to be sent back home. By extension, women and girls who were trafficked were effectively criminalised as, at best, half-victims according to their perceived level of dependence and passivity. Migrant sex workers, the group effectively most prone to sexual abuse and coercion, received the thinnest end of the wedge as both sexually and, to a degree, financially autonomous women. (Male) traffickers and pimps, meanwhile, regardless of their class and foreignness, were implicitly partly absolved by the JAPGW as at best only half-criminals—as thoroughly evil yet exceptionally talented entrepreneurs.

‘The white slave’ that had dominated representations of trafficking in the early 1880s was thereby replaced with ‘the guilty victim’ who came in many shades from grey to black. ‘The respectable Englishman’ came out best in the Association’s discourses, being positioned as the full subject, and the full agent. He was tacitly constituted as the supreme moral arbiter with the right to define, judge, and advocate action towards the various foreign participants in trafficking. Indeed, it is not surprising that the JAPGW had few words to say on the structural socio-economic or the religio-cultural factors that prompted the traffic in its co-religionists. To it and its ‘respectable’ English members, trafficking was no more or no less than a question of the (im)morality of poor foreign women who varied from flawed to just plain bad.

In making these observations, it is not my intention to trivialise the important structural foundations that the JAPGW laid in both the national and international fight against trafficking, or the fear that members of the Association felt on account of the seemingly rising tide of prejudice towards Jewish people in England. However, I do mean to question the way in which the Association, partly as a result of this fear, problematised trafficking and treated migrants who came to England, often fleeing grinding poverty, prejudice and violence, in search of a better life.

Within its detrimental misrepresentation of trafficking, the JAPGW also publically endorsed a number of other ideas that contradicted its commitment to the ‘protection of girls and women’. Although its annual reports and petitions were circulated mainly around its fifty-odd members and select followers (Jewish and non-Jewish) across the country, and any addresses its members made were typically to like-minded moral reform groups, what its audience lacked in size, it made up for in influence in and outside national, and often also, international anti-trafficking circles. As we have seen, the Association rehearsed and so reinforced discourses that had increasing resonance in English culture of the day regarding the danger to the social order posed by working-class women’s independence. It corroborated the notion in public debates over sex work that growing numbers of sex workers were wayward girls who had erred because of the new freedoms within their reach and the draws of modern consumerism.⁴⁸ Further, along with endorsing a double-standard of sexual morality, it entrenched the racialised concepts of ‘the prostitute’ as a contaminative, anti-national ‘other’ that were circulating, particularly in bourgeois circles, at the turn of the century.⁴⁹

Crucially, through its representation of trafficking, the Association, albeit unintentionally, not only reinforced but also extended the prejudice that was being disseminated by prominent anti-alienists, and thereby distinguished England’s growing migrant population from respectable English society at large as perpetually mutually exclusive entities. Its portrayal

⁴⁷ Moro cited in JAGPW, *Jewish International Conference*, p. 31.

⁴⁸ For an excellent examination of these ideas in later English representations of trafficking see J Laite, ‘Immoral Traffic: Mobility, health, labor, and the “Lorry Girl” in mid-twentieth-century Britain’, *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 52, 2013, pp. 693–721.

⁴⁹ Bartley, pp. 155–73.

of the trafficker as an immoral middleman dovetailed with Arnold White and other prominent anti-alienists' racialised scaremongering regarding 'the venal Jewish landlord or sweatshop owner', profiting from gross exploitation. Perhaps most damaging, however, was the Association's portrayal of the female recipients of its anti-trafficking efforts. Despite confining its most vehement condemnations to its private discourses, the JAPGW's portrayal of the immoral migrant as a deprived outsider who came to the country expressly to pursue her 'vocation' in prostitution, tacitly lodged a case for 'alien women' being even more blighted and dangerous than 'alien men' and reinforced the idea that England was a target for 'undesirable foreigners'. So too did its portrayal of the foreign fledgling as a morally loose girl whose presence in English society was profoundly burdensome. The Association underscored both the danger to the nation of the impoverished (im)migrant population and the 'common sense' of purging the country of not just 'criminal and vicious aliens', but all poor foreigners. In driving this wedge between migrant and respectable English subject, the JAPGW scored a dangerous own goal. The anti-alienist prejudices it rehearsed and extended formed the bedrock of the simmering Antisemitism in the country. While causing little danger among the members of the Association, the circulation of the group's discourses outside the Jewish community, which was modest yet not insignificant, risked fanning the very flames that Battersea, Moro and Montefiore wanted to extinguish. The Association knew that by acting against Jews' participating in trafficking it risked bringing negative attention to England's Jewish community as a whole, but its misrepresentation of trafficking considerably increased the odds.⁵⁰

Conclusion

The JAPGW aspired, through its operations and its discourses, to demonstrate the lack of difference between England's Jews and respectable English society. And it achieved this, for, as has been suggested, despite its singular motivation, and its community-specific focus, the core ideologies and prejudices it espoused were largely those espoused by its anti-trafficking ally, the NVA. The Jewish Association was, in short, a product of its time, that is, not a Jewish product *per se* but, in the context of the national fight against trafficking, a very bourgeois English one.

More broadly, the example of the JAPGW's discourses suggests that to fully understand the deeper ideological roots of contemporary representations of trafficking in the sex sector, we need to build a more comprehensive, more nuanced, and more sensitive appreciation of the ways in which the world's first anti-trafficking organisations problematised trafficking. We need to look beyond the 'myth of "white slavery"'. The project of demonstrating the link between the representations of 'the trafficked (or potentially trafficked) woman' put forward by groups such as the JAPGW and the representations mobilised by key contemporary anti-trafficking initiatives is not one that I have attempted in this short article. My intention has been to shine a brighter light on a key overlooked historical discourse of trafficking. However, I hope that this article inspires others to look for not only 'the white slave' but also 'the poor, morally-dubious female migrant', and her many brothers and sisters, in the representations that feature in today's anti-trafficking discourses.

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⁵⁰ Minutes of Council, 11 February 1902, JAPGW, HL, MS 173, 2/3/1.