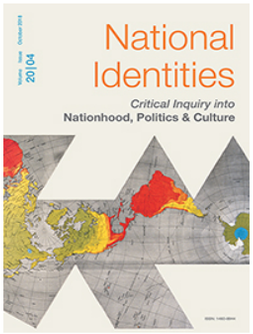

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A very un-English predicament: 'The White Slave Traffic' and the construction of national identity in the suffragist and socialist movements' coverage of the 1912 Criminal Law Amendment Bill

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ABSTRACT

The measure promoted as England's first law against sex trafficking, the Criminal Law Amendment Bill, journeyed through Parliament in 1912. Amid mounting extra-parliamentary protest over votes for women, workers' rights, and Home Rule for Ireland, the country's suffrage and socialist groups chose to engage with the somewhat ancillary Bill and the issue of trafficking (or 'white slavery' as it was popularly known) through the powerful medium of their periodicals. They did so largely because they saw the value to their wider campaigns of using trafficking - a phenomenon often cast by reformers as involving the sexual exploitation of working-class women - to forge connections (or highlight disjunctures) between the suffragist and socialist movements. Ideas of race, national identity, and empire attached to configurations of 'slavery' were central to their rhetoric, and to the links the groups made between trafficking and the political emancipation they sought. These ideas give a valuable insight into influential representations of trafficking in 1912 and the campaign against 'white slavery' during what was a fundamental, transnational moment in the history of trafficking. They also illuminate suffragist and socialist rhetoric of the day, and the conflicting ideas of 'Englishness' therein. This article strives to unlock some of these insights.

KEYWORDS

Trafficking; race; suffragism; socialism; Edwardian England

After a period of relative obscurity, the issue of sex trafficking resurfaced on the mainstream English political scene in 1912 when what was promoted as England's first anti-trafficking law, the Criminal Law Amendment (White Slave Traffic) Bill began its journey through Parliament. Over four short clauses, the Bill [hereafter the CLA Bill] set out to tighten the law surrounding third-party involvement in prostitution. It provided for the arrest without warrant of suspected procurers, harsher penalties for brothel-keepers and souteneurs, including flogging for male souteneurs, action against landlords whose

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premises were used for prostitution, and the clarification of 'solicitation by men' to encompass the solicitation of either sex (Criminal Law Amendment Act 1912, 2&3 Geo.5 c.20).

The CLA Bill was an ancillary measure within a fraught and tumultuous body politic. Acute extra-parliamentary protest over votes for women (women were disenfranchised at the national level), workers' rights, and Irish Home Rule commandeered parliamentary proceedings and plunged Herbert Asquith's Liberal Government further into a crisis of legitimacy. However, the country's main suffragist and socialist groups chose to engage with the 'little' Bill and the issue of trafficking – or 'white slavery' as it was popularly termed – through the powerful mouthpieces that were their periodicals. Some of these groups, mainly within the suffragist fold, had taken an interest in the anti-trafficking cause before (see *The Common Cause,* 28 April 1910, p. 34). Yet, their engagement with the CLA Bill, when the struggle for women's suffrage and workers' rights was reaching a pinnacle, was largely founded on their recognition of the value it would bring to their wider campaigns. Amid stiff competition for reform, the issue of trafficking – a phenomenon widely cast by reformers as involving the sexual exploitation of working-class women – allowed the groups to forge key connections (or highlight disjunctures) between the suffragist and socialist causes, and so forcefully argue for their respective notions of democracy and remedial legislation (Fletcher, 2006, p. 113). It provided suffragist groups with a channel through which to highlight the dangers facing the average working woman without female enfranchisement and contest the demands being made by many socialist groups for universal manhood suffrage and extended rights for male workers. It allowed socialist groups to either highlight the government's ill treatment of the 'weakest' of the working class or, as was often the case, marginalise calls for 'unnecessary' women's laws.

Enmeshed ideas of race, Englishness, and empire, attached to various configurations of 'slavery', were central to the ways in which the country's suffragist and socialist groups engaged with, and extracted value from the CLA Bill through their periodicals. They were also key to the links the groupings drew between trafficking and the wider forms of political emancipation they sought – whether for women, for workers, or, indeed, for working women. Through race, or historically specific taxonomies of human difference based on perceived physical, moral, and/or cultural characteristics, the groups, in various ways, cast trafficking as a pressing 'un-English problem' that had grave consequences for nation and empire.

The ideas of race that the suffragist and socialist groups mobilised in their periodicals not only provide a key insight into the politics of influential representations of trafficking in 1912 and the campaign against 'white slavery' during what was a fundamental transnational moment in the history of trafficking. They also illuminate aspects of the suffragist and socialist rhetoric of the day, and, crucially, the significance of conflicting ideas of 'Englishness' within that rhetoric. This article strives to unlock these insights through a thematic analysis of the concepts of slavery that England's main suffragist and socialist periodicals invoked in relation to the 1912 Criminal Law Amendment Bill.

The transnational traffic in women was neither a 'new' problem nor a newly racialised problem in 1912. Trafficking had entered English popular consciousness in 1880 when a scandal erupted over a small trade in underage English girls to the licensed brothels of Belgium and France.[1] Reformers portrayed the phenomenon as a targeted racial assault

on England's pure working-class girlhood by innately depraved 'Continental debauchés' (Dyer, 1880).[2] One of the key ways they did this was by adopting 'white slavery' as a metaphor to negatively compare the oppression of (white) trafficked girls against that of black chattel slaves of empire and so mark out trafficking as a superior racial abomination. The scandal, along with the revelations of juvenile prostitution unearthed five years later by journalist WT Stead in 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon' series for London's *Pall Mall Gazette*, generated widespread public indignation. They prompted the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act, which raised the age of consent from thirteen to sixteen, and tightened certain laws surrounding prostitution (Walkowitz, 1992, pp. 81–84).

By the late 1880s, trafficking had become a global phenomenon. Amid the Long Depression and the escalating persecution of Jews in Imperial Russia, mass migration started from Continental Europe. Thousands of women, often under the auspices of third parties, travelled to work in the commercial sex industries that were thriving in centres of migration including New York and Buenos Aires, and in sites of an empire such as Alexandria and Johannesburg. England was an important conduit in global trafficking networks, hosting four of the world's busiest passenger ports. It also housed two of the social purity groups at the forefront of the nascent global anti-trafficking movement, the National Vigilance Association (NVA) and the Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women (JAPGW). These groups cast trafficking as a problem caused principally by the ranks of troublesome foreign women from which trafficking victims came (JAPGW, 1890–1896; NVA, 1890–1910). They retained 'white slavery' as a label to invoke the severity of trafficking, but the sympathy that had once been attached to the sexually wronged 'English white slave' was displaced to those English men and women who had to abide by the scourge of foreign trafficking. From the 1890s, public engagement with the issue of trafficking waned as anti-trafficking activists focused on preventive strategy and international policy discussions. That is, until 1912 when the fruits of these activists' labour gave rise to a viable CLA Bill. Aided by the journalism of the country's suffragist and socialist groups, interest in trafficking was reignited and the racialisation of trafficking became more complex and politically charged.

This racialisation has yet to be subjected to detailed analysis. There have been some rich studies on the role of race and empire in turn-of-the-century English suffragist rhetoric. Mariana Valverde's (2000) exploration of how suffragists argued for the vote by emphasising white English women's patriotic contribution as mothers and guarantors of the imperial race provides useful context to suffragist groups' rhetorical engagement with trafficking in 1912. Laura Nym Mayhall (2000) and Antoinette Burton's (1994) analyses of suffragists' use of the mistreated 'colonial other' of colour as a 'wounded attachment' that enfranchised white English women could represent, meanwhile, constitutes an interesting counterpoint to certain suffragist periodicals' more inward-looking 'white slavery' rhetoric. However, trafficking has featured only briefly in this scholarship (Bartley, 2002, pp. 120–121; Frances, 2000, pp. 191–192; Kent, 1990, pp. 142, 196) – unlike the work on early suffrage activism in the United States (see Donovan, 2006, pp. 37–55; Pliley, 2014, pp. 23–26). Similarly, there are several excellent analyses of race and national identity in Edwardian socialist discourses. Stephen Yeo (1986) and Paul Ward (1998, pp. 5–36; 1999) have demonstrated the centrality of constructions of 'oppositional Englishness' (as distinct from popular ideas of national identity) and 'radical patriotism' in the way that the country's main socialist groupings formulated and justified their

socialism. This tendency, Ward (1998, pp. 54–57) suggests, led to some of the more radical groups that espoused national forms of socialism most fervently, adopting exclusionary ideas of race in their rhetoric surrounding putative outsiders undermining the 'true nation'. Diverse constructions of Englishness and this racial antagonism are evidenced in the socialist journalism surrounding the CLA Bill. Yet, again, the question of trafficking and the Bill has received little attention from historians of the Edwardian socialist movement.

Only a few studies of early responses to trafficking in England have closely considered questions of race, in contrast to the growing historiography of trafficking in other countries (Donovan, 2006; Guy, 1991; Peck, 2011; Pliley, 2014; Stauter-Halsted, 2015; Wingfield, 2017; Yarfitz, 2019). Mary Ann Irwin (1996) and Jo Doezema (2010) have each analysed late nineteenth-century English 'white slavery'; rhetoric, observing the distinctions made therein between good (innocent) trafficked women, whose torment was anathema to Englishness, and bad (complicit) prostitutes, for whom no sympathy was afforded. Some scholars have engaged with the broader discourses of trafficking in England, tracing the racial material within and surrounding 'white slavery' narratives (Attwood, 2015, 2016; Knepper, 2007; Laite, 2017b). Julia Laite (2017a), for example, pointed to the role of race and national identity in her analysis of how members of the anti-trafficking movement, governments, and international labour movement leaders in England sought to distinguish sexual labour from other types of labour for their own political ends in the early twentieth century. This holistic approach, which is also adopted in the ensuing analysis, promises to reveal the myriad shades of grey that inflected the racial politics of trafficking discourses. Indeed, Ian Christopher Fletcher (2006) has suggested its potential regarding the 1912 CLA Bill in his excellent chronological analysis of suffragist and socialist periodicals' coverage of the measure. The periodicals, he intimated briefly, brought diverse ideas of race and empire to their conceptualisation of both the Bill and the limits of democracy (See also Bland, 1995, pp. 297–302).

This article examines these ideas and unpacks the construction of national identity therein through analysing the suffragist and socialist periodicals' representations of the severity and the cause of trafficking. Before this, some context is required regarding the CLA Bill, and the socialist and suffragist press.

The CLA Bill

The journey towards the CLA Bill began in 1905 when the JAPGW starting lobbying for a reform of the measures on prostitution in the 1885 CLA Act and the 1898 Vagrancy Act, so as to clamp down on those organising and/or living off the earnings of prostitution, including trafficking. The association formed a Conjoint Committee in 1909 with the NVA, the Jewish communal group the Jewish Board of Deputies, and the London Council for the Promotion of Public Morality, and put together a moderate set of measures to this effect, which was approved by the Home Office (NVA, 30 June 1908). However, it was not until 1911 that a CLA Bill based on the measures came before Parliament. The Bill gained traction after being reintroduced in spring 1912 by the Unionist MP Arthur Lee and received strong support from the National Union of Women Workers (NUWW), and the Ladies' National Association (LNA), a women's rights-oriented group

that advocated the deregulation of prostitution (Stevenson, 2017). Yet it was starved of government backing and got repeatedly blocked.

Asquith's Liberals had little appetite to engage with minor measures that did not promise a political dividend, especially ones that provided for a potentially unpopular extension of police powers and government intervention in moral affairs. A political maelstrom was escalating. The Third Irish Home Rule Bill had been introduced in April, riling Unionists and prompting the formation of further armed paramilitary resistance groups. Women's suffrage protest was spiking. Having had its hopes raised in 1908 with the introduction of a Private Member's Bill allowing for partial female enfranchisement, the suffrage movement was bitterly disappointed when Asquith came to power that year, refused to back the Bill, and reneged on a promise to introduce a franchise reform Bill with a women's suffrage amendment. Conciliation Bills providing for limited women's suffrage were introduced in 1910, 1911, and 1912, but ultimately failed. Each failure generated an upsurge in suffragist protest, particularly militancy, ranging from pacific civil disobedience to hunger striking and arson attacks. Brutal suppression by the authorities ensued (Purvis & Holton, 2000). The labour movement was also in revolt. A crescendo of industrial disputes and union militancy began around 1910, and reached a deafening pitch by 1912, during a period dubbed 'the Great Unrest'. Over 800 strikes took place in 1911, some soliciting government suppression, and in 1912, an estimated 36 million working days were lost through strike action, including a national miners' strike. A general strike seemed imminent (Hinton, 1983, pp. 83–95).

The repeated blocking of the CLA Bill, along with the failure of the 1912 Conciliation Bill, prompted the country's suffragist groups to support the CLA Bill as necessary 'women's legislation'. They promoted the measure as a 'fitting memorial' to W. T. Stead, the spearhead of the 1885 CLA Act, who had died aboard the Titanic that April, days before the CLA Bill had foundered (see *The Common Cause*, 25 April 1912, p. 37; *Votes for Women*, 3 May 1912, pp. 481–4; *The Vote*, 22 June 1912, p. 150), and in May, a Pass the Bill Committee was formed. Following a deputation by the Women's Liberal Federation and amid heightening suffragist militancy, the government was finally persuaded to give facilities to the Bill that June, most likely as a concessionary 'women's measure' to quell further suffragist uprising. After the Bill passed its second reading and seemed like a more credible proposition, the country's socialist groups began to engage with it. Broadly speaking, two opposing sides in the debate over the Bill became apparent both within and outside Parliament. There were those who believed that meaningful action to protect women and girls from being trafficked was imperative, that the police should be empowered to act within reason, and that there should be stronger deterrents for third-party involvement in prostitution. Then there were those who objected to the police's powers being extended, especially for arrests on suspicion, questioned how living off immoral earnings could be proven, and condemned corporal punishment for souteneurs.[3] That July, the Bill's first clause was diluted in Committee such that only a policeman above the rank of sergeant could undertake an arrest on suspicion. This sparked renewed controversy, among the suffragist and socialist movements, reform circles, and Parliament at large, over the efficacy and repressive consequences of the Bill, but the original clause was later restored.[4] In October, Arthur Lee led a deputation comprising inter alia the religious and social purity groups of the Conjoint Committee, the NUWW, the LNA, the Salvation Army, and the National Free Church Council to Home

Secretary Reginald McKenna to demand the Bill's amendment to further protect women and girls and its swift enactment (Stevenson, 2017). With the Bill's passage imminent, attention turned to the Bill's so-called 'Flogging Clauses', their humanity, and their efficiency, and controversy raged again among Parliamentarians and activists alike. As we shall see, certain socialist groupings were particularly vocal on the subject. Flogging was a punishment that had previously been reserved for specific forms of 'deviant' male criminal and had profound racial connotations.[5] After much debate, the Bill received Royal Assent in December.

The suffragist and the socialist press

As well as exercising a significant influence in the fortune of the CLA Bill, the suffragist and socialist movements came to be among the dominant voices in the representation of trafficking in 1912 through their respective periodical presses. The periodical was a powerful weapon for Edwardian radical groups. With the growth of the press since the 1850s, rising literacy levels, and conducive reading cultures, an in-house newspaper was an economical means of moving with the frenetic political climate and disseminating up-to-the-minute rhetoric. Every major suffragist and socialist group either published or endorsed a periodical (Delap et al., 2005, pp. 21–70). The periodical was of course not the only medium through which the groups disseminated their written rhetoric. Many also used pamphlets and handbills. Yet, in 1912, it was mainly external organisations (albeit ones with some suffragist supporters) like the Pass the Bill Committee and the LNA that produced pamphlets and handbills focusing on the CLA Bill in its own right.[6] Indeed, as we shall see, just one socialist group published a pamphlet on the Bill, which was, in fact, a reprint from its newspaper. The periodical was the key channel through which the suffragist and socialist movements engaged with the CLA Bill, and, in turn, the suffragist and socialist periodical presses were key agents in the debate over the measure, containing singularly detailed and opinionated representations of the measure and the problem of 'white slavery'.[7]

This article explores the weekly periodicals of the main women's suffrage groups: *The Common Cause, Votes for Women, The Vote,* and *The Suffragette,* as well as the independent 'weekly feminist review' *The Freewoman*.[8] *The Common Cause* was the newspaper of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), the country's principal non-militant suffragist group, which was founded in 1897 by the seasoned suffragist and social reformer Millicent Garrett Fawcett to campaign for women's suffrage using constitutional means. Disappointed with the defeat of the Conciliation Bills and the Liberal government's equivocation over women's suffrage, the NUWSS announced its support for the Labour Party in 1912, after the Party began advocating women's suffrage. It also founded the Election Fighting Fund, pledging its support in elections to pro-suffrage candidates (Thane, 2007). *The Common Cause* was edited until June 1912 by Helena Swanwick, followed by the writer Clementine Black. While the periodical's weekly circulation is unknown, it is likely to be considerable. By 1913 the NUWSS had 100,000 members, enjoying a sizeable working-class following compared to its fellow middle-class-led suffrage groups (Purvis & Holton, 2000).

Votes for Women was the newspaper of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) until summer 1912. It was edited by Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, a one-time social

reformer, and her barrister husband Frederick, and by 1910 had a weekly circulation exceeding 30,000 (Crawford, 1999, p. 460). Established in 1903 as an alternative to the NUWSS, the WSPU advocated militant tactics under its leader Emmeline Pankhurst, a radical suffragist and socialist, and her daughters Christabel and Sylvia. 'Deeds not words' was its motto (Pankhurst, 1914, p. 32; Purvis, 2000a, pp. 114–19). It had associated itself with the Labour Party but broke its ties in 1907 over the Party's inaction on women's suffrage (Thane, 2007).

The Vote was the newspaper of the Women's Freedom League (WFL), which was formed in 1907 after a breakaway from the WSPU by the socialist-leaning feminists including Charlotte Despard and Teresa Billington-Greig. It was edited by Despard and had a weekly circulation of around 4,000 by 1910. The WFL disapproved of the Pankhursts' escalating militancy and autocratic leadership. It adopted militant strategies but vowed never to 'set out to damage persons or property'. Its slogan was 'Dare to be Free' (Eustance, 1993; Frances, 2000, p. 181). *The Suffragette*, meanwhile, was inaugurated in October 1912 as the WSPU's new publication, after the Pethick-Lawrences were ousted from the group for criticising the Pankhursts' increasingly bold tactics. It was edited by Christabel Pankhurst, the group's chief organiser, and early editions had a weekly circulation of 17,000. The Pethick-Lawrences retained *Votes for Women* as the organ of their new, more moderate militant group, The Votes for Women Fellowship (VFWF), but the periodical's circulation dropped considerably (Crawford, 1999, p. 460).

Finally, *The Freewoman* was founded in 1911 by another disillusioned WSPU defector, Dora Marsden. Marsden edited the periodical, with trade unionist and WSPU organiser Mary Gawthorpe as her co-editor until March 1912. Maintaining a feminist-individualist stance, the modernist publication printed candid pieces on marriage, sexuality, and women's legal status. It condemned the suffragist movement as philosophically inferior, and aimlessly fixated with integrating women into a defunct system of government (Delap, 2002; *The Freewoman*, 4 July 1912, p. 123). *The Freewoman*, which lasted until October 1912 in its first guise, had a humble weekly circulation of 2,000–2,500, but was significant in modernist circles (Delap, 2000).

With the exception of the VFWF's *Votes for Women* (22 November 1912, p. 144), which saw the vote as the only meaningful reform for women, the suffrage periodicals supported the CLA Bill, with the NUWSS and the WFL showing their support for the Pass the Bill Committee through their journalism. Yet all were critical of the Bill's terms. The repressive consequences of arrests on suspicion were a shared concern. *The Common Cause* (8 November, 1912, p. 530) questioned the brutality in flogging male procurers, whilst the militant periodicals highlighted the punishment's sexual inequality (*The Vote,* 16 November, 1912, p. 104; *The Suffragette,* 15 November, 1912, p. 63). In contrast, *The Freewoman* rejected the CLA Bill as a cynical measure that would not stop women's exploitation in prostitution.

The Bill was the subject of regular and often impassioned coverage in the suffragist press. As it journeyed through Parliament, the suffragist periodicals underlined their belief that 'white slavery', sweated labour, and child exploitation were the major women's problems of the day. *Common Cause*, the periodical with the most moderate tone, carried around six extended articles on the Bill and 'white slavery'. Meanwhile, *Votes for Women* and *The Vote* each featured twice this amount, with more racially explicit content. (The former periodical's takeover by the VFWF did not alter the volume of

coverage). *Votes for Women* also featured three cartoons referencing 'white slavery' among its weekly front-page satirical drawings, and *The Vote*, one. *The Suffragette* carried five substantial articles on the CLA Bill, with a similar tone to *Votes for Women*, whilst *The Freewoman* printed a substantial article on the Bill and some follow-up letters, along with an editorial referencing the measure.

The socialist publications under consideration are the *Daily Herald*, the weekly newspapers *Labour Leader*, *Justice,* and the *Clarion,* as well as the weekly modernist magazine, *The New Age*. Founded in April 1912, the *Daily Herald* was a Labour Party-backed national with syndicalist sympathies. Initially known as the Labour Representation Committee, the Labour Party started life in 1900 as an ideologically heterogeneous amalgamation of trade unions and socialist groupings, with the broad aim of acting as the parliamentary voice of the working class. The Party gained some traction at the 1906 general election through allying with the Liberal Party but, despite striving for more autonomy, remained largely dependent on the Liberals for its limited electoral success in the Edwardian era (Hinton, 1983, pp. 64–82). The *Daily Herald* was edited for most of the period by the writer Rowland Kenney, brother of the prominent WSPU activist Annie Kenney. Prior to 1914 it had a daily circulation ranging from 50,000–150,000 copies (Holton, 1974, p. 374). *Labour Leader*, meanwhile, was the newspaper of the Independent Labour Party (ILP), a radical working-class led affiliate of the Labour Party, which had been established in 1893 by James Keir Hardie, England's first pro-labour independent MP. Its members were influenced by intellectual socialism and their ultimate goal was to achieve the public ownership of industries. The newspaper was edited by the journalist and would-be Labour politician Archibald Fenner Brockway, who, unlike most ILP members, came from a middle-class background, as the son of a Congregational missionary, and had attended a public school. By 1911, *Labour Leader* had a weekly circulation of 40,000–50,000 (Holton, 1974, p. 348).

Further to the left, *Justice* belonged to the middle-class led socialist grouping the British Socialist Party (BSP), which stemmed from the Socialist Democratic Federation (SDF) of 1884. The BSP advocated violent social revolution alongside collective ownership of industries (Bevir, 2001, pp. 106–128). Styling itself as 'the organ of social democracy', *Justice* was edited by the Marxist trade unionist Harry Quelch, and had a pre-war weekly circulation of around 3,500 (Crick, 1994, p. 69). The *Clarion* was a popular independent periodical, founded in 1891 to spread the message of socialism among the workforce. Adopting a light yet powerful approach to political questions, it was one of the most influential socialist periodicals of its day, fostering its own movement. It was edited in 1912 by the journalist Robert Blatchford, one of its founders, and, in 1910, its sales peaked at 83,000 copies a week (Brake & Demoor, 2009, pp. 122–123). It, like many socialist periodicals, featured a small pro-suffrage women's section, with some editorial independence, although the main publication, like *Labour Leader* and *Justice,* supported universal manhood suffrage over women's suffrage, and condemned suffrage militancy (Green, 2017). Unlike the Labour Party and the ILP which endorsed more internationalist forms of socialism and cross-border working-class communality, the *Clarion,* together with the BSP, championed a distinctly national form of socialism and more conservative ideas of 'the nation' (Ward, 1999).

Lastly, *The New Age* was an eclectic magazine, developed in 1907 from a publication of the same name. In 1912, it was edited by its co-founder, the modernist intellectual Alfred

Richard Orage, who styled the publication as 'a weekly review of politics, literature, and art'. It hosted debates on issues ranging from socialist politics to psychoanalysis and boasted contributions from a host of radical writers including Ezra Pound and H.G. Wells. Whilst aligning itself with guild socialism, the magazine also contained reactionary and conservative content and became markedly anti-suffragist. It had a weekly circulation of around 4,000 by 1913, down from 22,000 in 1908 (Garver, 2011).

While the *Daily Herald* and the *Labour Leader* advocated the CLA Bill as an intermediary measure before legislation to achieve equitable economic distribution, *Justice* and the *Clarion* opposed the Bill and argued that targeted economic legislation was the answer to prostitution. As with *The Freewoman*, *The New Age* castigated the CLA Bill as futile and sinister. Like the suffragist press, all the periodicals questioned the repressive nature of the Bill's provisions. The socialist periodicals typically carried fewer pieces on the Bill than the suffragist press. However, their coverage was no less opinionated and provocative. Each featured one or two articles dedicated to the Bill, alongside references to the measure in editorials, news pages, and/or letters pages. Whilst the *Daily Herald* and *Labour Leader* focused on the minutiae of the Bill and the issue of trafficking from the Bill's second reading, the later debate over flogging was what prompted the majority of coverage in the more radical *Justice, Clarion,* and *The New Age*.

While all the periodicals under consideration had British readerships, the constructions of national identity they advanced in relation to the Bill were centred largely on ideas of 'Englishness'. This was partly because they often leveraged 'Englishness' as a catch-all to connote the shared 'domestic' characteristics across the four nations. There is also the question of the extent the English-based periodicals espoused Anglo-centric foci (Bohata, 2002), as well as the precedent set by the country's anti-trafficking movement. The dominant representations of trafficking in Britain had hitherto been produced by English-run (and London-based) anti-trafficking groups, which, whilst acknowledging the incidence of trafficking in Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, typically focused on trafficking as an 'English problem' (Attwood, 2016).

Given the ideological convergences between the suffragist and socialist movements, many of the periodicals shared contributors. The socialist and suffragist activist Dora Montefiore, for example, regularly wrote for *Justice*, contributed to the *Clarion*, and had her opinions aired in *Votes for Women*. The periodicals, however, each toed a distinct line on key political questions and each brought distinct ideas of race and national identity to its interpretation of the CLA Bill.

The new 'white slavery'

Dominant representations of trafficking underwent a sea change as the Bill progressed through Parliament and became more porous to broader political currents. A blatant reconfiguration came in the form of the diversification of the 'white slavery' metaphor, and the hardening of the gendered assumptions regarding national identity and entitlement therein. At this juncture, it is important to examine why 'white slavery' rhetoric was used by English activists to represent trafficking.

For generations, slavery had carried a profound symbolic charge in the English body politic as a grave affront to national identity. Conventional wisdom had it that England was the world's foremost anti-slavery nation. It had fought off slavery across the globe,

not least through abolishing chattel slavery in its colonies in 1833, and its subjects enjoyed freedom as a birth right (Huzzey, 2012). From the 1850s, these ideas began to be racialised as the concept of England's status as an imperial race developed, amid growing rivalry between Europe's imperial nation-states. This became more pronounced in turn-of-the-century society when Social Darwinist ideas linking the population's health to that of the country internationally gained currency, and anxieties regarding racial degeneration abounded (Young, 2008, pp. 13–14). Slavery was thus viewed as an un-English state that, if thrust on white English subjects, would emasculate the imperial race and disrupt the domestic and international racial order (Hanley, 2016).

By the first trafficking scandal, 'white slavery' rhetoric had a tried-and-tested resonance in English radical culture. Developing alongside abolitionist protests, the first sustained use of the 'white slavery' metaphor was by factory reform advocates in the 1820s and 30s, who claimed that English workers were subjected to 'a state of slavery more horrid than … that hellish system, colonial slavery' and rued the government's prioritisation of enslaved Africans. A focus prevailed on the exploitation of women and children, often with suggestions of sexual mistreatment (Hanley, 2016; Oastler, 1830, p. 3). 'White slavery' continued to be employed in radical circles to connote juvenile labour exploitation, sometimes involving an illicit traffic and/or prostitution (Cobden, 1853; Jackson, 2000, pp. 14–16). From the 1850s, reformers branded sweated labour in the clothing industry 'white slavery' and lamented its role in driving women into prostitution (Reynolds, 1850). The following decade, the term surfaced amid the panic over white European women being ensnared in 'Oriental' harems (Summers, 2011). In the 1870s, moreover, Josephine Butler (1876) appropriated 'white slavery' to liken prostitution to black chattel slavery in her international campaign against state-regulated vice.

From 1880, however, 'white slavery' rhetoric was used almost exclusively regarding trafficking, and again emphasised the superiority of white English subjects' suffering. Alfred Stace Dyer, leader of England's fledgling anti-trafficking movement, described trafficked English girls as being subjected to 'slavery infinitely more cruel and revolting than negro servitude, because it is slavery not for labour but for lust; and more cowardly than negro slavery, because it falls on the young and helpless of one sex only' (Dyer, 1880, p. 6). That trafficking was cast as a grave sexual form of slavery inflicted on white English girls re-politicised the 'white slavery' metaphor and underscored its status as a racial atrocity. Apart from the idea that an attack on 'the weaker sex' was immoral, women engaging in prostitution were deemed eternally corrupted, morally and physically, rendered prone to contaminate the healthy national stock, and unable to perpetuate the imperial race (Laite, 2012; Levine, 2003, pp. 1–36; Walkowitz, 1982). These anxieties were fanned by anti-trafficking advocates. Dyer (1880, p. 32) suggested that trafficking led to the irreversible corruption 'of every vestige of womanhood', whilst NVA leader W.A. Coote (1903) later described Englishmen exposed to foreign trafficked women as being, 'simply demoralised in body, soul, and spirit'.

In the tumultuous Edwardian political climate, slavery took on even more significance. The country's extra-parliamentary groups used the concept of slavery to condemn the treatment of the particular group of English subjects they believed was being abused under the current political settlement, compare the oppressions of the day, and argue for the precedence of a particular reform in the national interest. As will be shown, suffrage and socialist groups used the CLA Bill and the discussion surrounding trafficking as 'white slavery' to

manifest their grievances with the various other 'slaveries' to which they considered English women and/or workers to be exposed.

Like the country's first anti-trafficking reformers, the suffragist periodicals that approved of the CLA Bill adopted a 'white slavery' metaphor to express the severity of the victimisation of pure English women through trafficking, and this metaphor was also aired at the margins of the pro-Bill socialist periodicals. Yet, the suffragist periodicals moved beyond Dyer's 'white sexual slavery'/ black chattel slavery binary. Instead, they mobilised more complex, contemporary configurations of the 'white slavery' metaphor that were predicated on negatively comparing 'the English white slave' with a host of foreign slaves of colour whose oppression had recently received government attention. The argument packaged in the new metaphor was simple: Why when England's most vulnerable subjects were being enslaved in the most intimate, damaging way, did the government and its supporters care more about emancipating men of lesser races subjected to milder slavery abroad?

Nina Boyle, the head of the WFL's political and militant department and an influential voice in the group, produced the most vitriolic journalistic rendition of the new 'white slavery' metaphor in a letter to the 'Women and Citizenship' page of the *Daily Herald* (15 August 1912, p. 2) entitled 'Putumayo v. England', which was swiftly reprinted in *The Vote* (24 August 1912, p. 312). As we shall see, suffragists espoused heterogeneous and complex ideas surrounding empire and imperialism. The South African War of 1899–1902, an imperial conflict between the British and Boer settlers, had prompted diverse interpretations of empire and sympathies among them (Mayhall, 2000). Yet Boyle was one of the few staunch imperialists within the suffrage movement (*The Vote,* 11 November, 1911, p. 31). She invoked two putative modern slaveries in her letter. The first was that involving the workers in the rubber plantations of the Congo Free State under Belgian Rule, which had been highlighted by the British diplomat and human rights investigator Roger Casement, as part of a government-commissioned report in 1904. The second was that involving Huitotos Indians and Barbadian subjects in the rubber plantations of Putumayo, Peru under the British-directed Peruvian Amazon Company, which had prompted government intervention as the CLA Bill was passing through Parliament, thanks to another investigation by Casement (Burroughs, 2011, pp. 49–71). Writing in August following the publication of the trafficking exposé *The White Slave Market* by Mrs Archibald Mackirdy and Mr W.N. Wallis (1912) and the disappointment of the CLA Bill's dilution, Boyle chastised the male Establishment and the press for neglecting the country's enslaved white women:

> Your columns and those of other dailies have devoted much space to the Putumayo atrocities. It seems that it is quite sufficient to be a coloured man to enlist the sympathy of British philanthropists, Parliamentarians, politicians, and other public persons. Not one word, however … about the atrocities committed on the persons of young girls and women …
>
> The appalling exposition of the trade in girls … in *The White Slave Market* … contains matter infinitely more shocking than the Congo or Putumayo atrocities, and is sanctioned under the British flag. No international action is being urged by any influential section of the public, as our negrophile philanthropists, are urging on behalf of Peruvian subjects (*Daily Herald*, 15 August 1912, p. 2).

In a follow-up piece for *The Vote* (23 November 1912, p. 58) by Boyle entitled 'The Modern Don Quixotes', which was published during the Bill's reading that November and after the government had sanctioned an enquiry into the Putumayo atrocities, Boyle asked:

> The Barbadoes natives enticed to the rubber area will be avenged, the fifteen young English girls now on their way to Buenos Ayres in the charge of a foreign 'agent', will, we venture to suggest, never be heard of again … What is the Government, which can make such a fuss about Negro men, going to do about these English girls?

Votes for Women (11 October 1912, p. 17) under the WSPU, whose coverage of trafficking was the most sensationalistic of the periodicals, made a similarly blunt comparison when attacking the press and government's focus on the slavery being perpetrated on Macedonian men in the ensuing Balkan conflict, rather than the afflictions, including 'white slavery' blighting women at home.

An equivalent, if calmer, line was taken by *The Common Cause* (25 July 1912, p. 277) regarding 'the Chinese slave', with reference to Chinese indentured labour under the English in South African mines, which had provoked public indignation since 1904.[9] In a review of *The White Slave Market* in July, it declared that Mrs Mackirdy 'speaks with some justifiable indignation at the one-sided nature of men's sympathies which went out to the "Chinese Slavery" in South Africa, and placidly tolerated far worse slavery, when it is the slavery of women'.(See also *Votes for Women,* 12 June 1912, p. 594). As the debate over the CLA Bill intensified that October, a variation of this indictment was also rehearsed in the *Labour Leader* (12 September 1912, p. 596) via a letter by the actress and WSPU member Winifred Mayo, which took aim at the male voting public. 'The horrors of white slavery are far greater than those attendant upon "Chinese Slavery", which roused the electorate to such a pitch of excitement a few years ago', Mayo averred, 'but as the horrors are experienced by women, they are viewed with a callousness which is nothing short of disgraceful'. Indeed, as Sacha Auerbach (2009) has shown, the experience of Chinese 'coolie' labour in South Africa and increased Chinese migration in turn-of-the-century England precipitated ideas in and outside socialist circles of Chinese men as industrious yet inferior workers compared to the white English labour force.

England's main suffragist periodicals, particularly the militant *Vote*, with some limited editorial support from the pro-CLA Bill socialist press, then, brought popular notions of slavery as anathema to English national identity, white Englishness as the marker of superiority, and women as special others to the debate surrounding trafficking. When lobbying for the Bill, they articulated the severity of trafficking and highlighted the male Establishment's unpatriotic priorities by rhetorically constructing a racialised and sexualised hierarchy of oppressions, with the (white) trafficked English woman at its apex and one or more groups of foreign male slaves of colour, far below. They distinguished (male) slavery for labour from (female) sexual slavery, and positioned the former as a more banal, less corporeal and less morally-contentious form of slavery, so as to cast these enslaved men as relatively unworthy others who had not been, and could not be, subjected to the superior affliction that was 'white slavery'.

The periodicals thereby not only misrepresented the transnational, multi-ethnic phenomenon of trafficking as a peculiar burden of English womanhood and overlooked foreign trafficked women, who in 1912, made up the majority of trafficked persons. They also erroneously implied that there were no women within the un-white slave populations or that the women were not oppressed and had not endured similar suffering to white English trafficking victims. The latter indicates their suggestion that these women had neither the moral calibre to be attractive as sex slaves, nor the moral

sensibilities to feel true sexual exploitation, as in the interlinked notions of the over-sexualised physique and promiscuity of women of colour that had long existed in English culture. In casting these aspersions, the periodicals also disregarded the possibility that male slaves of colour could have been, as many were, sexually abuse (Block, 2006, pp. 88–125; Bush, 2000). The whiteness in the new 'white slavery' metaphor thereby acted as a specific national/racial, sexual status for English women, rather than simply a skin tone. The non-whiteness of the lesser slaves (which was never gradated), meanwhile, symbolised a skin-tone and a generic, inferior racial status that was the antithesis of Englishness.

The trafficked English woman was hardly a winner in this situation. Aloft upon a pedestal, she was positioned as cursed by the superior purity and sexual appeal that naturally emanated from her white Englishness, passive in her predicament, and blighted by her bodily subjection. This was not all. Although trafficked women were implied to be average, working-class subjects in wider representations of trafficking, the metaphor was based on the notion of a generic victimised English womanhood, as if any English female were prone to be trafficked. This served to entrench the idea of not only the special qualities and value of every English woman, but also the special vulnerabilities. Indeed, a good deal of Edwardian suffragist rhetoric was not based on the similarity of the sexes, but rather on the idea of women's special role in the electorate as man's maternal helpmate (Purvis, 2000a).

We also see through the new 'white slavery' metaphor that, for all their admirable campaigning for women's rights, militant suffragists in particular readily leveraged individuals' suffering for political advantage through their periodicals. They constructed ethnocentric zero-sum games using the English 'white slave' and the particular male slaves of colour they surmised would yield them most political gain to downplay the plight of groups that had received the government's time and attention. 'White slavery' was thus cast as a racial battle of oppressions between the sexes – white English women in the metropole versus inferior men of colour in sites of empire, and an unchivalrous (and morally unwhite) male Establishment. As Mayhall (2000) and Burton (1994, pp. 171–206) have shown, many suffragists in Edwardian England used a 'wounded attachment' argument to argue that English women deserved political representation because of their ability to sympathise with, and represent the interests of oppressed women in the British Empire. However, during the struggle over the CLA Bill and amid intensifying suffrage protest in 1912, many suffragists focused closer to home and privileged the 'white slavery' of English women.

The new slave masters

The biggest change to the dominant representations of trafficking and their racial content in 1912, however, was a fundamental shift in focus. Thanks to the suffragist and socialist press, attention turned away from trafficking as a problem of individuals and towards the thornier question of what (or who) was causing trafficking. The narratives popularised by Dyer (1880) regarding 'Continental debauchés' stimulating a traffic in English 'white slaves' to satiate their perverted lusts, and the NVA and JAPGW's focus on 'vicious foreign women' were marginalised in mainstream trafficking discourses (Attwood, 2015; Bartley, 2000, pp. 170–173). Instead, the forces generating the trafficked woman's

plight were brought under the spotlight, as the suffragist and socialist periodicals engaged to varying degrees with the question of trafficking in their broader criticisms of the state and arguments for emancipation. The ideas of race and national identity that underpinned representations of trafficking, in turn, became more complex as the conversation surrounding the CLA Bill re-focused on the bigger 'slaveries' and 'slave masters (or mistresses)' behind trafficking, and on exactly who it was being enslaved.

There was consensus over two fundamental points among the periodicals on these matters. Firstly, that trafficking was an un-English problem, caused by harmful 'foreign' influences within the country. Secondly, that trafficking involved the slavery of innocent English subjects and, as such, constituted a grave racial/national abomination. How the periodicals configured trafficking, Englishness, and slavery from the second reading of the CLA Bill, however, varied considerably.

Un-English systems

Unsurprisingly, all of the suffragist periodicals and the pro-CLA Bill socialist periodicals condemned trafficking as a foreign form of slavery inflicted on England's (white) women and attributed it to women's unequal position in the society and the economy. Their prime focus of blame was the unpatriotic government for facilitating 'white slavery' by failing to legislate in women's interests, and, in the case of the suffragist periodicals, by denying women the power to change their circumstances via the vote. What is more counter-intuitive, however, is how the periodicals used race to articulate this stance and condemn the government for being the nation's chief 'white slave' master (Figure 1).

The militant suffragist press, in the majority of its opinion pieces on the CLA Bill, cast trafficking as a foreign contagion that was being administered to the English race via innocent women, thanks to the immoral male body politic. It did so most blatantly through harnessing a pseudo-scientific language of racial purity and pollution, with a tacit Social Darwinist emphasis on the need to improve the health of the imperial race in the name of national prosperity. This marked a different play on 'white/pure' and 'non-white/ tainted' as racial categories in 'white slavery' discourses; one which looked inward to the health of England's national stock, rather than outwards to slaves of colour. In an editorial printed in *The Vote* (4 May 1912, p. 44) as the fate of the CLA Bill hung in the balance, Charlotte Despard chastised the government for allowing a racial abomination:

> Revelations [of trafficking] have been made … [W]e have bold and earnest statements by scientific men and women of how, by the sacrifice of women, the race is being poisoned at its sources. And we know that legislation concerning these vital questions is being deliberately blocked in the House of Commons to which men send men.

Indeed, the WSPU and the VFWF's coverage of the CLA Bill stressed the profound 'racial danger' the government was sanctioning through its inaction towards the 'white slavery' of English women. Following the third reading of the CLA Bill, Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence explained in the VFWF's *Votes for Women* (29 November 1912, p. 137):

> Having the vote means having the power to put a stop to the white slave traffic … [T]o a very large extent women are the keepers of the keys of destiny so far as the future of race

Figure 1. A. Pearse, 'Set the White Slaves Free!', *Votes for Women*, 3 May 1912.

> improvement and development is concerned … For while the bodies of women have ever been laid as a willing sacrifice upon the altar that is consecrated to the future of the human race, it is a very terrible perversion that they should be sacrificed … to disease-dealing and death bringing vice, fatal to humanity.

Similarly, in October *The Suffragette* (25 October 1912, p. 16) had also branded 'white slavery' a 'horrible degradation of the race' within England, which could only be vanquished with women's help. The moral certitude and eschatological allusions in these representations might well reflect what Mulvey-Roberts (2000) and Hartman (2003) have identified as the 'religious character' of many militant suffragist writings of the day, as well as the authors' own religiosity. Despard was a proponent of Theosophy, whilst Pethick-Lawrence's moral tone was perhaps influenced by her time working with the Wesleyans' West London Mission under Hugh Price Hughes, who was the progenitor of the 'Nonconformist conscience' – the moral influence that Nonconformist churches strove to exercise in British politics (Ross, 2014).

The racial content of this coverage was in keeping with the broader rhetoric of the suffrage movement. The politics of suffragism, as Fletcher et al. (2000) argued, were 'constitutive of, as well as shaped by, the national and imperial politics of the day'. Amid anxiety over the vitality of the nation, degeneration, and England's steadily declining birth rate, many suffragists emphasised women's special role as the mothers of England's superior imperial race and thus key stakeholders in the nation's continued pre-eminence at home and abroad. The discussion of male sexual vice through abominations like

trafficking provided a fruitful avenue for what Valverde termed this 'incorporation of existing racist evolutionary paradigms into feminism' (Valverde, 2000). It gave suffragists a powerful example of the physical danger posed to women under a male government that they could use to exhort the national importance of women's emancipation. It also allowed them to position the government, the male population, and anyone opposed to women's suffrage as degenerate and un-English. Such discussions increasingly became a feature of WSPU rhetoric, as exemplified by Christabel Pankhurst's (1913) work *Plain Facts About a Great Evil*, which outlined the connection between prostitution, the scourge of venereal disease, and racial decline.

The suffrage periodicals' emphasis on the racial consequences of 'white slavery' on English women was thus embedded in imperial feminism, but a specific current of imperial feminism. Unlike the pro-imperialist women who argued for more rights for their female compatriots so that they could better support the Empire, the suffragist arguments regarding 'white slavery' and racial purity are seemingly intellectually closer to the more complicated position occupied by feminists like Frances Swiney and Josephine Butler, who were involved in the turn-of-the-century campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts in India (Burton, 1994). That is, they attacked a corrupt British imperialist government, whilst also turning mainstream imperialist rhetoric on the government to show that it was not living up to the standards of civilisation upon which it prided itself.

Certain suffragist periodicals also conscripted mythological monsters to express the national, racial peril of 'white slavery'. In October, *The Vote* invoked Greek mythology via a front-page political cartoon entitled 'Woman's Danger', drawn by the artist M. Hughes and produced by the Suffrage Atelier, a non-affiliated nationwide collective founded in 1909 to promote women's enfranchisement via educational art (Morton, 2019) (Figure 2). Captioned 'The Scylla and Charybdis of the Working Woman', after the two sea monsters in Homer's Odyssey that lived on either side of a strait so narrow that a person could barely avoid one without succumbing to the other, the cartoon depicted a working-class Englishwoman sailing precariously between threatening monsters labelled the 'white slave traffic' and 'sweated labour' respectively. Behind the woman stood a sun-drenched city, perhaps the equitable England that she could reach once enfranchised. The problems facing the average working woman in the economy were thereby positioned as foreign foes that had no place in the true English nation, and her limited choice of destiny was set out: She would succumb to enslavement in prostitution for little if any pay, or to working long hours in poor conditions for a pittance (a practice itself branded 'wage slavery'). Either way, she would be bereft of freedom at the hands of a foreign monster, and degraded in her supposed anti-slavery nation, thanks to the male government's disinclination to emancipate her (See also *Vote,* 7 September 1912, p. 37; Suffrage Atelier, 1912). 'White slavery' was, as Fletcher put it, 'one of the pivots by which the WFL and the WSPU turned towards working-class women' in 1912, and convinced them that their interests as workers were best served by the suffragist rather than the socialist cause (Fletcher, 2006, p. 104).

While not replicating the language of racial contamination and emphasis on English women's imperial status (most of the socialist groupings under consideration were anti-imperialist and had decried the South African War[10]), The *Labour Leader* and the *Daily Herald* advocated the CLA Bill using a similar overarching argument and often reminiscent racial imagery to the suffrage periodicals. However, they blamed trafficking on the

Figure 2. M. Hughes, 'Women's Danger', *The Vote*, 5 October 1912.

government's failure to enact legislation to create an economic distribution capable of protecting working women from the wage slavery that precipitated prostitution. The *Labour Leader* (22 August 1912, p. 539) ran an editorial by Fenner Brockway in support of the Bill, following the revision of the measure, which featured a cartoon by the artist G.B. Foyster. The cartoon depicted a helpless bound-up damsel, dressed all in white to denote purity, being tyrannised by a menacing, smoke-breathing dragon labelled 'the white slave traffic' (Figure 3). Evoking the national legend of St George, a knight is shown coming to rescue the stranded damsel and slay the foreign creature with a spear marked 'economic freedom'. The image bore the caption '[t]he White Slave Bill will do much to rescue girls from the hands of the villains who carry on this trade, but Socialism and Economic Freedom can alone ensure that no woman shall be compelled to sell their body for bread'. Brockway continued, '[w]here honest toil is hard and without interest, where wages are so low that they necessitate semi-starvation … there

Figure 3. G.B. Foyster, 'Stop the White Slave Traffic', *Labour Leader*, 22 August 1912.

is to be found the recruiting ground of prostitution' (see also *Daily Herald,* 13 November 1912, p. 1 & 8 July 1912, p. 2). This use of mythological monsters arguably provided the periodicals with an alternative to overtly demonising foreigners and thus gave them a more palatable means of conveying the racial problem of 'white slavery' without alienating those in progressive circles (Virdee, 2014). In the case of the St George style cartoon, moreover, it allowed the *Labour Leader* to invoke a form of oppositional Englishness that was rooted in a romanticised vision of the national past – something that Ward (1998, pp. 20–36) has suggested was key to much Edwardian socialist rhetoric. This, in turn,

enabled the periodical to position the socialism for which the ILP fought as the means of restoring England to the fair country it had been prior to capitalism, and to position the ILP as a chivalrous defender of national interests. Indeed, depictions of St George were often used in socialist rhetoric to symbolise the slaying of capitalism and the renewal of the true nation under socialism (Ward, 1998, pp. 31–32).

These representations reveal that the principal suffragist, and more moderate socialist periodicals, used ideas of race and national identity, either tacitly or blatantly, to place trafficking in a broader, more sophisticated and more accurate causal context than previously. The periodicals moved away from attributing trafficking principally to bad foreign people, as social purity-oriented anti-trafficking reformers like Dyer and Coote had done before them (with a few notable exceptions[11]), but instead blamed broken 'foreign' systems – sexual discrimination, an unjust economic settlement, and above all, an unpatriotic government. However, this departure was not entirely progressive. For, while trafficking might at last have been cast as a structural issue that necessitated wide-sweeping reform, it was simultaneously compartmentalised, especially by the militant suffragist press, as a national 'women's issue' (albeit one with wider racial consequences). It was not, to the periodicals, a matter for equal action by each sex. Nor was it a matter that could be addressed under the present body politic. Nor, indeed, was it a matter that was also rooted in structural political, social, and economic causes outside England's borders that affected many foreign women.

Further, trafficking was often packaged by the periodicals in question as a national 'women's issue' that beset unfortunate working-class English women and that needed to be fought against by their 'enlightened' leaders – that is, self-aware activists, implicitly from the 'better' classes – who had the power and wherewithal to avoid being enslaved. While middle-class led, the WFL and WSPU each had many working-class members and, as we have seen, actively addressed working women's precarious socio-economic position (Purvis, 2000b). The Labour Party and ILP were of course dominated by and acted for the working classes. Yet their coverage of the causes of trafficking nevertheless entrenched bourgeois-centric views of the dependency of certain parts of the working-class, and notions of women's vulnerability to sinister un-English male forces.

The militant suffragist periodicals' representations of trafficking as a racial poison extended the boundaries of victimhood in trafficking such that it became a 'women's problem' that blighted the English race, and, with it, they extended the boundaries of 'whiteness' in 'white slavery'. This was a useful ploy in conveying the severity of trafficking and implicating the government. However, it served to dilute the concept of victimhood in trafficking and obscure the plight of trafficked persons.

We see here how the periodicals in question defined true Englishness as a superior racial and moral status that was altogether separate from the government and the country's social and economic structures. There were the people and then there was the power, with the latter working against national interests by facilitating the abuse of good Englishwomen and men. True Englishness, with all its superiority, was simultaneously cast as vulnerable, and at risk of eternal corruption due to this abuse. Militant suffragists' portrayal of trafficking as causing racial degeneration positioned English 'white slaves' as not simply incapable of contributing to the nation, but also eternally bereft of their Englishness due to the moral degeneration inflicted upon them. According

to this unforgiving social Darwinist rationale, they were creatures of pity that had once been, but could never again be part of the true nation.

Un-English subjects

A variation of this argument led to a different interpretation of who was responsible for the sexual slavery of English women entering the debate over the CLA Bill in some of the more radical periodicals under consideration – one which apportioned blame to not only bad un-English structures, but also malevolent un-English men, and specifically, malevolent male Jewish migrants. Like the *Labour Leader* and the *Daily Herald*, the *Clarion* represented the organised prostitution that underpinned trafficking as largely the product of the government letting the foreign system of capitalism thrive on English soil. However, in one of the most significant interventions on the CLA Bill in both the periodical itself and the socialist press, it situated the government's lack of patriotism in its disinclination to enact laws to not only improve the lot of honest English workers but, significantly, also stop the foreign Jewish men on English soil who orchestrated sexual exploitation.

Writing in the *Clarion* (6 December 1912, p. 5) just weeks before the CLA Bill's passage, the author and satirist A. Neil Lyons unleashed a multifaceted tirade regarding 'white slavery'. On the origins of prostitution, he declared:

> Of all my little sisters, [clothing factory workers] are most hardly used. Not only do they have to work for the support of Mr Hoggeheim by day, but they have also to minister to the recreations of his innumerable nephews by night … If, by correcting your social and economic standpoint, you can render it possible for every decent young man to enter a decent union with a decent young woman … man's desire for evil practises will die in him.

Here, through the Jewish protagonists of Mr Hoggenheim the clothing factory owner and his nephews, Lyons cast 'the male Jew' as either forcing English women into prostitution indirectly, by exploiting them in sweatshops such that they needed additional money to make ends meet or, directly, by buying their sexual services, in a generational cycle of abuse. It is perhaps no coincidence that it was one of the socialist periodicals that endorsed a more national form of socialism, and that focused on the rights of the white, British-born male worker, that indulged in such overt Antisemitic vitriol. The periodical that espoused an analogous socialism *Justice* (9 November 1912, p. 5), similarly endorsed the idea of a relationship between 'the men who sweat poor innocent women and children' and the 'evil' of trafficking, albeit without the same overt Antisemitism. Yet, the implicit identity of these men would not have been lost on its readers.

Jewish men had been cast, particularly by left-leaning radicals, as leading perpetrators of the 'white slavery' of native female workers in clothing sweatshops since the mid-century. Moreover, from the 1880s, the country's growing East European Jewish immigrant population engendered localised hostility, particularly in London's impoverished East End, where many migrants settled. The newcomers' impact on the housing and labour markets riled East End residents, and in 1902 spawned the proto-fascist group, The British Brothers' League (Feldman, 1994). Many socialist activists also aired their grievances regarding migrant Jews' adverse impact on London's labour market (Virdee, 2017). Middle-class anti-alienists like Arnold White (1899) fanned this hostility, invoking

generations-old Antisemitic calumny of Jews as venal middlemen, to cast the immigrants as a dangerous, anti-national race apart that must be restricted from entering the country (Attwood, 2016). Significantly, some anti-alienists also implicated male Jews in sexual exploitation (Evans-Gordon, 1903).[12] 'Procuring for the "white slave trade" and living upon the earnings of women are now two of the regular professions of the alien Jew', White declared to *The Standard* (30 January 1911, p. 2). Beyond the migrant population, the 'invisible hand' of a Jewish elite was implicated in certain circles for upsetting national life. Prominent Liberals such as JA Hobson (1900), and various socialist and/or modernist publications, including *Justice* (11 June 1910, p. 1) and *The Freewoman* (29 September 1912, pp. 321–323), for example, propounded the idea that Jewish financiers had tricked the government into the South African War of 1899–1902 for personal profit, as part of their condemnation of empire.

Despite interpreting trafficking differently to the *Clarion* and *Justice*, pieces in *The Freewoman* and *The Vote* rehearsed these themes in their coverage of the CLA Bill. *The Freewoman* (6 June 1912, p. 14) printed a piece on the CLA Bill in June by the socialist activist C.H Norman entitled 'Champions of Morality' that, without evidence or elaboration, casually branded 'white slavery' a phenomenon that was 'largely in the hands of Jews'. It was Boyle who brought Antisemitism into *The Vote*'s coverage of the Bill. In a leader in entitled 'Who Pays?', concerning women across the world bearing the brunt of men's immorality, Boyle referred to Christian women suffering at the hands of 'immigrant Russian and Polish Jews engaged in the traffic in womanhood and prosecuted for living on the proceeds of immorality' (*The Vote,* 25 May 1912, p. 92).

Those socialist periodicals that were furthest to the left and that shunned an internationalist form of socialism, then, together with the more extreme voices in the suffragist/feminist press, made Antisemitic slurs and elements of immigration restriction rhetoric an inextricable, albeit niche, part of the debate over the CLA Bill and dominant representations of trafficking in 1912. Drawing suggestions being made at the margins of anti-alienist discourse into mainstream political discussion, they implied that banishing Jewish migrants and their supposedly nefarious money-making activities represented a key step in the prevention of trafficking. Their diatribes thus overlooked the status of trafficking as a multi-ethic and multi-denominational phenomenon, as well as the lot of the many Jewish migrant women and girls caught up in trafficking. Ironically, their diatribes also neglected the link between poverty, social-dislocation, and mass-mobility that accounted for most of the global trafficking activity of the day, reducing the wider context of 'white slavery' to little more than the victimisation of London's underpaid female seamstresses by 'bad foreigners'. This representation of trafficking, like the ones previously considered, also marginalised trafficked women as passive victims, draw to their fate by harmful male foreign forces.

We also see here how certain periodicals had no compunction in conscripting unsubstantiated and injurious vitriol into the coverage of secondary political issues. Without care for the country's Jewish population, they rehearsed incendiary accusations based on the anti-national status of the foreigner and of 'the Jew', simply to capitalise on the pre-existing groundswell for anti-alienism and promote their wider agendas.

English national identity, in this sense, was configured as a superior status that was threatened on home soil by lesser races, and above all East European Jewish migrants, whose moral degeneration looked set to contaminate national life. That average

working women, as the mothers of the next generation, were represented as being first in line for contamination made this danger seem all the more acute. The true English nation was thus defined as a section of the population rather than its entirety – a section whose blood and heritage were pure and 'untainted'. The foreign Jewish parts of the population, meanwhile, were suggested to be in need of excision from the country in the name of not only stopping trafficking but also warding off degeneration and upholding national vitality.

Un-English complexes

The third interpretation of the slavery involved in trafficking subverted the ideas of race and national identity found in the other two. Espoused principally by the *Clarion, The New Age,* and *The Freewoman,* it held that 'white slavery' was not the slavery of English women at all, but rather a ruse by a race apart of perverted, unpatriotic activists and parliamentarians who were vying to enslave England's healthy male population. As in the *Clarion*'s indictment of Jewish men, the periodicals that harboured this view generally accepted that prostitution was a pressing social problem rooted in industrial exploitation and declining marriage rates, and they acknowledged that some women were forced into prostitution. However, they dismissed 'white slavery' as a problem that was fabricated by the advocates of the CLA Bill, and condemned it as a smokescreen for a cynical, racial political agenda. This interpretation emerged in October 1912 when 'the Flogging Clauses' dominated the debate over the Bill.

A. Neil Lyons's diatribe for the *Clarion* took the form of a two-part article entitled 'White Slaves and Nasty Nonsense', which the periodical later published as a pamphlet. In the piece, Lyons represented himself as an exemplary father who was doing his patriotic duty by defending his wife and home, and implicitly also all England's 'daughters' and households, and all English men, from the tyranny of the CLA Bill's chief advocates. Overlooking the country's male-led anti-trafficking organisations, he focused his vitriol on the social purity group the LNA simply because it had sent a pro-CLA Bill pamphlet to his home. Terming the Bill 'The Flogging Act', Lyons painted the 'puritan ladies' of the LNA as bourgeois do-gooders with persecutory complexes who were lobbying for a law against 'white slavery' as an excuse to subjugate English men, and who wanted to proselytise English women to the same 'persecutory disorder'. They were, to him, foreigners hostile to national life and the threat of girls being ensnared by traffickers 'simply do not exist':

> These Ladies, Nationally Associated, promoted their purity by thrusting upon my household a vulgar, flamboyant, indecent, and wholly untruthful work of fiction, and by inviting my wife to participate in a meeting 'For Women Only' … for the purpose of discussing the advisability of whipping men.

Having promised his readers 'some reflections upon the mental pathology of the unfortunate ladies', he went on to diagnose their 'disease': '[I]t is evident to me that the Ladies of Tothill Street possess a complex which is composed of certain fixed ideas about whipping, drugging, organised procuration'. (*Clarion*, 29 November 1912, p. 5 & 6 December 1912, p. 5) See also (*Clarion,* 22 November 1912).

These suggestions regarding the CLA Bill, sexual deviance, and psychosexual pathology were tame, however, compared to *The New Age's* coverage of the 'Flogging

Clauses'. 'The temper … of the backers of the Bill', it stated, 'needs explaining; it is not normal, it is not balanced, it is not healthy' (*The New Age,* 24 October 1912, p. 601). In a misogynistic and homophobic 'Notes of the Week' piece published around the CLA Bill's third reading that November, which comprised a curious blend of socialism, conservatism, and nationalism, the periodical attacked both the 'Peckniffian' middle-class women who were promoting the Bill and their 'Pharisaical' male allies in Parliament as a dangerous race apart of sadomasochistic deviants who were using the Bill as a cynical ploy to fulfil their perverse fantasy to enslave all true men. The 'Flogging Clauses' had come about, it insisted, because the women's movement had duped a sick 'sex-infatuated parliament, press, and public', and convinced parliamentarians to legislate for it to punish men. 'The Flogging Clauses', it claimed, were making progress because certain male parliamentarians vied to satiate their far-from-heteronormative libidos by inflicting corporal punishment on other men:

> The necessity for flogging is in the minds of the floggers, and there only … The flagellomaniacs are … unaware of the savage lusts still prowling for their prey in the depths of their mind. Under cover of righteous indignation and the good of society, they seek all unknowingly for a means of satisfying the lust that secretly possesses them. (*The New Age*, 7 November 1912, pp. 1–3. See also *The New Age,* 19 December 1912, pp. 152–153)

These indictments stemmed from *The New Age*'s view that the campaign against 'white slavery' was not only a ruse to enslave good English subjects, but also a reflection of a crisis of capitalism. Prior to the Bill's report stage that October, it lamented how middle-class social reform groups were exercising conspicuous power as 'substituted organs of society' in the schism that capitalism had wrought between the working and the owning classes. Despite this power, the 'puritan evangels' campaigning for the CLA Bill, it claimed, were dupes of the capitalist system, ignorant of the link between prostitution and industrial exploitation, and the role of their class in this exploitation. Their naive 'picture-palace view of life' made them perceive the procurer as a 'fiend from hell' and romanticise the police as 'St George against the Dragon'. This ignorance, it claimed, led to dangerous repressive measures like the CLA Bill and, would, with the 'public irresponsibility' of the two main classes, abet the creation of a 'future slave-state': 'In the White Slavery Bill and kindred legislation, we … see only the appearances and disguises of purity or morality or sexual decency; beneath the appearance is the wage-slave driver's whip urging women into mills and factories and sweating dens of capitalists'. It was 'bad national psychology' that the Bill's backers were deemed pure (*The New Age,* 24 October 1912, pp. 602–603). *The Freewoman* (6 June 1912, p. 14) took a similar, albeit less masculinist, line. In 'Champions of Morality' that was published in June amid discussion of the minutiae of the CLA Bill, CH Norman described the CLA Bill's advocates, and particularly the NVA, as a hypocritical 'lot of persecuting faddists' who were bankrolled by 'moneys derived from dividends drawn from abominably sweated labour of women and girls' and who, along with the government and the apathetic Labour Party, had no interest in addressing the causes of trafficking or organised prostitution. (See also *Justice,* 2 November 1912, p. 1).

These interpretations of the CLA Bill reveal the complex blend of old and new ideas of race that featured in representations of trafficking in 1912. Flogging had long been associated with slavery in English popular consciousness. The first abolitionists emphasised

Jamaican plantation owners' use of the lash on slaves, focusing particularly on the flagellation of enslaved women, as bodily evidence of the inhumanity and injustice inherent in slavery (Altink, 2002; Hall, 2002). This focus endured in turn-of-the-century society, with reformers decrying the flogging of black offenders and indentured Chinese labourers by the English in South Africa (Peté & Devenish, 2005). Significantly, flogging was gendered as a male punishment, a means of emasculating 'the stronger sex' (hence the outcry over the flagellation of female slaves). It was thus cast an un-English act that contravened the values of the anti-slavery nation and the basic rights of Englishmen. *Justice* (16 November 1912, p. 1) condemned the CLA Bill for delivering a 'deadly blow at that personal liberty which has always been regarded as one of the heritages of Englishmen'.

The references to the psychological and the sexual brought contemporary ideas of race to the representation of 'white slavery'. By 1912, sexology, the study of human sexuality, was gaining currency in progressive bourgeois circles. Amid growing social Darwinist anxieties over the nation's future, sexual behaviour deemed non-heteronormative was classified in terms of mental pathology, biological difference, and, often also racial degeneracy (see Ellis & Symonds, 1897; von Krafft-Ebing, 1965).[13] Indeed, theories of pathological female sexualities came to prominence alongside women assuming a greater presence in the public sphere, providing a new language and rationale for popular misogyny (Bland, 1995, pp. 256–257). Sexologists thought flogging to be rooted in pathological sexual deviance and, significantly, a deviance related to perverse female sexuality and/or homosexuality among 'the better classes of society' (von Krafft-Ebing, 1965, pp. 69–71, 130). It was, moreover, categorised as a transferrable pathology that would, in administrator and recipient, stimulate 'misdirected sexual desire' and violence (Gibson, 1978). Sexologists branded the desire to flog 'Flagellomania' and presented its pathology and detriment to the nation as a scientific fact.

The *Clarion, The New Age, The Freewoman,* and *Justice*'s engagement with the CLA Bill, contributed to the problem of trafficking being publicly linked to some extent with fallacy and fantasy and packaged as a symptom of the mental malaise of hypocritical, un-English middle-class conservatives with axes to grind and fancies to tickle. It positioned trafficking as a dangerous racial complex to be scrutinised and warned against by 'sane' paternal authority figures in the interests of the true English nation. Most problematically, it cast trafficking as a phenomenon that should be downgraded from a sexual crime perpetrated against women to a problem fabricated by female (or 'effeminate' male) deviants to live out their slavish, sexualised obsessions with enslaving men, as well as continue profiting from the slavery of honest English subjects. Trafficking was, in this view, a faddish sex war that was dangerous, physically and morally, not principally to women but to 'true men', to the masculinised body politic, and, ultimately, to England and its empire. Trafficked women were thereby plunged further into obscurity.

This focus on discrediting activism against trafficking via the periodical press prevailed long after the CLA Bill was passed. This can be seen in Teresa Billington-Greig's much-cited 1913 article for the *English Review* (June 1913, pp. 430–444), 'The Truth About White Slavery', which was based on her enquiry into the prevalence of trafficking. Billington-Greig, who had defected from the WSPU aggrieved at its undemocratic leadership and what she saw as its gratuitous militancy, extreme doctrines, and reliance on sensationalism to garner support, attacked both social purity reformers and the WSPU for

cynically sparking panic over 'white slavery', whilst failing to address the problem of trafficking (Frances, 2000):

> These dabblers in debauchery by word of mouth have given us a shocking exhibition of unlicensed slander … They have discredited themselves … [The Pankhurst domination of the WSPU] prepared the soil … it set women on the rampage against evils they knew nothing of, for remedies they knew nothing about. (See also *The Freewoman*, 14 March 1912, pp. 324–326)

It is also evident that, in the Edwardian body politic, certain leftist periodicals – often those that accused others of cynical and faddish behaviour – sought to gain political advantage by not only supporting Bills that promised them a rhetorical advantage, but also rubbishing the Bills, and the supporters of those Bills, that looked likely to compromise their immediate legislative goals. Socialist groupings in particular conscripted a host of unpatriotic anti-figures in this wrecking process – whether 'the rabid social purity Pecksniff', 'the perverted Pharisaical parliamentarian', or, as we have seen, 'the male Jew' – to dismiss a measure as being squarely outside national interests. Damaging misogynistic, homophobic, class-biased, and/or racist slurs became intrinsic to the representation of trafficking, not to mention the wider political parlance of the day.

Thus, in the debate over the CLA Bill, English national identity was defined in terms of not only superior physical attributes and moral fibre, but also sanity, and frequently a highly gendered concept of sanity. Mental pathology and, specifically, the will to 'enslave' fellow Englishmen, not least through ill-intentioned activism, were positioned as perverse, feminine characteristics that were indicative of racial degeneracy and were, as such, dangerous to the health of the nation. Within this idea was also the sentiment that Englishness involved 'normal' reproductive sexual behaviour (rather than misdirected libido), as well as the inclination to denounce those who transgressed due to un-English desires. We see here, in the case of the *Clarion* and the *New Age*, a toxic masculinity infiltrating and inflecting discourses of national identity – a toxic masculinity which defined the true patriotism as the preserve of white, native-born, heterosexual socialist men, and which positioned women as liabilities who were best off out of the body politic.

Conclusion

As the CLA Bill progressed through Parliament, the country's main suffragist and socialist periodicals engaged with, and leveraged the issue of trafficking like never before through the potent symbol that was 'white slavery'. This drew 'white slavery', once the bête noire of simply anti-trafficking advocates, into the heart of the periodicals' rhetorical arsenal as a recognised 'women's problem' (variously defined). Yet, the groups behind the periodicals were not actively vying to stop trafficking – although some were undoubtedly invested in the issue. They engaged with 'white slavery' largely because they recognised its multivalence as a rhetorical device, through which to highlight and help achieve their broader political goals. This had serious implications for the representation of trafficking persons. When not cast as passive others who had been victimised by sinister foreign forces, English trafficking victims were relegated to the side-lines in key portrayals of trafficking, as politicised discussions of the causation of trafficking took centre stage.

Their foreign counterparts, meanwhile, were omitted from the picture altogether, as the transnational was reduced to the national in the periodicals' 'white slavery' rhetoric.

Race was central to the leveraging of 'white slavery'. The periodicals drew upon racialised ideas of nation and empire that coalesced around the concept of slavery – combinations of old and new ideas of English identity with tried-and-tested resonance – to fashion 'white slavery' into a profitable rhetorical device. It was this racial potential of the CLA Bill and trafficking, as well as the close relationship between the issue of trafficking and women's rights and/or worker's rights that, to the suffragist and socialist groups, elevated the Bill from just another measure before Parliament (albeit to many activists, a commendable one) to a worthwhile political question.

Indeed, the debate over the CLA Bill in the suffragist and socialist press provides a valuable insight into the significance of race and national identity in the fraught Edwardian political climate. Namely, it suggests that competing concepts of slavery were fundamental within several key extra-parliamentary struggles of the day. From making assertions of the superior deservingness of groups of white English subjects to marking the Establishment and the economic settlement as profoundly anti-national. From positioning certain groups of English subjects as racially degenerate and unwanted in society to defining Englishness in terms of mental wellness, temperance, and sexual conformity. Slavery provided suffragist and socialist groups with a potent universal currency through which to elevate their respective causes, discredit the demands of their rivals, prescribe a rightful order of reform, as well as highlight the inadequacy of the government and Parliament as worthy representatives of good English subjects. It thereby endowed a language and set of racial ideals through which injustices afflicting English subjects were conceptualised and weighed against one another, the politics of inclusion and exclusion within the country expressed, and the prescriptions of Englishness reaffirmed.

Yet, the debate over the CLA Bill also suggests that, with the exception of the principal 'slavery' against which they fought, the suffragist and socialist groups employed many slaveries of the day casually, without the intention of making a significant political investment in directly redressing them. The extra-parliamentary political culture in which the groups operated thus came to be coloured by a quick-fix and throw-away mentality regarding 'ulterior slaveries', which facilitated rapid, short-term political gain in the unstable body politic. These quick fixes, however, came at a high cost. As we have seen with trafficking, the value conferred upon the various slaveries in play in the Edwardian body politic, and the ethnocentric, xenophobic, and/or misogynistic ideas attached to these slaveries, had a series of damaging consequences. They came at the expense of the grave social problems and the groups of often already marginalised individuals that were used for political gain – not least trafficking and trafficked persons. They came at the price of a stable political climate in England in which such problems, and the wider issues of women's disempowerment and the conditions of the working class, could be solved effectively. Ultimately, they came at the cost of a coherent body of opposition to the status quo that was capable of compelling permanent change on its own terms. For all their progress in advancing women's and/or workers' rights, the country's suffragist and socialist groups invested rather cheaply and ended up short-changing some of the very subjects in whose name they fought.

The radical press was key in this process. As we see today, the newspaper is a powerful tool for advancing political agendas, fostering political cultures, and facilitating political

flux. Suffragist and socialist periodicals acted as the principal channel through which their owners capitalised on issues such as trafficking, and, in turn, created a political culture that was too fragmented for their favoured English 'slaves' to be emancipated. Of course, the reluctance of the government to affect change and the sheer complexity of the political landscape ought not to be overlooked. However, the political culture fostered by the suffragist and socialist press was neither benign nor wholly conducive to bringing about reform. It was divided and divisive, exclusionary and partisan, just like the ideas of race, Englishness, and slavery that ran through it.

Notes

1. The modern term 'trafficking' is used throughout this article to create an analytical separation between representations of 'white slavery' and the interpretation of these representations.
2. Most historical trafficking discourses erroneously represented trafficking as an exclusively female problem.
3. In addition to the suffragist and socialist periodicals under consideration, a useful insight into these arguments can be found in the debate over the CLA Bill in *The Spectator* (1912).
4. The Bill's 'White Slave Traffic' subtitle was also dropped at this point. Reginald McKenna, Speech to the House of Commons, 14 October 1912, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th Series, vol. 42 (1912–13), col. 781.
5. Flogging was used for mutinous male prisoners (1898 Prisons Act), homosexuals (1898 Vagrancy Act), and violent robbers (1863 Garrotters' Act).
6. Significantly, the question of 'white slavery' was taken up by suffragists in the wake of the 1912 CLA Act via pamphlets and dedicated works. See Pankhurst (1913).
7. The NVA's periodical, *The Vigilance Record* also featured regular coverage of the CLA Bill. However, neither its reach nor arguably its journalistic depth rivalled that of the suffragist and socialist press.
8. This article deliberately explores the same periodicals as Fletcher, with the intention of supplementing his insights with a racial reading of the CLA Bill.
9. This form of indentured labour was often referred to as 'yellow slavery', inviting direct comparison with 'white slavery'.
10. Robert Blatchford supported the South African War and was widely condemned from within the socialist movement.
11. Josephine Butler blamed trafficking on state-regulated prostitution during England's first trafficking scandal. However, her voice was increasingly marginalised in the male-dominated anti-trafficking movement.
12. The 1905 Aliens Act restricted immigration on the grounds of criminality, impoverishment, and ill health.
13. In Sexual Inversion, British sexologists Havelock Ellis and JA Symonds did not categorise homosexuality in terms of pathology or criminality, but nevertheless positioned it as a 'condition' to be scrutinised.

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