

2 The European (State) Categorising the *Other*

At the end of the nineteenth century, a complex of issues and ideas came together under the gendered and transnational problématique of “white slavery”. In light of the historical literature, “white slavery” is understood as having been uncovered or constructed from the 1870s as a result of women’s campaigners and moral reformists, who began critiquing state systems of regulated prostitution. Within the literature that speaks directly to this development, there are varying explanations of where the metaphor of “white slavery” emerged from. Some have linked it back to a trope found in a mix of Christian legend and Greek mythology.⁶¹ Others have linked its emergence to ideas in varying nineteenth-century literary works from Lord Byron, Honoré de Balzac, Émile Zola, and Anton Chekhov.⁶² There is, however, a somewhat broad consensus that the metaphor of “white slavery” came from a letter of support sent by Victor Hugo in 1870 to Josephine Butler.

Particularly over the course of chapters four and five, I will contradict in detail all of the above claims with my own findings. My research rather indicates a specific transfer of the metaphor “*la traite des blanches*” (trade in white women) from French-speaking Switzerland, which thereafter entered a metamorphosis process in the 1870s; resulting in the production of a transnational and gendered concept called “white slavery”. Entangled in this development were simultaneous state-enabled processes which gave further meaning and significance to the emerging concept in terms of structures for migration control. Due to all of these varying threads, there is a need to disentangle this rather knotty conceptual mess. This chapter and the following are thus intended to do this through contextualisation. While in chapter three I focus on the cultural trope of the white slave and its relationship to developments in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century, here I begin with examining the history of the European state categorising of the *other*.

The historiography on so-called “white slavery” would have it that the problem arose or was uncovered, after moral reformers in later nineteenth-century

61 See, for example, Mary Ann Irwin, “White Slavery” As Metaphor: Anatomy of a Moral Panic’, *Ex Post Facto: The History Journal* V (1996), <https://www.walnet.org/csis/papers/irwin-wslavery.html>.

62 See Bristow, *Prostitution and Prejudice*; Corbin, *Women for Hire*, 133–34; Philippa Hetherington, ‘Victims of the Social Temperament: Prostitution, Migration and the Traffic in Women from Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union, 1885–1935’ (PhD thesis, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University, 2014); Philippa Levine, ‘The White Slave Trade and the British Empire’, in *Crime, Gender, and Sexuality in Criminal Prosecutions*, ed. Louise A. Knafla, vol. 17, Criminal Justice History (Westport, CT/London: Greenwood Press, 2002), 135–36.

Britain began internationally organising against state-regulated prostitution. This British-centric narrative will be broken down throughout the course of the book; however, there is first of all need to contextualise the emergence of state systems of regulated prostitution, knowledge of which played, and continues to play, a central role in how the history of “trafficking” has been recalled by state and international organisations alike. The emergence of a new concept of “white slavery” cannot be understood without knowledge of how this system developed and how it was part of a broader trend in Europe of producing knowledge on, and subsequently a means of controlling, *others*.

The historical literature makes a direct link between “white slave trafficking” in the late nineteenth century and systems of state-regulated prostitution which emerged incrementally across Europe out of revolutionary Paris. At the same time, however, the notion of “white slave trafficking” was clearly embedded in racialised knowledge of enslavement, even if appropriated and inverted. For this reason, long histories predominately based on secondary literature are provided here as contextualisation. Firstly, by looking at the emergence of state regulation and its relation to the production of certain kinds of categories for people designated so by the state. Secondly, I look broadly at the history of gender and race as constructed categories for people, alongside the shifting relationship of these constructs to the language of “white slavery”.

2.1 State Categorisation and the Regulation of Prostitution

Medieval canon law condemned women who exchanged sex for money. Nevertheless, brothels were tolerated all around Europe throughout the period due to male demand. By the fifteenth century, public and political concerns were growing about how “morally corrupt” women could be distinguished from “respectable” ones. The regulated brothel began to emerge as a practice out of this problem as it was seen as a means of maintaining public order.⁶³

Medievalists in the 1970s and 1980s began research on the organisation of prostitution. They often interpreted categories and social roles such as “prostitute”, “whore”, and “pimp” into their sources. Maja Mechant has, however, highlighted that these terms emerged only after a period of toleration had firmly

⁶³ James A. Brundage, ‘Prostitution in Medieval Canon Law’, *Signs* 1, no. 4 (1976): 840; Ruth Mazo Karras, ‘The Regulation of Brothels in Later Medieval England’, *Signs* 14, no. 2 (1989): 402–6; Marjorie Ratcliffe, ‘Adulteresses, Mistresses and Prostitutes: Extramarital Relationships in Medieval Castile’, *Hispania* 67, no. 3 (1984): 348–49.

begun in the sixteenth century, with no equivalents to be found in medieval European sources.⁶⁴

Contrary to correcting the anachronism of some medievalist scholarship which projected modern terms on older practices, Christopher Paoella makes conscious but highly problematic anachronistic use of the UN definition on human trafficking, which he claims can be applied to phenomena emerging in the late twelfth-century Europe.⁶⁵ A trained medievalist, Paoella makes a highly state-centric argument throughout the book, which seems more like a legitimisation of UN and nation state practices, than it does an empirically grounded historical work. Claiming that the UN definition can be applied to the practices since the twelfth century, he argues that trafficking has always shown itself to be “very adaptable thus prevention needs to be carried out by a central authority”.⁶⁶

The findings of this book indicate that the concept of “human trafficking”, as is understood today, emerged through a series of entangled transfer processes from around 1870. In terms of how this history has so far been written, only women’s campaigners and moral reformists at the end of the nineteenth century have been linked to the development of the concept of “white slavery”. The research here, however, also shows the involvement of state and semi-state actors in this process.

All actors concerned with “white slavery” at the end of the nineteenth century were informed by knowledge which was in circulation based on the work of the hygienist Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet (1790–1835);⁶⁷ knowledge which, among other things, drew a cognitive relationship between medieval church/state toleration of prostitution and that of Napoleonic state regulation. In order to be able to look at this narrative from a distance, contextualisation of historical developments in Europe are needed which pay particular attention to the processes of category making around practices of prostitution.

In early modern Europe, the sale of sex by women had come to be understood as a “necessary evil”; this having been a means of protecting “respectable” women from what were perceived as the uncontrollable desires of men. As a result, a toleration of brothels emerged in many European urbanities. All the while,

64 Maja Mechant, ‘The Social Profiles of Prostitutes’, in Rodríguez García, Van Voss, and Van Nerveen Meerkerk, eds., *Selling Sex in the City*, 64–65.

65 Christopher Paoella, *Human Trafficking in Medieval Europe: Slavery, Sexual Exploitation, and Prostitution* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), 11.

66 Paoella, 41–42.

67 A. J. B. Parent-Duchâtelet, *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris, considérée sous le rapport de l’hygiène publique, de la morale et de l’administration*, 3rd edn., 2 vols (Paris: J. B. Baillièrre et Fils, 1857 [1836]).

whole sets of previously unrelated behaviours involving women's engagement in extramarital sex gradually became packed under versions of the judicial word "whore".⁶⁸ In mid-seventeenth-century London, however, a turn was made away from this strategy of "damage limitation" in favour of an outright ban on the sale of sex, which resulted in a rigid dualistic categorisation of women as being either "prostitutes" or "honest".⁶⁹

By the mid-seventeenth century, anti-vice campaigns in Britain and legislation in different parts of Europe had started to target third parties involved in the organisation of the sale of sex. As a result, figures such as brothel owners, pimps, procurers, panderers, bawds, and advertisers, all of whom helped prostitutes secure customers in exchange for a cut of their earnings, had started to become visible in culture, politics, and popular discourse. Johannes Vermeer's 1656 work, *The Procuress* possibly offers one of the earliest visual depictions of such a third party.⁷⁰

Seemingly throughout continental Europe up into the late nineteenth century, the vast majority of those who procured, such as Vermeer's subject, had been women; procuring having related to the act of either matching the one who shall sell sex to the one who will buy it or to providing the space in which the sex shall be sold. Contemporary to Vermeer, and at least in London, men were also go-betweens in the sale of sex, having typically fulfilled the roles of "pimps" and "fetchers" who had the task of operating shuttle services between brothels: this being the act of escorting the women requested by brothel keepers and procurers.⁷¹

The mid-seventeenth century was a period in which go-betweens in the sale of sex were made visible. Not only was light shone on these social roles through anti-vice campaigners in London, they also began to be defined through legal practice in the Russian Legal Code of 1649, which would appear to have been the first state to outlaw procurement for fornication.⁷² Case evidence can, however, also be found for the same period, indicating that women were sentenced to physical punishment for procuring in Stockholm, while, by the eighteenth century,

⁶⁸ See Rodríguez García, Van Voss, and Van Nederveen Meerkerk, eds., *Selling Sex in the City*.

⁶⁹ Paul Griffiths, 'The Structure of Prostitution in Elizabethan London', *Continuity and Change* 8, no. 1 (1993): 43.

⁷⁰ Johannes Vermeer, *The Procuress* (1656). Oil on canvas, 143 x 130 cm. Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden. See https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Johannes_Vermeer_-_The_Procuress_-_WGA24606.jpg.

⁷¹ Griffiths, 'The Structure of Prostitution in Elizabethan London', 46–47.

⁷² Philippa Hetherington, 'Prostitution in Moscow and St. Petersburg, Russia', in Rodríguez García, Van Voss, and Van Nederveen Meerkerk, eds., *Selling Sex in the City*, 140.

procuresses and other intermediaries who facilitated and profited from prostitution were also being targeted and punished in other European urban municipalities such as Paris, Amsterdam, and Florence.⁷³

In chapter six, I build on Peter Becker's argument that the cultural role or idea of a trafficker had in fact already existed in the German-speaking world before anti-regulationists took up the term in the 1870s campaigns against "white slavery". Becker points out how, throughout the nineteenth century, the procurer or "Kupplerin" was the stock figure in cultural knowledge in the Germanic world, who bore the brunt of the blame for the corruption of previously innocent, but subsequently irredeemable girls.⁷⁴ I complement this knowledge by showing how the idea of coercing a naïve young female into crossing borders and engaging in activities against her will is a development since the late 1860s; an idea that historically changed the gendered meaning of procurer and procurement.

In the mid-seventeenth century, at a time when such third parties were first described and discursively constructed as "agents of corruption", a sense of volunteerism could still be found on the part of those they approached; such as was in English prose which described pimps and panders who were, to the most part, "employed abroad, both to bring in customers and to procure such wenches as are willing to be made whores of".⁷⁵ Although merely anecdotal and wrapped in a moralism which blamed women for their own bad decision making or lack of power to resist, this sense of volunteerism had largely disappeared three centuries later in Britain, after the construction of a victim narrative became central to discourses on "white slavery".

During its incubational period of conceptual development (1866–1881), moralistic condemnation of girls' gluttony and their lack of willpower could still be found in "white slavery" discourses on the continent. Much empirical research would be needed to develop a full understanding of the historical development of varying social roles in the sale of sex in practice and in description; but in my understanding, the victim frame of "white slavery" was a particular element of a cultural transfer which developed in Britain after 1876.⁷⁶

73 Susan P. Conner, 'The Paradoxes and Contradictions of Prostitution in Paris', in Rodríguez García, Van Voss, and Van Nederveen Meerkerk, eds., *Selling Sex in the City*, 180; Marion Pluskota, 'Selling Sex in Amsterdam', *ibid.*, 41; Michela Turno, 'Sex for Sale in Florence', *ibid.*, 91; Yvonne Svanström, 'Prostitution in Stockholm: Continuity and Change', *ibid.*, 205.

74 Peter Becker, *Verderbnis und Entartung: Eine Geschichte der Kriminologie des 19. Jahrhunderts als Diskurs und Praxis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2002), 153.

75 Griffiths, 'The Structure of Prostitution in Elizabethan London', 149; *The wandering whore*, in six parts (London, 1660) quoted in Griffiths, 47.

76 For full details, see chapter 4.

Whether on the continent or in Britain, a filter of moral perception can be found in the late nineteenth-century written campaign sources that spoke of “white slavery” and its marginalised subjects. These authors were elites and not themselves involved in the practice of selling sex. They moralised such social practices while not commenting on the economic motivations behind the sale of sex, such as the need to generate or subsidise income, so as to avoid or survive destitution. This discursive power shifted in the later twentieth century with the onset of a sex workers’ rights movement. This cesura sits on the backdrop of a longer European history since the early modern period, in which conceptions and categorisation for actors involved in the sale of sex were designated by people or institutions who were not themselves involved in the practice.⁷⁷

It is a safe claim to make that throughout human history, those faced with hunger and hardship have sought to better their lives via relocation. For those who managed in modern European society, the skills of trading, tinkering, selling sex, hawking, and so on, served as a means of making money on the road. Over the course of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, vagrancy and organised urban crime were becoming increasingly perceived as problems which needed to be targeted legally throughout Europe.⁷⁸ Women who provided sexual services nevertheless continued to be tolerated by local authorities as a “necessary evil”, while go-betweens in the organisation of the sale of sex were increasingly targeted.

The argument of a “necessary evil” was highly critiqued by anti-regulationists at the turn of the twentieth century. The notion had emerged in early modern Europe from the belief that the moral protection of “virtuous” women could be guaranteed should unmarried men with their innate uncontrollable desires be provided with access to sex through women who sold it. By the end of the eighteenth century, however, this approach of just mere toleration began to enter a period of gradual transition into a system of regulation by the state.

In revolutionary Paris of the 1790s, prostitution became *de facto* decriminalised following new practices of registration. By 1802, a clearly defined system of regulation had then been established which was, thereafter, incrementally imple-

⁷⁷ Griffiths, ‘The Structure of Prostitution in Elizabethan London’, 49.

⁷⁸ There is plenty of literature on these developments for the French, English, and German-speaking regions of Europe during the period. For a literature list and for the same development in the Netherlands, see Florike Egmond, *Underworlds: Organised Crime in the Netherlands, 1650–1800* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993).

mented under the Napoleonic Code throughout the Empire.⁷⁹ Adaptations of this “French system” had become a common element in national and colonial legislations elsewhere by the mid-nineteenth century; needless to say, the general shift toward regulation had its nuances and was policed differently depending on contexts and developments over time.⁸⁰

While church-state interference into the practices and work spaces of women who sold sex was nothing new, the newly emerging structures for the systematised registration of prostitutes were. With such stringent state categorisation, it became difficult for women to avoid the label of “prostitute”, even for those who only occasionally engaged in the sale of sex as a means of subsidising other sources of income.⁸¹ The “maid” or “servant”, who had been caught and arrested in

79 For the initial development of the system, see Jill Harsin, *Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985); Clyde Plumauzille, ‘Du “scandale de la prostitution” à l’“atteinte contre les bonnes mœurs”: contrôle policier et administration des filles publiques sous la Révolution française’, *Politix* 3, no. 107 (2014): 9–31.

80 There is a mass of literature focused on urban and national geographies, which examines the implementation throughout the Napoleonic Empire and its adoption by other empires and urban settings. The history of regulation has also been examined on several scales and in several geographies including the city of Paris, the British Empire as a whole, Imperial Russia, Colonial India, the Istanbul city district of Beyoglu, China, Colonial North Vietnam, and Italy. For some examples, see David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Bernstein, *Sonia’s Daughters*; Bruce W. Dunne, ‘French Regulation of Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Colonial Algeria’, *The Arab Studies Journal* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 24–30; Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness*; R. J. Evans, ‘Prostitution, State and Society in Imperial Germany’, *Past and Present* 70 (1979): 106–29; Philip Howell, *Geographies of Regulation: Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Britain and the Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Stephan Legg, ‘Governing Prostitution in Colonial Delhi: From Cantonment Regulations to International Hygiene (1864–1939)’, *Social History* 34, no. 4 (November 2009): 447–67; Müge Özbek, ‘The Regulation of Prostitution in Beyoglu (1875–1915)’, *Middle Eastern Studies* 46, no. 4 (July 2010): 555–68; Elizabeth J. Remick, *Regulating Prostitution in China: Gender and Local Statebuilding, 1900–1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014); Rodríguez García, Van Voss, and Van Nederveen Meerkerk, eds., *Selling Sex in the City*; Isabelle Tracol-Huynh, ‘Between Stigmatisation and Regulation: Prostitution in Colonial Northern Vietnam’, *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 12, no. 1 (August 2010): S74–87; Bruno P. F. Wan-rooij, ‘Josephine Butler and Regulated Prostitution in Italy’, *Women’s History Review* 17, no. 2 (April 2008): 153–71.

81 This stringent categorisation became an issue for women, who occasionally sold sex throughout Europe. Luise White, however, also shows that in colonial Nairobi various women, cultural practices, and social structures became boxed into the Eurocentric category of “prostitution” because the legal, social, and political meaning had no equivalent in the colonial mind. Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

the act of selling sex on the side in the seventeenth century, would have left the barracks or courtroom of the late nineteenth century with the permanent title of “prostitute”.

“Polices de mœurs”, or “vice squads” had been first established in a revolutionary France out of an obsession to clean up the streets and re-establish social control following a century of increasing “vagrancy” and “crime” across Europe.⁸² This gave rise to a bureaucratic culture which produced all kinds of data on “prostitutes” through a system of registration. The resulting police archives not only give indication of the spatial movement and control of women who sold sex, they also explain how it was possible for the social hygienist Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet to produce new state-centric knowledge, which can be found in his detailed 1836 study *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris, considérée sous le rapport de l'hygiène publique, de la morale et de l'administration*.⁸³

Parent-Duchâtelet's name was famous among late nineteenth-century women's campaigners and moral reformists. The knowledge he produced was a product of and not the springboard for state-regulated prostitution. The desire of the state to regulate in the name of social order and hygiene had already been there since the late eighteenth century.⁸⁴ That said, Parent-Duchâtelet's data not only legitimised the Napoleonic state practices, it would bear great influence on scientific knowledge and state-run systems to come.

The theoretical basis and understanding of the role of the state that emerged with the July Monarchy's adaptation of “Réglementation” likely stemmed from the work of Parent-Duchâtelet. He had produced data that could guide decisions on central planning. The developments from toleration to regulation before that were more so a product of historical process.⁸⁵ This is not to suggest that the French state suddenly pulled the breaks on contingency in the name of taking control over how history unfolded. It is only to say that the patterns of scientific knowledge emerging out of the eighteenth century were beginning to impact how decisions were made within state power and planning.

On the backdrop of emerging criminalisation practices toward “vagrants” and other “nuances” of European society in the early nineteenth century, the logic of prostitution as a “necessary evil” increasingly slipped away from an argument of toleration in favour of an idea of state regulation which was seen as necessary to prophylactically prevent the spread of venereal diseases among the gen-

⁸² Conner, ‘The Paradoxes and Contradictions of Prostitution in Paris’, 185–86.

⁸³ Parent-Duchâtelet, *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris, considérée sous le rapport de l'hygiène publique, de la morale et de l'administration*.

⁸⁴ Conner, ‘The Paradoxes and Contradictions of Prostitution in Paris’, 180–82.

⁸⁵ Howell, *Geographies of Regulation*, 7–8.

eral population. As Philip Howell, however, importantly points out, there was no absolute boundary between “regulationist” and “non-regulationist” systems; regulation was after all not a “distinct science, medical project, policy or practice” but rather more loosely defined through the practices of policing disease and prostitution in differing localities.⁸⁶ Parent-Duchâtelet nevertheless had produced data upon which other medical scientists could build their own theories and knowledge, which would go on to have an impact on how states dealt with disease and crime.

In his meticulous study of a minority population, namely “prostitutes”, Parent-Duchâtelet’s work influenced many of his contemporaries, most notably the Paris-based American physician, Philippe Ricord (1800–1889), who demonstrated for the first time that syphilis and gonorrhoea were two distinct diseases.⁸⁷ In 1838, Ricord had published his ground-breaking findings in *Practical work on venereal diseases* (*Traité pratique des maladies vénériennes*). Although Parent-Duchâtelet’s and Ricord’s works were revolutionary in how scientific knowledge would be produced; this is not to say that the knowledge they produced finds consensus today.

Contra to Parent-Duchâtelet, who believed only women with visible infection could pass on contagion, Ricord believed that all women, whether they had discernible ulcers or not, were infectious and potential spreaders of disease.⁸⁸ In this sense, non-“virtuous” women were always a threat to social order. The birth of biology as a discipline formed the base of a long nineteenth century in which “prostitutes” were still categorised as a “necessary evil”, but in which they were also placed alongside other “criminals” by “their scientists” who deemed them as necessitating legal regulation and medical control.⁸⁹ By the mid-nineteenth century, the mantra which was sung by states and which was increasingly made visible in their practices, was concern for public hygiene, sanitation, and disease control.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Howell, 4.

⁸⁷ K. A. Pashkov, M. S. Betekhtin, and A. I. Yevdokimov, ‘Philippe Ricord – Prominent Venereologist of the XIX Century’, *Istoriâ Mediciny* 4, no. 4 (2014): 13.

⁸⁸ Katja Sabisch, ‘Die Prostitution im 19. Jahrhundert. Zur Entstehung und Entwicklung einer wissenschaftlichen Tatsache’, *L’Homme* 21, no. 1 (2010): 16.

⁸⁹ Becker and Wetzell, eds., *Criminals and Their Scientists*.

⁹⁰ In 1851, the first International Sanitary Conference took place in Paris and was subsequently followed by ten further gatherings which dealt with questions such as how to control the international spread of venereal disease. For more details on debates around international medical discourses, see Ann F. La Berge, ‘The Early Nineteenth-Century French Public Health Movement: The Disciplinary Development and Institutionalization of “Hygiène Publique”’, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 54, no. 3 (1984): 363–79; Stéphane Frioux, Patrick Fournier, and Sophie Chauveau, *Hygiène et santé en Europe. De la fin du XVIII^e siècle aux années 1920* (Paris: Editions Sedes, 2011);

Although regulation had initially been implemented into most parts of continental Europe under the expansion of the First French Empire, the resulting state and police practices had clearly not disappeared along with its collapse in 1815. Medicalised knowledge of sanitary checks and data keeping increased in popularity after Parent-Duchâtelet's publication and Ricord's findings, with parts of Tsarist Russia and certain cities in Spain adopting the "French system" in the 1840s.⁹¹ Knowledge of this statist system was transferred to varying geographies in complex and entangled ways, such as its implementation in Mexico in 1865 after the Habsburg Emperor Maximilian brought knowledge of it following a visit.⁹²

The process of defining the British approach to regulation had already become a matter of imperial policy in 1855, when brothels in Singapore started to be regulated.⁹³ It was, however, only in the 1860s, that the idea of implementing regulation in the metropole was put on the table for debate by William Acton (1813–1875), who, among others, was instrumental in bringing this idea to the British authorities.

Acton was a British physician who had moved to Paris between 1835 and 1840, where he continued his medical training under Philippe Ricord, later going on to work for the Paris Medical Society. Having become convinced that it was impossible to "cure animal passions", Acton became an "advocate of [the] recognition" of prostitution upon his return to London. The British state was, however, not initially convinced of Acton's arguments in the name of public health; they had, after all, already established a system of "Lock hospitals" since the late eighteenth century, which were incrementally implemented across varying geogra-

Mark Harrison, 'Disease, Diplomacy and International Commerce: The Origins of International Sanitary Regulation in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of Global History* 1, no. 2 (2006): 197–217; Katharina Kreuder-Sonnen and Andreas Renner, eds., *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 61 (2013), 4: Öffentliche Hygiene in Osteuropa (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2013); Judith Große, 'Der Kampf gegen Prostitution: Zwischen Sittlichkeitsreform, Feminismus und Medizin, 1864–1914', in *Biopolitik und Sittlichkeitsreform: Kampagnen gegen Alkohol, Drogen und Prostitution 1880–1950*, ed. by Judith Große, Francesco Spöring, and Jana Tschurennev (Frankfurt am Main/New York: Campus Verlag, 2014), 177–215.

⁹¹ Bernstein, *Sonia's Daughters*; Jean-Louis Guereña, 'Prostitution and the Origins of the Governmental Regulatory System in Nineteenth-Century Spain: The Plans of the Trienio Liberal, 1820–1823', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 17, no. 2 (2008): 216–34; Hetherington, 'Prostitution in Moscow and St. Petersburg, Russia'.

⁹² Fernanda Nuñez and Pamela Fuentes, 'Facing a Double Standard: Prostitution in Mexico City, 1521–2006', in Rodríguez García, Van Voss, and Van Nederveen Meerkerk, eds., *Selling Sex in the City*, 446.

⁹³ Shawna Herzog, 'Selling Sex in Singapore: The Development, Expansion, and Policing of Prostitution in an International Entreat', in Rodríguez García, Van Voss, and Van Nederveen Meerkerk, eds., *Selling Sex in the City*, 603.

phies of the Empire as a means of dealing with venereal disease. Unlike the “French system” of compulsory registration and routine health checks, British lock hospitals, the first of which opened in London in 1747, relied on the voluntary self-submission of women who showed symptoms. Acton’s acquired knowledge from Paris, however, favoured a prophylactic approach which, he acknowledged, would unfortunately necessitate the infringement upon the personal liberties of certain groups “for the sake of the community at large”.⁹⁴

The benefits of enforced regulation only began to resonate with the British state after the argument came up as to how it would help protect the military and marines.⁹⁵ In an empire increasingly dependent on its military and conscious of shifting knowledge toward medicalisation following the Crimean War (1853–1856), William Acton’s *Prostitution, Considered in its Moral Social and Sanitary Aspects* came as a timely publication in 1857, the year of the major Indian Rebellion. It had already been colonial knowledge since the early nineteenth century that British soldiers were twice as likely to die of disease as Indian sepoys and that venereal diseases were the cause of thirty per cent of all hospitalisations among them. The Indian uprising of 1857 was thus an important factor in shifting British military-medical attitudes with regards to soldier’s health.⁹⁶

While not introducing a system of tolerated brothels, the Contagious Diseases Acts (CD Acts) of 1864, 1866, and 1869 required the compulsory registration and medical examination of women who sold sex; thus, the CD Acts can on the one hand be understood as a British adaptation of French state regulation as had been transferred to the Crown Empire by William Acton. On the other hand, they can also be seen as falling in line with the broader European and British statist desires to manage microbes in their metropolises and colonies.⁹⁷

In the late nineteenth century, women’s campaigners began to historicise how they had challenged this system. They claimed that this began almost immediately following the resistance of Quaker medical doctors Charles Bell Taylor and Charles Worth in the late 1860s, who raised awareness of new practices

94 William Acton, *Prostitution Considered in Its Moral, Social and Sanitary Aspects, in London and Other Large Cities and Garrison Towns with Proposals for the Control and Prevention of Its Attendant Evils* (London: John Churchill & Sons, 1857), xi, vii.

95 Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, 69–73.

96 Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India*; Douglas M Peers, ‘Soldiers, Surgeons and the Campaigns to Combat Sexually Transmitted Diseases in Colonial India, 1805–1860’, *Medical History* 42 (1998): 137–38.

97 For more context, see Ballhatchet, *Race, Sex and Class under the Raj*; Legg, ‘Governing Prostitution in Colonial Delhi’; Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race & Politics; Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Stoler, *Carnel Knowledge and Imperial Power*; Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*.

being implemented at British ports and military stations.⁹⁸ Throughout chapters four to seven, I complicate this narrative. For now, however, it can be kept in mind that according to their own version of history, the agitations of medical doctors, women's campaigners, and moral reformists against the CD Acts quickly culminated into a movement for and about women, which became known as the Repeal campaign. As more people joined them in the rally against the CD Acts, the name of Josephine Butler was suggested for the leadership of the "Ladies Protest" movement.⁹⁹

One of their first collective actions was to establish the "Ladies National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts" following their publication of a collective letter in the *Daily Mail* on 31st December 1869.¹⁰⁰ Among the many signatories of the letter was Florence Nightingale, the woman who was by then famous in Britain for arguing the benefits to the nation of good medical hygiene in military practice.

The main critique of the "Ladies Protest" concerned the forced medical checks and their infringement on civil liberties as well as the moral double standard which subjected women (those who sold sex) but not men (those who bought it) to these practices. While these protests were concerned with women's individual rights, chapter five shows that they were also firmly entangled with the goal of raising the age of consent in Britain and that wrapping this agenda rhetorically in arguments against the "French system" and a transnational "white slave trade" was a strategic means of achieving it.

The established narrative in the historical literature maintains that Josephine Butler embarked on a continental tour in 1874/75 with the intention of building

⁹⁸ For the writing of this history in historical sources, see Virginia M. Crawford, *Josephine Butler* (London: The Association for Moral and Social Hygiene, 1928), 4; E. M. Turner, *Josephine Butler* (London: The Association for Moral and Social Hygiene, 1935), 5. There are, however, conflicting claims between the historical literature and historical sources about how the movement was triggered. Jane Jordan and Ingrid Sharp, for example, historicise the beginning of the "Ladies Appeal and Protest" in Britain to the letters of Harriet Martineau, which she had published in newspapers since 1863: once Martineau was no longer able to lead the protest due to ill health, Josephine Butler is said to have taken over the role. Jane Jordan and Ingrid Sharp, eds., *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns: Diseases of the Body Politic*, vol. 2: The Ladies Appeal and Protest (London/New York: Routledge, 2003). In her memoir, Josephine Butler, by contrast, recalls having received a "mysterious" telegram in 1869, after which she met with Doctors from Nottingham, who informed her of the CD Acts, see Butler, *Personal Reminiscences of a Great Crusade* (London: Marshall, 1896), 14.

⁹⁹ Crawford, *Josephine Butler*; Turner, *Josephine Butler*, 6. This summary is based on established knowledge. Chapters four to seven revise this narrative in varying ways.

¹⁰⁰ Josephine Elizabeth Grey Butler, Lucy A. Nutter Johnson, and George William Johnson, eds., *Josephine E. Butler: An Autobiographical Memoir* (Bristol: J. W. Arrowsmith, 1909), 94–96.

further international support for her home cause against the CD Acts. After returning from her trips to France, Italy and Switzerland, the British Ladies National Association is then said to have issued an invitation to their continental allies, inviting them to the first International Congress for the Abolition of State Regulated Prostitution, which took place in Liverpool in 1875. Its major outcome was the establishment of the “British, Continental and General Federation for the Abolition of Prostitution” (from here on simply the Federation), which set up its headquarters in Neuchâtel in Switzerland.¹⁰¹

Within the historiography, the topic of “white slavery” has been strongly linked to this established narrative on the history of the Federation and their efforts to abolish state regulation. This has been largely due to the figure of Josephine Butler and the account of her collaboration with the journalist Alfred Stace Dyer, who aided her in “uncovering” the mechanisms of the “white slave trade” in English girls toward Belgian brothels. The knowledge produced in this book revises this British-centric narrative, however, before doing so, the language of “white slavery” requires careful treatment and deconstruction so as to understand the racialised and gendered history of knowledge which informed this emerging concept at the end of the nineteenth century.

2.2 Gender, Race, and the Language of “White Slavery”

It would be anachronistic to speak about white people as having lived in ancient, medieval, or even early modern times. There were of course light-skinned people but they were not labelled “white” by others, nor did they self-identify as such. Within Greek texts, the people of northern Europe were designated by tribal names such as Scythians, Celts, Gauls, and Germans.¹⁰² Neither the Greeks nor the

¹⁰¹ At varying points in time, this organisation had differing names, such as “the British and Continental and General Federation for the Abolition of Government Regulation of Prostitution”, “the British and Continental and General Federation for the Abolition of Government Regulation of Prostitution for the Abolition of State Regulation of Vice”, “the Association of Social and Moral Hygiene”, “the International Abolitionist Federation”, “Fédération Abolitionniste Internationale”, etc. Thus, I take the lead from Anne Summers by simply referring to it as The Federation, see Anne Summers, ‘Liberty, Equality, Morality: The Attempt to Sustain an International Campaign against the Double Sexual Standard, 1875–1906.’, in *Globalizing Feminisms 1789–1945*, ed. by Karen Offen (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), 26. For more on the establishment of the Federation, see Anne Summers, ‘Introduction: The International Abolitionist Federation’, *Women’s History Review* 17, no. 2 (1 April 2008): 149–52, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612020701706961>.

¹⁰² Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York/London: Norton & Company, 2010), 18.

Romans after them, thought in terms of race, though many nineteenth-century translations of their ancient sources would falsely interpret such ideas back into them, just as they would narrate whiteness into histories of the medieval period.¹⁰³

Between the tenth and the sixteenth centuries, Vikings and Italian traders obtained most of their slaves from the Slav lands, hence the origin of the term “slave” coming into Western European languages around the thirteenth century.¹⁰⁴ Since the eighth century, however, Arabs had also been operating a slave trade from Nubia toward Bagdad. It had long been assumed that the medieval Arab term “*Zanj*” referred to slaves of the caliphate with a colour-coded meaning of “black”. This has, however, since been disputed.¹⁰⁵ Robin Blackburn has also suggested that the Arabic “*abd*” drew both the meaning of slave and Blackness together, though he does not make clear what period this development supposedly took place.¹⁰⁶ Thus, speaking about the colour-coding of skin and its relationship to practices of enslavement needs careful dissecting to separate anachronistic claims from historical developments.

The Arab slave trade out of Africa since the eighth century had expanded vastly by the thirteenth century, with caravans travelling as far as West Africa and then back across the Sahara.¹⁰⁷ Irrespective of the trade in slaves out of Eastern Europe or Africa, a concept of race or skin tone did not matter to those capturing, buying, or selling in the medieval period; what was of importance, was that those captured did not share the same monotheistic Islamic beliefs as their future owners in the Levant – at least not at their time of purchase. Despite the expansion of a caravan trade across the Sahara, African slaves in the ancient world or medieval Europe were still rare. By the end of the fourteenth century, however, thousands of Africans, mostly slaves, could be found in the Iberian Peninsula, though this was not yet the case for the rest of Europe.¹⁰⁸

During the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Catalans and Aragonese had come into contact with the Levantine commerce in slaves and

¹⁰³ Painter, 24–50.

¹⁰⁴ Robin Blackburn, ‘The Old World Background to European Colonial Slavery’, *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (1997): 83; Marc Bloch, ‘How and Why Ancient Slavery Came to an End’, in *Slavery and Serfdom in the Middle Ages: Selected Essays by Marc Bloch*, Transl. William R. Beer (Berkeley et al.: University of California Press, 1975), 28; Painter, *The History of White People*, 76.

¹⁰⁵ Marina Tolmacheva, ‘Toward a Definition of the Term *Zanj*’, *Azania: Archaeological Research in Africa* 21, no. 1 (2010): 111, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00672708609511371>.

¹⁰⁶ Blackburn, ‘The Old World Background to European Colonial Slavery’, 98–99.

¹⁰⁷ Blackburn, 99.

¹⁰⁸ Blackburn, 98.

sugar.¹⁰⁹ With a quickly developing taste for sugar, plantations were then established on Crete and Cyprus which were initially worked by a mix of share croppers, free and slave labourers. The Black Death of the mid-fourteenth century, however, created a dependency on imported Slavs from Eastern Europe to meet the Iberian demand for sugar.¹¹⁰ Ottoman occupation of the eastern Mediterranean in the fifteenth century resulted in Western Europeans being cut off from their sugar and slave supplies; thus, Portuguese sailors set off down the Atlantic coast of West Africa where they planted sugar on Madeira and Sao Tomé. History thereafter marks 1444 as the year that a European triangular trade began.¹¹¹

From the mid-fifteenth century, Europeans had not only completely changed the structure of the slave trade out of West Africa by means of shipping, the European demand for sugar changed the meaning and colour-coding of slavery. In chapter one, I argued that the concept of “human trafficking” has a split history, part of which saw the fifteenth-century term *traffic* being taken up to describe the European trade in people from Africa. As European triangular trade expanded across the Atlantic, sugar plantations had been established in the Caribbean which became reliant on ever increasing streams of captured Africans being brutally transported there.¹¹² In this era of history and in the minds of Europeans, the meaning of slavery became firmly cemented in the slave trade out of Africa.

Over the course of the long sixteenth century, European powers funded expeditions and colonised varying parts of the Americas. Plantation economies were then established for different crops, but the sugar revolution exploded in the mid-seventeenth century, with the Caribbean being the most important region of production. The Island of Barbados, named by the Portuguese, had already been known to Europeans since the beginning of the sixteenth century, but it was colonised by the British in 1625 and subsequently turned into a highly profitable and brutal sugar plantation economy.

Not long thereafter, in 1649, Oliver Cromwell had been sent to the British crowns first and geographically nearest colony to quell any possible success of an Irish catholic insurrection. As Barbados was also recipient to imprisoned Europeans who had been deemed “vagrants” and “criminals”, one of Cromwell’s solu-

¹⁰⁹ Blackburn, 81.

¹¹⁰ Painter, *The History of White People*, 76.

¹¹¹ Painter, 77. Also see Michael Zeuske, *Handbuch Geschichte der Sklaverei: Eine Globalgeschichte von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2013).

¹¹² See Trevor Burnard and John Garrigus, *The Plantation Machine: Atlantic Capitalism in French Saint-Domingue and British Jamaica* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

tions to the Irish problem was to send suspected insurgents to this distant Caribbean Island as indentured servants.¹¹³ In fact, in the early 1640s, Barbados was populated with about 37,000 labouring Europeans along with around 6,000 of African origin. The demographics of the Island, however, shifted drastically in a short period. Even if consciously anachronistic to formulate it in such a way, not even 50 years later, in the 1680s, the Island was populated by about 20,000 whites and 46,000 Blacks.¹¹⁴

Gradually, over the course of the eighteenth century which followed, the Caribbean sugar plantations were to become exclusively laboured by enslaved people from Africa. It was in this context that skin tone became a defining feature of labour roles and lack of rights. In their formative years, the Caribbean plantation economies had imported forced labourers from different places which resulted in colour-coded structures based on skin tone and origin. This constellation arguably created a circulation of knowledge and ideas which would later inform European “scientific” concepts of race. While white indentured labourers in Barbados could over time earn their freedom, this was not the case for Black slaves. These juridical differences did not, however, bear relevance in political discourse in Britain when the racialised concept of “white slavery” first historically emerged.

In the early seventeenth century, the increasing flow and demand for European indentured servants to Barbados did not go unnoticed amongst those in Britain who began debating the role of sugar in producing “white slavery”.¹¹⁵ The colour-coding of plantation populations based on skin tone had emerged out of the European experience of colonising in the Americas. Not only had there been a need to find a moral justification for the enslavement of non-European *others*, there was a need to account for the origin of other humans who had not been documented in the Bible, which until that point in time was the sole source of legitimised knowledge on the existing world in Christian Europe. In this historical constellation of plantation economy, European desire for sugar and a knowledge gap for legitimisation and explanation, the concept of race provided a way out of these challenges to the Biblical status quo.

The term “*raza*” had emerged during the Spanish Reconquista so as to distinguish between groups of people along a notion of blood cleanliness, differentiat-

113 Painter, *The History of White People*, 80.

114 Christopher Stewart Jackson, Woodville K. Marshall, and Anthony De Vere Phillips, ‘Barbados – History – British Rule’, Britannica, accessed 25 July 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Barbados/British-rule>.

115 Hilary Beckles, ‘The Concept of “White Slavery” in the English Caribbean during the Early Seventeenth Century’, in *Early Modern Conceptions of Property*, ed. by John Brewer and Susan Staves (Oxon: Routledge, 1995), 575–81.

ing “pure” Christians from those “contaminated” by Muslims or Jews. This was, however, not the same as what is understood by the term “race” today. The medieval meaning of “raza” changed upon its application and arrival in the first Spanish colonies of sixteenth century. This development is what informed, and became informed by, emerging European theories of race in the eighteenth century. As explained for Barbados, colour-coding based on bodily aesthetics, skin tone, and geographic heritage allowed Europeans in seventeenth-century colonies to distinguish themselves and their privileges from the lack thereof for indigenous people and Africans.¹¹⁶ Starting around the mid-seventeenth century, a number of well-travelled French scholars began developing theories of different human “races” following their study of dynamics in the colonies of the Caribbean and the Americas.¹¹⁷

While these scholars explicitly used the term “race” taken from “raza” to explain distinguishable, and thus categorisable, groups of humans, it would not be until the eighteenth century and the emerging biological sciences in Europe, that the word would come into common scholarly usage; or even the nineteenth century, when it had been established as common popular knowledge.

During the Enlightenment period, race theories of anatomical difference began to be combined with new theories on human development and progress, which included the idea of polygenism; a theory that would become popular in the nineteenth century.¹¹⁸ This provided explanation for the oversight in the Bible, while simultaneously giving justification for the enslavement of these “newly discovered” *others*.

One of the most influential late seventeenth-century thinkers on “race” had been Jean-Baptiste Chardin (1643–1713).¹¹⁹ His depiction of light-skinned people was more diverse than later accounts to come. Broadly speaking, Chardin constructed Europeans into two groups, those which were vile and disgusting and those of pure beauty, which he represented in his description of young, pale, and vulnerable enslaved females. However, by the time the Enlightenment period

116 Angelika Epple, ‘Inventing White Beauty and Fighting Black Slavery. How Blumenbach, Humboldt, and Arango y Parreno Contributed to Cuban Race Comparisons in the Long Nineteenth Century’, in *Practices of Comparing: Towards a New Understanding of a Fundamental Human Practice*, ed. by Angelika Epple, Walter Erhart and Johannes Grave (Bielefeld: Bielefeld University Press, 2020), 301–2.

117 The mid-seventeenth century works of Isaac La Peyrère (1596–1676), François Bernier (1625–1688), and Jean-Baptiste Chardin (1643–1713) were central to the development of scientific theories of race. For more details, see Painter, *The History of White People*, 84–89.

118 Epple, ‘Inventing White Beauty and Fighting Black Slavery’, 303; Schiebinger, ‘The Anatomy of Difference’, 390.

119 For more details, see Painter, *The History of White People*, 84–89.

came about, it was only his positivist notion of the very pale-skinned pure beauty which had endured; the abhorrent portrayals of Europeans having fizzled out. Binary concepts of attractiveness nevertheless persevered.

The world to the eighteenth-century anatomist or voyager was divided into the beautiful and the ugly; while skin colour had become a determining factor for falling into one category or the other.¹²⁰ Such truths which were claimed within these sciences were in part built upon knowledge of two kinds of slavery that could be found in eighteenth-century anthropological works; namely, Africans and Tartars who were depicted as a brute and ugly labour force, while white female slaves remained sexualised and vulnerable beauties.¹²¹

In ancient times, Caucasian women, as opposed to other light-skinned ones such as Celtic or Scythian, had already been valued for their beauty among the Greeks. Within the European “science” of the eighteenth century, however, all light-skinned people were being constructed as the most perfect and beautiful humans.¹²² The Enlightenment autonomists who constructed categories for defining human difference did not only do so for *others* compared to Europeans, but they also did it for European women compared to European men. Thus, as Londa Schiebinger has pointed out, there is a problem when historical works treat the study of sex and race separately, since these constructions were developed simultaneously in history.¹²³

At the end of the eighteenth century, the discipline of biology had already emerged, which constructed humans into hierarchies and binary opposites through categories and concepts of race and sex/gender.¹²⁴ These means of categorising people served as important tools for controlling populations through census and for the production of truths. Although examples of humans delineated along the lines of physical traits can be found as far back as prehistoric times, what changed in the eighteenth century in global terms was the definition of cate-

120 Londa Schiebinger, *Nature's Body: Gender and the Making of Modern Science* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 127.

121 Painter, *The History of White People*, 83.

122 Building on the works of Immanuel Kant and Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803), Johann Friedrich Blumenbach was central to the knowledge production on “white beauty”. For more, see Epple, ‘Inventing White Beauty and Fighting Black Slavery’.

123 Schiebinger, ‘The Anatomy of Difference’, 388.

124 See Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); Tayyab Mahmud, ‘Colonialism and Modern Constructions of Race: A Preliminary Inquiry’, *University of Miami Law Review* 53 (1998–1999): 1219–46; Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 3rd edn. (New York/London: Routledge, 2015); Schiebinger, ‘The Anatomy of Difference’; Schiebinger, *Nature's Body: Gender and the Making of Modern Science*.

gories of difference within a newly emerging knowledge order of European science and imperialism; this scientification or bio-medicalisation of humans had after all been born out of the context of European colonial expansion and nation-state consolidation. These processes of producing “scientific” knowledge were what legitimated the subordination of women and non-Europeans by deeming the hierarchical position of these *others* as part of the natural order of things.¹²⁵

Race and racism had been products of European expansion and colonialism. These knowledge orders and tools of discrimination were, however, neither shaken nor disappeared when moral compasses started shifting on the question of the transatlantic slave trade.¹²⁶ In fact, most of those arguing for the abolition of slavery reinforced the racial constructions which had been developed to justify European colonial slavery. At its core, the Enlightenment ideal of freedom had been intended to apply only to those who would and could hold privilege and responsibility as property owning citizens of states; namely white upper-class men. Even if producing a paradox, *othered* groups, such as women and enslaved Blacks, resisted by quickly reclaiming ownership of their given categories of exclusion as a means of fighting for inclusion amid liberation discourse, so that they too might contend for equal treatment before the law.¹²⁷

In seventeenth-century France, slavery had already been used as an analogy so as to springboard demands for women’s rights.¹²⁸ As a logic of chronology and the historical development of ideas, however, this did not contain a notion of whiteness, which was at the time only at the start of its development in the Caribbean. By the late eighteenth century, concepts of race had become more solidified and inseparable from the development of abolitionist ideas which simultaneously marked a historical moment in which the justifiable existence of slavery had

¹²⁵ See Bühner and Möhring, ‘Einleitung’.

¹²⁶ Epplé has for example shown how committed abolitionists of the Enlightenment relied on official data and legal constructions of race for their research, thus reproducing racial categories and knowledge. See Epplé, ‘Inventing White Beauty and Fighting Black Slavery. How Blumenbach, Humboldt, and Arango y Parreno Contributed to Cuban Race Comparisons in the Long Nineteenth Century’.

¹²⁷ For example, see Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburg, PA.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009); Joan W. Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge et al.: Harvard University Press, 1996); Tyler Stoval, *White Freedom: The Racial History of an Idea* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2021).

¹²⁸ Karen Offen, ‘How (and Why) the Analogy of Marriage with Slavery Provided the Springboard for Women’s Rights Demands in France, 1640–1848’, in *Women’s Rights and Transatlantic Antislavery in the Era of Emancipation*, ed. by Kathryn Kish Sklar & James Brewer Stewart (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2007), 57–81.

been called into question on a globally connected stage.¹²⁹ Pitched against the enlightenment idea of “freedom”, “slavery” in the nineteenth-century garnered so much power within a moral economy that it serviced metaphorical expression for all kinds of social grievances and articulations of evil.¹³⁰ Race in the nineteenth century was, however, just as powerful and a tightly entangled concept with that of slavery and its abolition. In this context, the idea of “white slavery” was heavily loaded.

Chapters four to seven analyse in detail the development of the concept of “white slavery” from the late 1860s to 1881 which show its circulation in French, English, German, and Dutch speaking Europe. “White slavery” of the nineteenth century, however, needs to be carefully distinguished from the concept of “white slavery” used in Britain in the mid-seventeenth century to speak about the shipments of indentured European labourers to the sugar plantations of Barbados.

The use of the term “white slavery” for mid-seventeenth century Barbados was not intended metaphorically, even if the conditions of indentured labour could and should be debated in terms of its relation to definitions of enslavement and where it is to be positioned on a spectrum of asymmetrical dependencies.¹³¹ Colour-coding based on skin tone had, however, come to function as a means of distinguishing groups and their (lack of) privileges. At the same time, the concept of slavery functioned to describe the condition of forced migration and labour.

At this point in historical time, neither a notion of a white race nor theoretical reflection on the distinction between indentured labour and hereditary enslavement had yet emerged. This would only occur over the course of the eighteenth century with the dual birth of biology as a discipline and of abolitionist ideas. In the midst of the initial scientification of races and the era of legally adopting abolitionism in the early nineteenth century, the racialised indicator of “whiteness” alongside the notion of “enslavement” in the term “white slavery”

¹²⁹ Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776–1848*, World History Series (London & New York: Verso, 1988); Bloch, ‘How and Why Ancient Slavery Came to an End’; Laura Brace, *The Politics of Slavery* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018).

¹³⁰ Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, 21; Ennis, ‘Narrating “White Slavery” in and out of Fiction’.

¹³¹ The Bonn Center for Slavery and Dependency Studies is doing massive work to understand the dynamics of asymmetrical dependencies in all world regions, with a strong emphasis on pre-modern times. See, for example, Julia Winnebeck, Ove Sutter, Adrian Hermann, Christoph Antweiler, Stephan Conermann. ‘The Analytical Concept of Asymmetrical Dependency’, *Journal of Global Slavery* 8, no.1 (2023): 1–59; Christoph Antweiler, *On Dependence, Dependency, and a Dependency Turn: An Essay with Systematic Intent*, Concept Paper 2022/02 (Bonn: Universität Bonn, 2022).

came to serve as a powerful metaphor based on its misappropriation and racial inversion of the notion of the European slave trade in people from Africa.

Several sources exist where the metaphor of “white slavery” was used to express social and political grievances since the 1830s. Until the 1870s, all who articulated the metaphor were men. While this also remained the case for much of the century thereafter, from the 1850s it was incrementally and increasingly used to express issues on marriage or the sale of sex which concerned the lives of women.¹³²

The first ever use of the “white slave trade” metaphor that I found was from 1830 by the French lawyer J. B. P. Brunel, who was writing and petitioning from prison. Just following the inauguration of the July Monarchy in France, a new law had been passed which made all commercial debts above 200 francs a punishable crime. Brunel found himself imprisoned on these grounds and described himself as a victim of this “*traite des blancs*” and thus called upon philanthropists to organise for the abolition of this recently introduced law.¹³³ Brunel’s “*traite des blancs*” was a clear appropriation and racial inversion of the common French language term “*traite des noirs*” which referred to the trade people from Africa who had been forcibly transported across the Atlantic.

Still in the process of being legally abolished internationally, though it would continue *de facto* well on into the century, the transatlantic slave trade in its non-metaphorical sense was still and would continue to be a horrific reality for many Blacks. The misappropriation and racial inversion of a nineteenth-century Black reality was, however, not always as clear as Brunel in its function as metaphor. In some cases, such as in Britain, around the same period, the metaphor blurred into the literal meaning of slave-like conditions while still being an appropriation of the transatlantic slave trade in people from Africa.

In 1832, the radical British tory Richard Oastler employed the term “white slavery” to critique the conditions of children working in British factories. Child labour under industrialisation were cruel and harsh and requires the kind of careful semantic expression of asymmetrical dependency in distinction to enslavement which is currently being worked out by the Bonn Center for Slavery and Dependency Studies. Likewise, careful contextualisation of structures and practices are required for these kinds of exploitation, so as to distance them from problematic historical comparisons that Oastler, for example, engaged in. Without hesitation, Oastler made a direct comparison between child labour in Britain

¹³² Also see Ennis, ‘Narrating “White Slavery” in and out of Fiction, 1854–1880’.

¹³³ J. B. P. Brunel, *La traite des blancs ou le cri de désespoir d'un détenu pour dettes, contre la contrainte par corps* (Paris: Astier, Libraire-Éditeur, 1830).

and “Black Slavery” by using the increasingly familiar female “white slave” motif of the 1830s.¹³⁴

The notion of a young pale-skin female beauty had already emerged in the late seventeenth century, which over time became culturally entangled with a particular idea of gendered enslavement. In the abolitionist era this came to have powerful moralistic meaning. Oastler used this sort of imagery to draw attention and sympathy to his cause against child labour in the 1830s by specially highlighting how it affected “little female [white slaves]”.¹³⁵ A decade later, though from the other side of the Atlantic, an anonymous author likewise described the living conditions in England to be that of “white slavery”.¹³⁶

Writing in the monthly magazine *The United State Democratic Review*, which was published between 1837–1851, the author argued that compared to the wealth and security enjoyed by Americans, the people of Britain did not have equal access to food, housing, clothing, and education. Another misappropriation in a context where the topic of real race-based slavery was about to set the scene for a civil war, the author crudely declared England to “be far less civilised” than America, precisely because of its state of “white slavery”. In this same period of the 1840s, and then again in the 1880s, the term “*la traite des blancs*” was likewise an appropriation and racial inversion of the transatlantic slave trade, though with the intent of drawing attention to the recruitment strategies and lack of rights for railway workers in France.¹³⁷ Grammatically, this metaphor was in the masculine, expressing a concern about the working conditions of men.

I am ever grateful to Prof. Dr. Frédéric Barbier who pointed out to me that Honoré Balzac (1799–1850) was the first to use the feminised version of “*la traite des blanches*” in the 1840s. It has been suggested by several scholars, that the term “white slavery” had first been coined to speak about prostitution in Britain in the 1830s by Michael Ryan. In chapter three, I complicate this history in relation to its seemingly quite random republication in Philadelphia in 1870, several decades after Ryan’s death.¹³⁸ From my findings, however, the racially-inverted

134 For further details, see chapter three.

135 Richard Oastler, ‘Slavery in Yorkshire! April 17th, 1832’ (University of London, 1903); Edward Baines and Richard Oastler, ‘Yorkshire Slavery’ (Leeds: J. Hobson, 1835).

136 Anonymous, ‘White Slavery’, *The United States Democratic Review* 11, no. 51 (1842): 271.

137 Raoul de la Angle-Beaumanoir, *La Traite des blancs au XIX^e siècle. Situation des employés de chemins de fer en 1883* (Paris: Chez tous les Libraires, 1883); Adrien Chenot, *L’Entente Cordiale et Cie, société humanitaire pour la traite des blancs par les marrons sous prétexte d’émancipation des noirs* (Paris: Imprimerie de Fain et Thunot, 1845).

138 The scholars who made this claim about Ryan have based it on the research findings of Edward Bristow, whose work I reappraise throughout this book. None of these scholars examined and contextualised Ryan’s work, which I will do in chapter three. Bristow, *Prostitution and Preju-*

metaphorical use of “white slavery”, which formed the base of the concept relating to women and prostitutes, and which emerged around 1870, did not come from Ryan, but rather from a number of French cultural works, where the meaning oscillated in reference to the conditions of (upper class) women in marriage, prostitution, or a combination of both.

Around 1843, Balzac began the manuscript of *Les Petits Bourgeois*, which he entitled with the term he used to refer to the new middle class of white-collar men. Illustrated through the character of a fraudulent young lawyer named Théodose de La Peyrade, a central theme of the work appears to formulate a critique of the deceitful efforts of “*les petits bourgeois*” in how Balzac presents them as conniving to secure themselves a marriage with a good dowry.

Balzac, however, apparently lost interest in the work, as it remained incomplete, only to be published posthumously in 1854 as a feuilleton and thereafter in 1855 in book form. Thus, it was only in the 1850s, that his readers were exposed to his sensational metaphor which appeared in one single line, but seemingly went on to have a large cultural impact.

Employing the term “*la traite des blanches*” once, Balzac used it to refer to the marriage trickery of the “*petits bourgeois*”. In the surrounding scene, Théodose sits over a glass of wine with this friend Cérizet, who pitches a fraudulent plan to him. Cérizet suggests that documents could be organised for Théodose in exchange for a fee; documents which would give him the title of a lawyer and the air of an honest man. Equipped with this new position in society, Théodose would then be enabled to marry an old, but incredibly rich woman, from whom he would secure the means of repaying his debts: “We’re equipping you as a Corsican privateer eh! To trade in white women. If we don’t capture this dowry, then we are only passing it on to someone else . . .”¹³⁹

I suspect that Balzac dressed Théodose up as a Corsican pirate, so as to draw reference to Lord Byron’s 1815 depiction of a privateer, who had discovered women being brought by ship to an imperial harem.¹⁴⁰ Balzac’s unfinished work, *Les Petits Bourgeois*, from the 1840s would have, however, reached a more popu-

dice; Michael Ryan, *The Philosophy of Marriage, in Its Social, Moral, and Physical Relations: With the Physiology of Generation in the Vegetable and Animal Kingdoms* (Philadelphia: Lindsay & Blackiston, 1870 [1836]).

¹³⁹ Honoré de Balzac, *Les Petits Bourgeois: scènes de la vie parisienne* (Brussels/Leipzig: Kiesling, Schnée et Cie, 1855), 73.

¹⁴⁰ In Byron’s story, a Corsican pirate discovered women being brought to a harem while he ransacked the ship of Pacha Seyd. Contemporaries of each other, Byron and Balzac are well-known for their contributions to orientalism. Lord Byron, *The Corsair* (London: John Murray Ltd, 1814).

lar audience after going into circulation posthumously in the 1850s. It would then seem that his use of the term “*la traite des blanches*” went on to inspire visual and literary artists to make social comment about and within French speaking Europe, which neither built nor relied upon the Orientalist notion of “white slavery”.

In 1857, two Belgium artists Félicien Victor Joseph Rops (1833–1898) and Jules Joseph Georges Renard, pseudonym Draner (1833–1926), published a satirical cartoon entitled *La Traite des Blanches* in the literary and artistic journal *Uylen-spiegel*.¹⁴¹ Their artwork depicts two former high-class prostitutes who bumped into each other on the street. One of the women is surprised by the formality of the other’s attire: “Gosh Maria, what a serious outfit!” Responding that she had recently become a baroness, the second woman reveals her coat of arms, asking the other if she recognises it. The first woman responds, “yes, like mine” to which the pun then kicks in that it depicts ten exhausted lions encrusted in gold.

Humour and puns only work in their context, and they can only be understood with the relevant knowledge. I would not have been able to figure out the joke if Prof. Dr. Frédéric Barbier had not carefully explained the nuances to me, such as how Balzac had used the term “*lions éreintes*” (exhausted lions) in 1841 *Le Foyer de l’Opéra* to refer to the young men of high society, who were often very rich and hung around with actresses and other members of the *demi-monde*.¹⁴² I would thus assume that the audience that Rops and Draner were communicating to would likely have been familiar with Balzac’s renowned 1841 work as well as having perhaps read his more recently published posthumous work *Les Petits Bourgeois*.

While Balzac had used the term “*la traite des blanches*” in *Les Petits Bourgeois* to suggest how certain men illegitimately climbed the social ladder via document forgery so as to enable them to fool old rich women into marriage, Rops and Draner pulled off a humorous stunt by flipping the gender of the subject who made social and financial gain through marriage. They played on the words to conjure up the idea that the “*traite des blanches*” was that of women who had previously sold sex, but who made it to the top in their business should they have secured a good marriage with one of their young and wealthy “exhausted lions”. Untranslated, directly beneath the satirical cartoon (see Figure 1) was the following snippet of the women’s conversation:

¹⁴¹ Félicien Rops and Draner, *La Traite des Blanches*, 19 April 1857, Satirical Cartoon in *Uylen-spiegel* Periodical, Université Libre de Bruxelles.

¹⁴² Honoré de Balzac, *Le Foyer de l’Opéra. Mœurs Fashionables* (Paris: Hippolyte Souverain, 1841), 101.



Figure 1: Félicien Rops and Draner, *La Traite des Blanches* (1857). Image courtesy Service des Archives, Patrimoine et Réserve précieuse, Université Libre de Bruxelles.

Pristi Maria quelle toilette sévère!
Tiens! je suis baronne! connais-tu mes armoiries?
Oui comme les miennes dix lions éreintés sur fond d'or

In 1862, and some 8 years after the publication of *Les Petits Bourgeois*, the playwright and novelist Hippolyte Jules Demolière (1802–1877) published a novel entitled *La Traite des blanches*, which I believe was also a reference back to Balzac. Unlike Rops and Draner’s humouristic twist, however, Demolière made a seri-

ous and sober adaptation of the idea that women were being exploited through marriage.

Published under the pseudonym Moléri, *La Traite des blanches* invites the reader into the lives of three young women, who are presented as victims of the discriminatory marriage laws of the Napoleonic Code, which enabled their exploitation by men.¹⁴³ Slavery as an analogy for women's position in marriage in French literature can be traced back to critiques in the seventeenth century, but as Karen Offen has already pointed out, these did not feature the racialised indicator of whiteness.¹⁴⁴

Moléri made a critique of marriage as an institution in Napoleonic France, which, in his view, unfairly affected women, irrespective of class. He did so by taking the cultural meaning of "*la traite des blanches*" beyond Balzac's comment on how "*les petits bourgeois*" swindled and wooed wealthy spinsters. By contrast, Moléri used three young coming-of-age protagonists, Charlotte, Octavie, and Angèle, who all came from very different class backgrounds, but who for a variety of reasons ended up attending the same boarding school. As their school days came to an end, the lives of these three bachelorettes parted, thus propelling the reader to follow them on their varying journeys into young womanhood; each of them getting married, which ultimately resulted in their legal entrapment and exploitation, rather than security and happiness.

In showing how men drank away their wives hard-laboured income or squandered their dowry on failed business attempts and expensive women, Moléri engaged in a stark critique of the Napoleonic Code and its discriminatory laws, which stripped women of rights and equality through the institution of marriage.¹⁴⁵ Unlike Balzac, however, who emphasised the scheming of a particular underworld of men, Moléri's use of "*la traite des blanches*" made a structural critique of the state, whose laws he presented as unjust.

Balzac had in some ways reproduced the orientalist "white slave" trope of his times, who was stolen away from her father and her fatherland. Moléri, by contrast, depicted his protagonists as complex and critical, working in solidarity with one another when in need, yet independent and resilient when faced with diffi-

¹⁴³ Moléri, *La Traite des blanches* (Paris: Pagnerre, 1862).

¹⁴⁴ This would fit the chronology of historical development presented above, which shows that race only came to fully form a significant social indicator in Europe in the eighteenth century. For the slavery analogy in seventeenth-century French literature, see Offen, 'How (and Why) the Analogy of Marriage with Slavery Provided the Springboard for Women's Rights Demands in France, 1640–1848'.

¹⁴⁵ For a contemporary review and examination of the critique of the Napoleonic Code, see Anot de Maizière, 'Revue de *La Traite des blanches*, par M. Moléri – 1 Volume in-12 de 304 Pages (1862), Chez Pagnerre; Prix: 2 Fr. 50. c', *Bibliographie Catholique* XXX (1863): 236–38.

culties alone. The subject behind the problem, as Moléri saw it, was not an *othered* person or people of Empire or imperial ambition, rather it was the state authority at home.

2.3 Conclusion

Within the memory politics of the late nineteenth century, “white slavery” conjured up a whole network of images and ideas, depending on who was speaking and who was listening. The historiography on the topic or on that of “human trafficking” has only focused on the late nineteenth-century struggle of moral reformists and women’s rights campaigners against state-regulated prostitution. The concept of “white slavery” that emerged in this period was, however, heavily loaded with other cultural meanings that had immense political power. The significance of the metaphor was structured by race and racism and morally informed by abolitionist debates since the late eighteenth century. This chapter began the work of disentangling the varying meanings; this work continues into chapter three, only to be deepened in the source analysis of chapters four to seven.

The history of *othering* in Europe, or by Europeans, begins with the inaugural carving of the figure of the “prostitute” since the late medieval period. All the while, the history of tolerating and regulating prostitution in Europe emerged in the fifteenth century. Thus, the practices of categorising such a social group has long served as a powerful tool for gaining power over particular kinds of people, while at the same time controlling and regulating interactions in urban space. The management of such a “necessary evil” via toleration became the management of microbes at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Initially emerging in Napoleonic France, the “French system” of state-regulated prostitution was expanded across the First French Empire, while being adopted by other empires at home and in their colonies over the course of the century. This marked a shift in European state practice, not only in how people and territory were categorised and controlled, but also in how early attempts were made to govern the movement and spread of diseases.

The emergence of new European medical knowledge on diseases was accompanied by the birth of biology as a discipline in the late eighteenth century, which over time defined and categorised people along the rigid lines of gender/sex and race. The history of the concept of race as well as its relationship to the history of slaveries requires understanding in order to smooth out the creases and unpack the anachronisms embedded in the established historiography on “white slavery”.

It is often incorrectly understood that “white slavery” stretches back to a medieval period, when Arabs ruled the Mediterranean world and created the demand behind the trade in *Slavs*. However, a careful chronology proves essential to understanding when and how the enslavement of pale-skinned European women can be spoken about, and when this needs distinction or dissecting from nineteenth-century conceptions of whiteness combined with metaphorical uses of slavery in an abolitionist era.

The colour-coding used to make sense of the Caribbean plantation world had fed into the development of race theories which began to emerge in the mid-seventeenth century. Combined with Enlightenment and abolitionist ideals alongside the establishment of biology as a discipline by the late eighteenth century, “white slavery” made a powerful metaphor in the nineteenth century; a period when there was popular consensus that race was a scientific truth and slavery a moral evil.

The metaphor of “white slavery” was used to express a whole host of political grievances in the French and English-speaking worlds since the 1830s and on into the 1880s. What was, however, to come by the 1880s, was the solidification of the term “white slavery” into a gendered and transnational concept in Europe, which pertained to young women being engaged in the sale of sex in contexts foreign to their place of birth. This language of white slavery had initially formed and garnered its gendered meaning in the French literary world between the 1850s and 1860s, though without the migratory aspect. Thus, to understand the development of “white slavery’s” meaning in a transnational sense, a deeper examination is needed for the concept’s relationship to the orientalist memory politics of war under the global condition in late nineteenth-century Europe.