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## **Stopping the Traffic: the National Vigilance Association and the international fight against the ‘white slave’ trade (1899 – c.1909).**

**Rachael Attwood**

### **Abstract:**

*The National Vigilance Association was the most prominent organization to take on the fight against sex trafficking in turn-of-the-century Britain. In 1899, it established and presided over the first global multi-denominational anti-trafficking taskforce, the International Bureau for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic (later Traffic in Persons). This article focuses on the configuration of the National Vigilance Association’s anti-trafficking work during the formative years of the Bureau, paying particular attention to the relationship between the Association and the state. It sheds new light on the nature and significance of both the Association’s role in the Bureau and the Association’s domestic anti-trafficking operations. It exposes the way in which, while making notable advancements in the fight against trafficking, the Association brought an assumption of British superiority to its international work, and operated on the basis of a misdiagnosis of ‘sexual exploitation’ informed by a gender- and class-biased xenophobia, such as to detract from its commitment to the suppression of trafficking.*

### **Biographical details:**

Rachael Attwood researches the history of the sexual traffic in women and anti-trafficking activism in Britain and the British Empire. She is particularly interested in the discourses used to represent sex trafficking as well as the categorization of certain types of sex trafficking as ‘white slavery’. Her doctoral thesis, ‘Vice Beyond the Pale: representing “white slavery” in Britain, c.1880-1912’ was supervised by Professor Catherine Hall at UCL and was completed in 2013. She is currently developing a project on the global history of sex trafficking. Email: rachael.attwood@ucl.ac.uk

The National Vigilance Association (NVA) was established in August 1885 amid the furore over the revelations of juvenile prostitution in London exposed by the maverick journalist WT Stead in ‘The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon’ series for the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Promoted and initially funded by Stead himself, the Association was inaugurated with one clear goal. It was to ensure the enforcement of the new Criminal Law Amendment [CLA] Act, which had reached the statute books earlier that month largely thanks to Stead’s journalistic coup. Along with raising the age of consent from thirteen to sixteen, the Act provided for laws to protect against procurement and other sexual offences against women and minors, tightened legislation against prostitution, and criminalized (male) homosexuality.<sup>1</sup> The NVA, however, soon adopted a broader agenda and quickly grew to be ‘an association of men and women to enforce and improve the laws for the repression of criminal vice and public immorality, to check the causes of vice, and to protect minors’.<sup>2</sup>

The men and women comprising the NVA’s upper echelons predominantly emanated from the country’s middle-class reformist circles, and by and large were nonconformist and/or evangelical Christians. Notable members included Percy Bunting, editor of the *Contemporary Review* and one of the country’s pre-eminent Methodists, and Millicent (‘Mrs Henry’) Fawcett, the influential champion of women’s rights, author and intellectual, who would become one of the first trustees of the National Union of Women Workers and the leader of the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies.<sup>3</sup> Bunting’s sister-in-law Elizabeth Sedman Lidgett, a suffragist, Poor Law Guardian and devotee of the Charity Organization Society also played a key role in the Association, together with Laura Ormiston Chant, founder-member of the National Society for the Promotion of Women’s Suffrage and a Women’s Liberal Federation devotee.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, many of the NVA’s luminaries comprised a pre-existing reformist network, combining their duties in the Association with such activities as Poor Law Guardianship, promotion of the National or Women’s Liberal Federation and/or allegiance to pacifist societies, as well as membership of groups campaigning for the abolition of state regulated prostitution, women’s rights and/or women’s suffrage. Representatives of the country’s principal religious congregations from the

Roman Catholic Bishop of Southwark to Chief Rabbi Dr Hermann Adler also participated in the Association, along with their local colleagues.

The NVA was led by William Alexander Coote, a man who, unlike most of his colleagues, had risen from working-class beginnings and had been installed at the helm of the Association quite by chance. Coote, according to his own account, was born into an affluent London-based Irish family but, having lost his father aged three, was brought up in a neighbourhood of ‘a very mixed character’, leaving school at twelve to become a compositor, and falling in with the ‘wrong crowd’ socially.<sup>5</sup> At sixteen, however, he underwent a spiritual experience, after being given a religious tract by three strangers. He became an Evangelical Christian, parting company with his old friends and setting about overcoming ‘the weaknesses that had accrued through [his] many neglected educational opportunities’.<sup>6</sup>

Coote started to make his mark as a leader of working men. In 1870, he spearheaded the printing trades’ campaign for shorter hours and, by 1880, was elected to represent the London Society of Compositors at the Trade Union Congress, before serving on the Camberwell Vestry and Borough Council and participating in further union activity. He also brushed with national politics, attempting in 1883 to become the Liberal candidate for North Camberwell.<sup>7</sup> Coote, as fate would have it, came to be Secretary of the NVA because he had been chosen by Stead at a meeting of ‘leading working men of London’ to be the chief marshal at the Hyde Park social purity rally held following ‘The Maiden Tribute’ revelations, and had gained Stead’s confidence as a potential leader of the new Association.<sup>8</sup> Whilst not without his critics, Coote was viewed by many in and beyond the NVA as a charismatic, influential and extremely dedicated leader, and remained Secretary until his death in 1919. At the Association’s 1910 annual meeting, Percy Bunting attested to the ‘magnificent power, the disinterested devotion, and the excellent discretion’ Coote had displayed as leader of the NVA.<sup>9</sup>

Operating through a nationwide network of committees, the NVA focused on a wide range of preventive initiatives. It undertook tasks including investigating employment agencies advertising jobs for young women, instigating convictions for ‘immoral conduct’ and brothel-keeping, publishing pamphlets and holding meetings on various moral questions, and, notoriously, prosecuting vendors of

‘questionable books and photographs’, owners of theatres staging ‘improper productions’, and exhibitors of ‘immodest works of art’ for their ‘assault on public decency’.<sup>10</sup> Yet this was not the extent of the NVA’s social purity programme. The Association also championed Britain’s fight against the traffic in women and children for the purpose of sexual exploitation, or ‘white slavery’ as it was often known, thanks in no small part to Coote, who took a particular interest in anti-trafficking work. It went on to instigate the first multid denominational International Congress to oversee the suppression of sex trafficking in 1899. Moreover, the NVA was a prime power within the new anti-trafficking movement, with its Executive constituting the putatively dominant British National Committee of the International Bureau for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic, which had been set up to oversee the work of the Congress. It is the structure and significance of the NVA’s early anti-trafficking agenda that will be explored in this article.

While there has yet to be a study dedicated to the operations of the NVA, the Association’s more notable attempts at censorship have solicited scholarly interest and some insightful analyses have been undertaken of certain aspects of the group’s assault on ‘impure’ culture.<sup>11</sup> Given its scale and enduring importance, however, the NVA’s anti-trafficking work has, perhaps surprisingly, received relatively little analytical attention. More often than not, the Association’s fight against trafficking has been dealt with incidentally and in a descriptive manner within wider histories of moral reform and sexuality. In her feminist history of sexual and moral politics, Lucy Bland refers briefly to the NVA’s role in lobbying for the first purported anti-trafficking measure, the 1912 CLA Bill, during what is an excellent consideration of the structure of the moral panic over trafficking stirred by suffragists and social purity advocates preceding the Bill.<sup>12</sup> Taking a broader perspective, Katherine Mullin, in her study, *James Joyce, Sexuality and Social Purity*, and Helen J. Self, in her work on prostitution and the law, each note the NVA’s role in establishing the International Congress and in effectively overseeing the anti-trafficking nerve-centre, the International Bureau.<sup>13</sup>

Some scholars have cast a more critical eye on the NVA’s anti-trafficking operations. Edward Bristow, in his work on British purity movements, and, more recently, Paula Bartley and Julia Laite, in

their excellent histories of prostitution, each refer to the focus on ‘the foreign prostitute’ in the NVA’s domestic fight against trafficking, and highlight the importance of ‘sexualised xenophobia’ in the group’s initiatives at a time of growing anti-alienism in Britain. Pointing to the sexual double standard in the policing of vice, Laite recognises that such a focus facilitated foreign women selling sex being treated as ‘double criminals’ for being both foreign and women ‘electively’ working as prostitutes, when in fact they were often subject to similar (non-consensual) sexual abuse and violence as the putatively pure trafficking victim. These scholars do not, however, consider in depth the wider significance of such xenophobia upon how sex trafficking was constructed and publicly represented as a problem. Indeed, they pay little attention to the negative ideas of ‘the foreign man’ espoused by the Association, which provide vital clues about the construction of not simply ‘the trafficker’, but also ‘the foreign prostitute’ and ‘the trafficked woman’ in the group’s discourses of sex trafficking and ‘foreign vice’.<sup>14</sup> Stephanie Limoncelli sheds more light on the NVA’s agenda in her groundbreaking study of the first international anti-trafficking movement. As well as noting the bias against foreign women permeating the programmes pursued by many contingent nations of the International Bureau, she observes Bureau members’ ‘tendency to discriminate on ethno-national lines’, to uphold national interests, and to assume a statist outlook. However, in what is a broader study that examines the participation of a number of countries in the global anti-trafficking movement and provides a valuable insight into the evolving relationship between the Bureau and the international campaign against state regulated prostitution, Limoncelli does not explore the NVA’s, or, in this context, the British National Committee’s, operations in depth. Indeed, her analysis focuses mostly on a period more than a decade after the Bureau’s formation.<sup>15</sup>

The crucial formative stages of the NVA’s major international anti-trafficking work following the foundation of the International Congress and the International Bureau have not been explored to any great extent. Neither have the wider implications of this work, particularly in light of the NVA’s self-appointed dominance in the nascent international trafficking movement, and the group’s actions against, and representations of certain ‘classes’ of both foreign women and foreign men within Britain. This article approaches an element of such overdue analysis. It outlines the history of the NVA’s fight against

trafficking, from its inception through to the British National Committee's first years in the Bureau, mindful of the changing nature of sex trafficking during the period. Further, it examines the nature and the significance of the key policies and ideological assumptions that guided the NVA's assault on trafficking, as manifested inside the Bureau and in British domestic anti-trafficking policy respectively. Particular attention will be paid to the importance placed on being, or, rather, on not being, British by the Association, and on the relationship between the Association and the government, which, despite the NVA's efforts to forge closer links to the state than some notable earlier moral reform campaigns, was neither straightforward, nor, in the eyes of Association members, wholly satisfactory.

The article pursues the argument that, following the inception of the International Bureau, the NVA made considerable progress in both the domestic and the worldwide fight against sex trafficking, despite the continued reluctance of the British government to permit the Association to co-ally with state officials in anti-trafficking operations as Association members wished. However, it also incorporated a series of ideas and policies into its anti-trafficking programme that ultimately had a detrimental effect upon its self-professed agenda. It brought an assumption of Britain's superiority to its work within the Bureau that (albeit through little fault of its own) could not be brought to fruition and that hindered work at key moments in the nascent international movement. It operated its domestic anti-trafficking initiatives according to a gendered, class-biased xenophobia, which was founded on the tacit exaltation of 'the respectable (male) British citizen', and distinctions between the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving' foreign poor. As a result, it misinterpreted sexual exploitation and acted, often as an adjunct to the state, to stigmatize and 'suppress' the supposed danger of the working-class foreign women and girls within the country who were among the most susceptible to being sexually exploited, followed by the foreign men it perceived to be organizing their exploitation. As scholars seldom acknowledge, the NVA did articulate a profound hostility to the 'male agents' of the sex trafficking industry, but the focus of its antipathy and suppressive actions was by and large on that foreign female population. Such attitudes and actions combined to detract from the Association's commitment to stopping trafficking and providing succour for the women and girls threatened by such criminality. Further, they also functioned to endorse and often

extend prejudices not least towards ‘the foreigner’ and ‘the prostitute’ that had currency in the culture of the day. The NVA thereby set an unfortunate example for other Congress members and the global anti-trafficking movement as a whole.

### **The NVA and the First International Anti-Trafficking Movement:**

The NVA embarked on anti-trafficking work from its inception through its Foreign Traffic Subcommittee. It took over the operations of the London Committee for the Exposure and Suppression of the Traffic in English Girls for the Purposes of Continental Prostitution, which had been founded in 1880 by Alfred Stace Dyer, a publisher and Secretary of the Quaker-led Friends’ Association for Abolishing State Regulation of Vice, following revelations of a minor traffic in English girls to the licensed brothels of France and Belgium.<sup>16</sup> The Committee was helped considerably by Josephine Butler, the leader of both the domestic campaign for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts and the British division of the International Federation for the Abolition of State Regulation of Vice, and was dominated by opponents of state regulated prostitution. In practical terms, however, it did not actively support the campaign against regulation. Together with carrying out anti-trafficking services such as checking the bona fides of foreign jobs on behalf of young girls and helping worried parents find missing daughters, it was influential in lobbying the government to appoint a Select Committee to investigate ‘the law relating to the protection of young girls’ in 1881.<sup>17</sup> The findings of the Select Committee formed the basis of the CLA Bill, which, after repeated setbacks, was passed into law in 1885.

The NVA perpetuated the London Committee’s focus and rolled out a range of preventive operations. From its earliest years, the Association distributed ‘Friendly Warning’ leaflets on cross-channel steamships, urging ‘[y]oung Ladies leaving England to take situations on the Continent...to satisfy themselves that *the situations promised them really exist*...[or else] run a great risk of being *deceived and disappointed*’, and listing emergency contacts it had secured at European and British ports.<sup>18</sup> It translated leaflets in various languages for girls leaving the Continent and, together with printing stories of trafficking in its journal, *The Vigilance Record*, had its safety message reproduced regularly in the British and the European press.<sup>19</sup> It organized local committees in the country’s port

towns and achieved permission for a 'Warning' placard to be placed on board steamers and in train carriages.<sup>20</sup> By 1887, Coote was visiting Rotterdam 'to investigate allegations of trafficking [and gather] suggestions of local officials as to how to stop traffic [sic]' and his Foreign Traffic Sub-Committee was busy petitioning the government to strengthen the law regarding the employment of foreign girls in 'places of entertainment'.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, although its early lobbying for anti-trafficking legislation was generally fruitless, the NVA played a decisive role in bringing about an amendment to the Vagrancy Act in 1898 which made it an offence for a man to subsist from a prostitute's earnings. Yet all of this paled into insignificance compared to the Association's involvement in the fight against trafficking from 1899.

By the 1890s, in line with mass-migration from Europe following the Long Depression and the increasing persecution of Jews in and beyond the Pale of Settlement, a series of global trafficking networks was established that would flourish over subsequent decades. Hundreds of women were systematically transported from Continental, and particularly Eastern Europe, to destinations such as Johannesburg, Alexandria, Calcutta and Buenos Aires, and subjected to prolonged sexual exploitation in a lucrative multi-ethnic and multi-denominational trafficking industry. Some of them initially consented to entering prostitution, some did not. Of the 6,413 women who registered as prostitutes in Buenos Aires between 1889 and 1901, 4,361 originated from Europe, with 1,211 coming from Russia alone.<sup>22</sup> Britain became a prime conduit for traffickers and procurers in the new global trafficking industry, hosting the major transmigrant ports of Glasgow, Southampton, London and Liverpool. The country also served as a place where 'human merchandise' would be picked up for onward transportation and became a trafficking destination, receiving a small yet nevertheless significant flow of girls trafficked from Continental Europe.<sup>23</sup> Home Office records show that under the immigration restriction measure, the 1905 Aliens Act, between 1906 and 1913 at least 300 immigrants were expelled from the country for 'crimes relating to trafficking'.<sup>24</sup> However, these statistics are likely to belie the extent of what was a sophisticated, covert criminal enterprise.

1899 represents a watershed in terms of not only the history of the NVA and the British response to trafficking but also the worldwide offensive against such criminality. Why it was this year is the

responsibility of Coote and what he described as ‘a Divine Vision, or a day-dream inspired from on High’ in which he had been shown how to co-ordinate an international anti-trafficking taskforce.<sup>25</sup> Coote toured most European capitals in January 1899, having received the £200 he had prayed for to start his crusade from an unexpected donor, and with considerable financial and practical assistance from the Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women (JAPGW), the country’s other major anti-trafficking taskforce which would go on to lead an impressive international Jewish network against trafficking.<sup>26</sup> He returned to England with sufficient support from reformers and government officials to convene the first international congress on trafficking.

Held in London that June under the auspices of the NVA and with ample JAPGW representation, the congress witnessed the convergence of delegates from a host of European countries and the United States to discuss how best to fight trafficking internationally. It was resolved to form ‘a permanent international organization for perfecting and bringing into effect the work of the Congress’ and the objectives and constitution of the new body, which would meet every three to four years, were settled.<sup>27</sup>

The new response to trafficking was to be predicated on the pragmatic agenda of obtaining multilateral government co-operation and securing suppressive international legislation. It was agreed that as a matter of priority an international agreement should be achieved among the governments of member-countries to facilitate the fight against trafficking, legally and organizationally. Moreover, as has been widely documented, to ensure the sustained support not least of these governments, the new fight was to be officially separate from the international campaign against the state regulation of prostitution, and tacitly separate from the campaign’s libertarian feminist principles, its opposition to the enlargement of the state, and condemnation of the use of state power to violate the civil rights of prostitutes, and working class women in general.<sup>28</sup> ‘[I]t occurred to Mr Coote’, Percy Bunting later observed, ‘that there were immense numbers of private individuals and societies and governments who could not be induced to Mrs Butler’s primary condition’.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, the new response to trafficking was founded not simply on a different ethos but also on a different practical relationship between ‘the reformer’ and ‘the state’ than the International Abolitionist

Federation. It was determinedly statist. Its members, as will be outlined below in the case of Britain, actively sought to participate in, if not altogether oversee, state initiatives to combat trafficking, and strove to foster alliances with the state officials responsible for implementing elements of the country's official anti-trafficking policy, albeit with varied degrees of success. Certainly, although opposing the extension of state power, Butler and her colleagues, had, out of necessity, to engage with the state at some level. They, as Judith Walkowitz and Paul McHugh show in the case of the British repeal campaign, actively petitioned parliamentarians to repeal old laws and lobbied for the enactment of reforming legislation.<sup>30</sup> However, Coote and his followers differed in as much as they combined parliamentary wrangling with a faith in the state as the bearer of the solution to the particular 'moral problems' against which they fought and strove to ally with state officials to facilitate the everyday policing of these problems. Incidentally, Butler, and some of her followers who had joined the NVA in 1885 quickly distanced themselves from the group not least because of its approach to prostitution. As Butler confided to a friend in 1894, 'there is a constant tendency towards external pressure [in the NVA], and inside that a tendency to let the pressure fall almost exclusively on women because it is more difficult, they say, to get at men'.<sup>31</sup> In short, two very different types of internationalism came to co-exist in global responses to organized female sexual exploitation.

In the new anti-trafficking movement, there was to be a quasi-autonomous national committee in each member-country. Two representatives from each national committee were to comprise the International Committee of the Congress and the Congress' affairs were to be coordinated by a single body. This body was to be the nexus of the new taskforce through which all information pertaining to trafficking was to be passed, all contact between the individual national committees mediated, and to which all of these committees were to be accountable.<sup>32</sup>

### **Inside the International Bureau:**

The International Bureau for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons was thereby formed. However, a hub where all member-countries enjoyed equal representation it was not. The International

Bureau, as Bristow puts it, was essentially ‘the NVA Executive in another guise, with delegates co-opted from the national committees’.<sup>33</sup> It was made up of five of the most influential men from the Executive who also acted as the English (later British) National Committee. It was led by Coote and had as its President, the Lord Bishop of Rochester and subsequently the Earl of Aberdeen; both members of the five. Even with the incorporation of a host of countries including Egypt, South Africa, and Argentina in later years, the Bureau cherry-picked representatives from other British social purity and religious groups, including the JAPGW, and in 1907 conscripted forty such organizations into what was then the British National Committee. While having many women in its number, the Committee, in terms of authority, remained male-dominated. The NVA successfully carved out a dominant role for itself and Britain in the new international movement against trafficking, positioning the members of the British National Committee as a class apart endowed with superior qualifications to direct their fellow Congress members and charged with a special burden as representatives of the Congress’ pioneering nation. The Lord Bishop of Rochester explained regarding the Committee in 1904: ‘the word British is somewhat misleading. We do not want to belittle by one degree the work done by the National Committees, but it is, as it were, the original, or the mother Committee, and has somewhat more taxation of general organization than would fall to the other Committees’.<sup>34</sup>

The status the NVA claimed for the British National Committee within the International Bureau was not, however, universally accepted by other Congress members and was occasionally the source of considerable resentment and disruption within what was otherwise a harmonious and productive movement. The British National Committee’s apparent lack of credentials to live up to the powerful position it had accorded itself is central to this matter. The honeymoon period of the Congress came to an abrupt end when controversy raged over the then English National Committee’s apparent inability to organize the movement’s first Official Conference. Indeed, before the second meeting of the Bureau, little short of a rebellion was in the offing. ‘[A] letter was received from Pastor Burckhardt, Secretary of the German National Committee’, the Bureau’s minutes recall, ‘enclosing...[a] copy of a circular sent on by the German Committee to the other National Committees, complaining that the English National

Committee were [sic] not getting on with the work as fast as the German Committee thought they ought'. A month later, it was accompanied by correspondence from Monsieur René Bérenger, head of the French National Committee, 'regretting that it had been impossible for the English Committee to take definite action [regarding the calling of an official conference], and referring to the circular received from Germany'. Coote was compelled to take on the embarrassing task of visiting each of these committees to justify 'why apparently nothing definite had been accomplished' in this respect.<sup>35</sup>

Indeed, despite effectively holding a position of unrivalled strength within the Congress, the British National Committee was in many ways also one of the Congress' weakest links. The reason for this, and for the Committee's slow start as Congress leader, does not principally lie in the hands of the Committee itself. Rather, it resides in the fact that, throughout the formative years of the Congress, the British National Committee could rarely secure the co-operation of its own government. The minutes of the International Bureau's first meetings are testament to the profound difficulties facing Coote and his Committee. With the business of the International Bureau barely underway, a request by Coote to the then Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury to 'favourably entertain the idea of calling an Official Conference' of the Congress countries was refused in a 'definite statement' from the leader of the government.<sup>36</sup> Coote was thereby compelled to try to organize the conference outside Britain. After unsuccessfully petitioning the German National Committee, Coote asked the Swiss Minister in London whether 'the Swiss Government...would be willing to call an Official Conference' and, in good faith, reassured the Minister that the British government would support Switzerland in holding the event. The Swiss Minister subsequently broached the subject with the Foreign Office but, contrary to Coote's word, was 'given to understand that not only would the English Government not take the responsibility of calling an Official Conference but that they did not believe in the Conference in principle'. The Swiss Minister refused to endorse the conference and the complaints about the British National Committee's mismanagement of the event ensued. Determined to circumvent what he saw as 'the difficulties constantly arising owing to the attitude of the English government with regard to the Official Conference', Coote, who was already working tirelessly to foster Congress business on the Continent, eventually helped persuade the French

government to organize, and Salisbury's ministry to nominally support, the Official Conference he had hoped his country would host.<sup>37</sup>

While never quite to the extent that Coote and his acolytes deemed appropriate, the level of support government officials afforded the Committee would increase over time, particularly when, as will be seen, the government was obliged to establish an official line regarding trafficking from 1902. However, the debacle over the first Official Conference facilitated the impression among important players in the Congress that the Committee was assuming an inappropriate and inhibitive role in the international anti-trafficking movement, and most likely cast some doubt on the Committee's ability to foster the sustained multilateral government co-operation that lay at the heart of the Congress' agenda.

Moreover, the British National Committee's intervention in other national committees' anti-trafficking affairs went on to, at times, stir thinly veiled tensions over the position of dominance by Britain in the Bureau. In 1905, Coote's offer on behalf of the Bureau to supply two trained British workers to instruct four Parisians in travellers' aid operations at stations and to guarantee £200 for 'investigating the station work at the Paris railway stations' was snubbed, albeit politely, by the French National Committee. As reported in the Bureau's minutes, the members of the French committee 'expressed their gratitude' for Coote's consideration, 'but felt that their patriotism forbade them to accept the offer' and, independently of the Bureau, gained promises for 'sufficient money to inaugurate the work at three of the principal Paris stations' at a subsequent Committee meeting.<sup>38</sup>

The Bureau succeeded in fostering notable advancements in the fight against trafficking thanks to the co-operation and concerted action of its constituent countries, as well as Coote's energetic commitment to his cause. What was to be a momentous first Official Conference did, after all, take place. Indeed, for all the qualms over the British National Committee, Coote himself was held in high regard internationally, decorated by the French President, the German Emperor, and the King of Spain for his exemplary work in furthering the aims of the Bureau.<sup>39</sup> Yet, the Committee's self-ascribed dominance considerably complicated and hindered the Bureau at crucial moments in its early life, creating the need for diplomatic wrangling with both state officials and Congress members before work could even begin

on forging an international agreement on trafficking, in addition to inspiring damaging disdain for Britain within the new movement. Of course, the Committee was not to blame for the paucity of support it received from the government that caused much of the problem, but its lack of official backing nevertheless coloured how the Committee functioned and how it was viewed. Moreover, as in the French National Committee's snub, the British National Committee's actions from its position of dominance seem even to have driven some Congress contingents to deliberately by-pass the International Bureau and seek assistance for anti-trafficking projects at national level from private sponsors, even at a time when the Bureau's operations were officially recognized by the respective governments of member countries. The NVA certainly demonstrated the 'importance' of being British in the new anti-trafficking movement, but not always in the way that it intended.

### **Anti-Trafficking At Home:**

One of the most important early milestones for the Congress came at the long-awaited first Official Conference in Paris in 1902 with the drafting of the first International Agreement on sex trafficking. The Agreement, which was finally ratified in 1904, committed the governments of member-countries of the Congress to a range of initiatives designed to expose and prevent trafficking as well as help restore trafficked women to their home countries.<sup>40</sup> The provisions of the Agreement were influential in reconfiguring the NVA's response to sex trafficking, and the way in which the Association strove to facilitate the implementation of the Agreement reveals a great deal about the ideology that drove the group's domestic anti-trafficking work as well as the new relationship the group came to have with the government and state officials. The Agreement's second and third articles had the most transformative effect in this respect. Significantly, both articles, as in the main thrust of the Agreement itself (not to mention the NVA's pre-existing domestic policies regarding prostitution and trafficking), focused in a practical sense principally on the women and girls exploited through trafficking.<sup>41</sup>

Article Two of the International Agreement stipulated that each signatory government 'undertakes to have a watch kept, especially in railway stations, ports of embarkation, and en route, for

persons in charge of women and girls destined for an immoral life' and to report all relevant information to a competent authority. Little more than seven months after the British government had assented to the Draft Agreement, the NVA tried to convince the Home Secretary that it should have sole responsibility for implementing the Article on the government's behalf. It sent a Deputation to the Home Office in March 1903 which, suggesting that the Article 'could be better worked by ladies than by police constables', proposed that the Bureau managed the surveillance work on a six-month trial basis, working in cooperation with kindred groups including the Travellers' Aid Society and the JAPGW, with both salaried and voluntary members recruited by either the British National Committee or these affiliates. After commending and expressing his 'entire sympathy' for the NVA and its fellow organizations' anti-trafficking work, the Home Secretary accepted.<sup>42</sup> The NVA inaugurated the International Guild of Service for Women the following month, funding its work exclusively through donations, and, after the trial period, the Guild achieved Home Office approval to become a permanent philanthropic taskforce.<sup>43</sup> Functioning as a branch of the NVA and a sister-organization of the International Bureau, the Guild quickly gained the co-operation of many of the country's railway and steamship firms and placed teams of workers at the country's main ports and stations.<sup>44</sup>

The Guild, however, was far from an apolitical vigilance group and certainly did not limit its operations to locating the 'persons in charge of women and girls destined for an immoral life' as outlined by the International Agreement. Indeed, its female workers, who were predominantly of a similar demographic to their male superiors at the NVA, focused most attention on lone, foreign, working-class women and girls entering the country. Moreover, they were briefed to not merely watch for, and, in one of the Association's more admirable policies, provide assistance to such wayfarers, but also observe their movements and interrogate them. In his report to the Home Office following the six-month trial, Coote declared the need in anti-trafficking work for a 'properly qualified...staff of women speaking the necessary languages...ostensibly for the purpose of rendering first-aid to the foreign women as they arrive, but really judiciously to ascertain for what purpose they [have] come and where they intend staying'.<sup>45</sup> The NVA's discourses suggest that the principal intention behind this surveillance was for the

women and girls the Association deemed most intellectually or morally prone to enter prostitution – that is, the most flighty, credulous or wayward young female foreigners from the ‘unprotected’ working classes - to be weeded out from the fray, and not principally to prevent them from being spirited abroad by a trafficker, but to stop them falling into vice within Britain. While migratory prostitutes were sought out by the Guild, in practical terms, most attention was paid to these ‘marginal’ wayfarers. The NVA’s publications are peppered with references to ‘unaccompanied’ and/or naive foreign girls who, in a blind desire for a better life, rendered themselves vulnerable to traffickers and entered, or narrowly escape entering, prostitution within the country. With initials used to hide the victim’s identity, the NVA highlighted to both the readers of its journal and the Home Office a ‘typical trafficking case’ concerning a twenty-two year old Frenchwoman who Guild members eventually managed to ‘rescue’:

M.D, 22 – In a situation in Paris; was met and persuaded by a young man to accompany him to London to occupy a good situation. Once in London he forced her on to the streets, and ill-treated her when she did not earn sufficient. At the time our worker met the girl the man was on ‘business’ in Paris, and, fearing he should lose her, he had brought her to Dover to await his return. The worker finally succeeded in persuading her to return to her friends in Paris, and saw her on board the boat at Dover.<sup>46</sup>

Similarly, the Association’s 1908 report featured the story of a rescued sixteen year-old Belgian girl, ‘CB’, who ‘had been employed as a cigarette maker at a factory near Brussels, and in consequence of friction at home had decided to run away’, only to meet a German man on the boat to England and follow him to what proved to be a ‘house of ill-fame’.<sup>47</sup> In this way, the NVA might be seen to be invoking a configuration of paternalistic ideas surrounding the threat posed to the social order by working-class female independence that, as Sally Ledger suggests, had increasing purchase in turn-of-the-century society due not least to the new forms of employment becoming available to women and the impact of working women’s militant trade unionism.<sup>48</sup>

Most foreign girls travelling to Britain alone or with newly-made acquaintances, of course, had not been, or were never in any danger of being trafficked, let alone of entering prostitution. However, many were not spared the surveillance, interrogation and often the unjust moral judgment of Guild workers for simply being ‘unBritish’, working-class, female and independent (read unprotected or unmothered). Meanwhile, the girls who did fall prey to a trafficker, the NVA insinuated through its typical representation of ‘the victim of vice’ as a foreigner misguidedly trying to improve her prospects, as what it termed ‘helpless and weak and ignorant’, had helped bring their predicament on themselves and needed the respectable British stand-in ‘mothers’ of the Guild to correct their shortcomings.<sup>49</sup> Speaking at a 1903 Conference on the White Slave Traffic of the girls of all nationalities who drift towards the London railway stations, Coote, highlighting the importance of the Guild, reminded his colleagues that ‘if there is nobody to interpose between them [the girls] and the next step, then the next step will surely be for many one of sorrow and trouble’.<sup>50</sup> In 1908, one NVA delegate even described the Association as ‘a strong, helping hand [that] steps in where a parent ought to be’.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, it is perhaps telling that the NVA used ‘white slavery’ as a basic term to refer to trafficking rather than developing it as a metaphor as in Dyer’s ethnocentric discourses, which marginalized the suffering of formerly enslaved black people, to condemn the subjugation of his ‘pure and innocent’ countrywomen.<sup>52</sup>

Significantly, despite receiving the acceptance and nominal support of the Home Office, the government declined to grant the Guild the official authority, assistance, and recognition as a state body that Coote and his colleagues wanted and deemed necessary to combat trafficking. At the NVA’s 1904 annual meeting, Mrs Henry Fawcett declared on behalf of the members of her Association regarding the work of the Guild: ‘We think the State might do a little more than it is doing. We look at what is being done by this private society and by the ladies working for the society, and we know that it is a gigantic effort to check and prevent crime...[M]ay [we]continue to ask the Government of the day, and the Government of any future day, to give more protection, more sanction, more support to the admirable work that has been set on foot by the Association’.<sup>53</sup>

As often mentioned, but seldom analysed regarding its significance upon the NVA's portrayal of and actions against sex trafficking, the provisions of the International Agreement extended to another supposed type of 'female foreigner'. Article Three of the Agreement was concerned with the repatriation of foreign prostitutes or, as the NVA put it, 'the repatriation of undesirable foreign women'.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, Coote branded the International Agreement the 'Woman's Moral Charter'.<sup>55</sup> While its direct interaction with them remained respectful and relatively sympathetic, the Association saw 'foreign prostitutes' as sexually experienced, morally bankrupt, lower working-class women who had migrated to the country to electively sell sex, as distinct from the younger foreign female wayfarers it generally perceived liable to becoming pure, albeit credulous, 'white slaves'. There was little recognition on the part of NVA members that these women, despite supposedly having said 'yes' to a pimp or trafficker, were potential victims of sexual violence and coercion, along with 'the virtuous white slave'. They were simply 'vicious foreigners', unwanted in the country. 'Many foreign women who have in their own countries led lives of prostitution', Coote wrote in the six-month report of Guild work, explaining why such individuals had no place in Britain, 'find it necessary to leave. These women, principally French, Belgians, and Germans, come here for the sole purpose of carrying on the business of prostitution, because they can do it under pleasanter circumstances and on easier terms'.<sup>56</sup> This, as will be seen, was not the only reason why the NVA thought 'the foreign prostitute' was so 'undesirable'.

Article Three, in a positive break from pre-existing provisions, prescribed that signatory governments organize the safe repatriation of foreign prostitutes upon request and care for those who were impoverished prior to repatriation. It also stipulated that women working in Britain as prostitutes should be interrogated, and their details communicated to their respective country's authorities 'with a view to their eventual repatriation'.<sup>57</sup> The NVA took it upon itself to assist the process, and, as a sideline to its government-approved traveller's aid initiatives, it deployed Guild workers to encourage foreign women selling sex to accept the Association's help to return home. Going out in search of 'suspicious looking' foreign women in areas of the city known for prostitution, the Guild was active in, as the NVA phrased it, 'giving assistance, unofficial assistance, in trying to interview these unhappy women in the

streets of London, with the purpose if possible of sending them back to the country to which they belong'. Similar assistance, albeit on a smaller scale, was provided in the country's key port cities, and costs for the repatriations overseen by the Association were generally defrayed by the state.<sup>58</sup> Such work, however, which was undoubtedly conducted in good faith and without recourse to overt coercion, was often of no avail. The 1903 Conference on the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic heard that the Guild's 'work on the streets' had not been 'quite so satisfactory' as the group's other operations: 'For the first three weeks there was nothing but rain. Plenty of evidence had been obtained, but after speaking to hundreds of the girls "foreigners" offering to repatriate them, put them in touch with a lady in their respective countries, and to give them a fresh start in life, not one accepted our offer of help, but smilingly announced their intention of staying here until they are turned out [of the country] [sic]'.<sup>59</sup>

At this point, it pays to note that the International Agreement came into force, and the NVA's new domestic anti-trafficking agenda was rolled out, amid growing debate over foreign immigration, and anxieties over the type of the 'foreigners' flocking into the country. Resentment was increasing surrounding the supposed detriment to society and the nation at large caused by the influx of East European Jews, or 'impoverished aliens' as they were often branded, into London's already over-populated East End and other urban centres including Leeds and Manchester. Anti-alienist scaremongers such as Arnold White were drawing upon Social Darwinist ideas to decry the newcomers as a degenerative race apart in body and soul that, through its displacement or exploitation of English workers in sweated labour, its contribution to overcrowding, as well as its innately 'corruptive properties', represented a 'danger menacing to national life'.<sup>60</sup> Such diatribes mainly focused on 'the male alien' (that is, not principally 'the male East European Jew') as a worker or employer.<sup>61</sup> However, anxieties abounded over the moral and physical calibre of 'foreigners' in Britain more generally, and particularly working-class foreigners.<sup>62</sup> The gendered, moral assumptions that guided the NVA's anti-trafficking activities should be seen as in part informed by these anxieties.

Indeed, less than three years after the formation of the International Guild, the NVA's policy concerning 'vicious foreign women' was given new impetus when the 1905 Aliens Act was implemented

with the intention of combatting the ‘social malaise’ caused by increasing levels of immigration. Together with denying entry into the country or sanctioning the expulsion of immigrants on the grounds of a proscribed level of poverty, infirmity, or criminality, the Act gave magistrates unrestricted power to force the swift repatriation of foreign women convicted of prostitution.<sup>63</sup> That such a provision featured in the new legislation was no coincidence. The NVA was not only influenced by popular ideas of ‘the foreigner’ or ‘the alien’ that were behind the new legislation. It was held as somewhat of an authority on ‘the vicious alien’, as it put it, and, in fact, wrote much of the section concerning ‘alien criminals’ in the Aliens Act, after draft clauses it had prepared received the approval of the Conservative Members of Parliament backing the measure.<sup>64</sup> Elements of a ‘Special Bill’ the NVA had drafted as early as 1897 to ‘deal with the terrible immoralities of the streets’ caused by ‘undesirable foreigners’ was thereby brought to fruition.<sup>65</sup>

Following the implementation of what it termed ‘the Undesirable Aliens Act, the NVA came to focus much of its practical anti-trafficking work on striving to purge the country of ‘foreign prostitutes’, incorporating reporting some such women to the authorities into the ‘unofficial assistance’ with repatriations it bestowed on the government.<sup>66</sup> Incidentally, a similar outlook came to be shared by many member-countries of the Congress, validated and facilitated by the stipulations of the International Agreement.<sup>67</sup>

Although carrying out this work diligently and although, as it acknowledged, Guild workers ‘always met with the heartiest sympathy of the police’, the Association was again dissatisfied with the lack of official recognition and support it received from the government and the Home Office.<sup>68</sup> Perhaps more than with any other initiative it pursued, the work in assisting the repatriation of ‘foreign prostitutes’ caused the NVA to look critically at its relationship with the state, and to try and broker what it deemed a more apposite arrangement. Coote and his colleagues wanted to be given more responsibility, implicitly as experts in female-led ‘front line’ work with foreign women selling sex, in the repatriation of ‘alien prostitutes’ (which was then conducted by Police Officers simply placing a woman ‘on a steamer for her own country...with good advice as to her future’).<sup>69</sup> They wanted, rather commendably, to be

given the authority to work in close co-operation with the police and act as official mediators between Officers and the women under consideration for repatriation, liaising with the women to assess how best to help them, and establishing what, if any, 'remedial measures would help to reinstate her to her former social position' once back home.<sup>70</sup> Before the enforcement of the measure, Coote had a proposal for a three-month trial to carry out such work submitted to the Home Secretary.<sup>71</sup> When the Act was in force, however, the Home Secretary replied diplomatically that, 'while the Government was not prepared to accept the offer of the Committee in its entirety it would be very glad to avail itself of the help of the Association in isolated cases where necessary', which, in reality, it did very rarely.<sup>72</sup>

To fully understand why the Association placed such importance on the *repatriation* of 'foreign prostitutes' requires a closer examination of what Coote and his colleagues believed to be the problem with these women. As intimated, the NVA deplored and willed to act against foreign prostitutes for having travelled to the country expressly to profit from their vicious ways. However, what it considered so dangerous about these immigrants, and why it believed expulsion from the country was the only suitable solution, was that they inflicted their immorality upon the British and, through their contamination of the healthy male national stock not to mention their very presence in society, brought about the physical and moral degeneration of the whole population. The evidence that Coote was summoned to give to the 1903 Royal Commission on Alien Immigration (RCAI), which was charged with assessing the impact of immigration, and which was influential in bringing about the Aliens Act, is telling. Outlining how, 'the foreign prostitute' has 'introduced into England what is called special forms of vice [sic], which even amongst gentlemen would not bear mentioning, but they are some of the most destructive forms of vice and you must remember these forms of vice are brought in contact with our young men, who are simply demoralized, body, soul and spirit', Coote clarified his Association's stance: 'we should have the power to repatriate women of this class, who come here simply for the purpose of pursuing this occupation. It is not that they err or slip into it, but they come deliberately to carry on this business, which is inimical to the welfare of every section of the community'.<sup>73</sup>

The NVA was thus rehearsing a xenophobic configuration of well-aided gendered prejudices in the culture of the day of the sort that had been forwarded not least by certain advocates of the Contagious Diseases Acts regarding 'the prostitute' as the bearer of disease and the moral decay of society.<sup>74</sup> Significantly, it might be argued that the Association was also extending anti-alienist prejudices by lodging a case for 'alien women' being seen as, if not more, blighted and contaminative as their male counterparts, and reinforcing the idea that England was a special target for, as the NVA branded it, 'the moral refuse of Europe'.<sup>75</sup> David Feldman observes that in the years following the implementation of the Aliens Act, negative stereotypes focusing on 'the criminal alien' as opposed to the 'pauper alien' came to the fore.<sup>76</sup>

The NVA's policy regarding the perpetrators and profiteers of sex trafficking was also afforded more weight by the Aliens Act and was facilitated by the International Agreement, which provided for the appointment of a state-sanctioned Central Authority on Trafficking - in Britain's case, Assistant Commissioner of the Police, Frederick S. Bullock - to co-ordinate and communicate information regarding trafficking to the government and other countries' Authorities on trafficking, as well as oversee preventive work.<sup>77</sup> Although seldom acknowledged, the NVA worked hard to stop those behind the trafficking industry. From its inception, the Association, whose members typically perceived trafficking (and organized prostitution) in dichotomous terms as a crime inflicted by men upon women, had lobbied for the tightening of the law against prostitution in part with this end in mind, scoring a collaborative success with the 1898 Vagrancy Act. At the end of the period, it embarked on another multi-organizational effort alongside the JAPGW to lobby for a law to tighten the Vagrancy Act and the 1885 CLA Act, with the express intention of combatting trafficking, although its efforts would not come to fruition until 1912 when a new CLA Bill was passed.<sup>78</sup> Further, the NVA had long called for the expulsion of the foreign men within the country it perceived to be orchestrating and/or living off organized prostitution. The Special Bill that the Association prepared in 1897 specifically contained provisions for the expulsion of 'alien bullies or souteneurs' and the clauses of the Aliens Act it drafted were also tailored to deal with 'vicious male aliens' involved in procurement, pimping or brothel-

keeping.<sup>79</sup> As the Aliens Bill progressed through Parliament, NVA members, again providing fuel for anti-alienist propaganda, emphasised to the public the dire need for the state to deal with not only ‘vicious foreign women’ but also the ‘greedy rascals, [the] foreigners who live on immorality, and decoy, and cheat, and enslave these unfortunate and unhappy young women’.<sup>80</sup>

Given the nature of sex trafficking as a highly covert transnational crime with distinctly fewer perpetrators or profiteers than victims, the NVA’s domestic fight against the coadjutors of sex trafficking was principally a relatively narrow legal and bureaucratic one rather than the broad-based vigilance-orientated agenda pursued by the Guild. Most of the Association’s everyday efforts in this direction involved having proceedings brought against individual offenders by investigating claims of their wrongdoing, and passing on information that might lead to arrests. Once again the Association worked in an unofficial, auxiliary capacity with the ‘sympathy’ and necessary co-operation of officialdom. Whereas prior to the International Agreement, individual police officers were the Association’s point of contact, the appointment of Frederick Bullock as the country’s Central Authority on Trafficking provided NVA members with a ‘direct line’ to summoning state action. As Coote explained, ‘[b]y arrangement with the Authorities all information forwarded to this Committee concerning traffickers in, or passing through, London, is first investigated by the officers of the Association, and if the information obtained is considered to be of any legal value, it is at once forwarded to Mr F.S.Bullock...’.<sup>81</sup>

The Aliens Act did not alter the criminal law per se. However, that it made immigrants liable to expulsion upon conviction for predefined prostitution-related offences punishable only by imprisonment, endowed the NVA’s ‘grass-roots’ legal work with an added significance and, most likely, provided more impetus for Association members to undertake such business.<sup>82</sup> Trafficking, after all, was to them a ‘foreign outrage’ against Britain. In May 1904, the NVA enthused when the Aliens Bill was introduced into the Commons, ‘we were glad and encouraged to find that the Government had dealt with the Vicious Alien in the most satisfactory and effectual manner...[I]f the clauses relating to the Vicious Alien become law, we shall, in the future, have very little trouble to keep our streets free from these parasites of evil [foreign souteneurs]’.<sup>83</sup>

Despite this initial optimism, the NVA's confidence in the government's implementation of the measure soon started to waver and, it seems, encouraged the feeling among Association members that the state was not pulling its weight in their quasi-official working relationship to effectively suppress trafficking. In June 1906 Coote 'drew attention to the fact that the provisions of the Aliens Act, with regard to the repatriation of undesirable aliens [men and women], were not being put into force' at the Royal Commission on the Metropolitan Police in 1906, and had his concerns passed to the Home Secretary.<sup>84</sup> Further, at the NVA's 'Coming of Age' celebrations in 1906, Percy Bunting not only acknowledged that the police 'are very cautious, and not too rapid' in bringing the Aliens Act into operation and expressed his hope for the cooperation of borough councils in bringing the measure to bear, but also, after discussing the 'bad characters who infest our shores', implied that there was still a long way to go before the Association had the necessary backing from officialdom: 'Let us hope that we shall have the complete confidence of the public and of public authorities, and the earnest support also of those who lead society...I believe the standard of the personal character of public men is rising, and we expect, and shall have, their support'.<sup>85</sup> This sense that state assistance to the NVA was insufficient regarding tackling those perpetrating and profiting from trafficking, as well as 'vicious foreign women' predated the Aliens Act, suggesting that the implementation of the Act did little to sway members' opinion. In Mrs Fawcett's aforementioned 1904 plea she highlighted that the NVA had also to deal with 'the sturdy ruffians whose trade is in vice...These men are posted up in all that the law allows them to do, and they know quite well how little real authority is at the back of those who are doing this very difficult work. I cannot but feel that it would aid and help them [Association members] if they had an additional backing from the State in this important matter'.<sup>86</sup>

The NVA's domestic anti-trafficking work as a whole following Britain's signing of the International Agreement is testament to the great inclination and efforts on the part of the Association to operate hand in hand with the state and the determination of the government to keep the Association at arm's length when significant power was at stake. The government was quick to enforce the Agreement. It installed and supported a Central Authority on trafficking which struck a cordial working relationship

with the British National Committee. It sent representatives to the major meetings of the International Congress. Notably, it happily accepted the NVA's offer to carry out the logistically-challenging vigilance programme prescribed by the Agreement on its behalf, 'unofficially assist' in securing the repatriation of prostitutes, and provide advice regarding the Aliens Bill. However, when the NVA requested more authority or official co-operation or a larger role in state-led anti-trafficking affairs that did not directly benefit the government, that risked complicating rather than facilitating policies and procedures, and/or that threatened to compromise the authority of government officials, it was diplomatically refused. Throughout the period, the Association remained a convenient helpmate of the government with an allocated niche at the margins of state affairs, commended, recognised, used for its worth, but kept in its place. It did not, however, give up trying to transgress the invisible boundaries marked out for it, retaining its faith in state cooperation and multi-government accord as the root of the solution to trafficking, and heaping praise on the 'attitude of the government' and the 'harmonious relationship' it had with the Central Authority on trafficking in its annual reports.<sup>87</sup>

Logistical limitations and selective state apathy aside, it is reasonable to suggest that the NVA devoted disproportionately less of its practical efforts to targeting those who orchestrated and/or profited from sex trafficking, and, through its actions, impinged upon the liberty of the potential victims of, or women involved in organized prostitution as opposed to that of their exploiters. The way in which the NVA represented 'the trafficker' and his accomplices might provide some clues as to why the Association perpetuated this uneven focus. As we have seen, the NVA pulled no punches when describing what was wrong with the foreign men they believed to assume these roles. They were, to it, 'greedy rascals', 'sturdy ruffians' or 'parasites of evil', the sort of person 'compared with whom', as Lord Aberdeen put it, 'an ordinary pickpocket may be in the moral scale, relatively, a gentleman'.<sup>88</sup> However, they were simultaneously painted as members of some kind of underground criminal/corporate elite, whose business model (as opposed to its business practices) was unexceptional save for the fact that it was highly impressive and profitable. As Percy Bunting bluntly told the First International Congress, '[n]o one can be surprised that while vice is practised and money can be made out of it, it should give rise

to a trade, carried on by third persons, *entrepreneurs* and their agents, or that the trade should, with the facilities of modern civilization, have command of large capital and resources'.<sup>89</sup> Association members often went further when outlining the acumen of the 'businessmen' of the trafficking industry. Vice President of the JAPGW and NVA member, Arthur R. Moro told the First Congress how traffickers and their allies were 'often very rich and well versed in the law' and, later in 1910, even referred to their 'extraordinary intelligence, energy, ingenuity and enterprise' at an international conference of his Jewish colleagues.<sup>90</sup> The trafficker and his comrades were thus suggested to inhabit a perfected corporate, as well as a morally fetid world, whilst the sexual exploitation they wrought was given the air of a shrewdly-conducted business deal, albeit with singularly dubious consequences. Perhaps more worryingly, as elite international criminal/capitalists they were suggested to be part of an untouchable clandestine enterprise that ought to be brought to book by the Association and the state, but that could never realistically be eradicated wholesale.

The NVA was to an extent disempowered by its lack of official recognition and state endorsed authority. However, the way in which it represented and treated the male and female participants of sex trafficking in its core anti-trafficking agenda conveyed an influential and damaging message about how blame should be apportioned for the sexual exploitation wrought through sex trafficking. Whether intentionally or not, through its words and actions as the country's, if not the world's, leading authority on sex trafficking, the NVA presented to the public a misrepresentative hierarchy of culpability in which it morally ranked the various foreign protagonists it deemed central to the crime of trafficking. By casting her 'predicament' as self-inflicted on account of her inborn proclivity to sell sex, and directing extensive practical efforts towards ensuring her expulsion from the country, it positioned the impoverished 'foreign prostitute' at the pinnacle of the hierarchy as somehow the most morally egregious and culpable participant in the 'alien crime' of sex trafficking. Below her, it placed the young, working-class foreign female traveller, by representing her as apparently prone to fall into vice at the hands of a procurer due to her credulity, misguided desire for liberty and 'unprotected' state, and rolling-out an extensive practical surveillance programme to mitigate her shortcomings. Finally, at the bottom of the hierarchy it situated

the wealthy foreign orchestrator or profiteer of trafficking, casting him as a wicked yet nevertheless cunning and masterful propagator of vice, and dealing with him by checking information and pulling on the long arm of the law. Taking ‘foreignness’ as a determinant of natural inferiority, the female as the weaker sex and the guilty party in (elective) prostitution, and poverty as a relative indicator of moral calibre and worth, the NVA with its majority of ‘respectable British men’, thus seemingly obfuscated the distinction between victims and perpetrators of sexual exploitation in their anti-trafficking work.

Dangerous allure was attached to the trafficker and his accomplices as men, and dangerous contempt attached to the women they exploit, with ‘male agency’ in sexual exploitation painted as somehow more acceptable than ‘female agency’ in the sale of sex, and women assumed incapable of selling bodies that were not their own.

The NVA was a product of its time. The assumptions that informed the implicit moral ranking it undertook through its anti-trafficking programme were neither incongruous nor overtly inflammatory in a society in which derogatory ideas of working-class morality and working-class women’s financial and sexual independence, in which prejudices surrounding ‘the prostitute’, and ‘the alien’ or ‘the foreigner’, had considerable currency. What the Association did do, however, is provide an object lesson in why these assumptions ‘made sense’ and, at least regarding ‘the immigration question’, publically present a case for their extension. This, it might be suggested, made the implementation of a more progressive and sympathetic anti-trafficking strategy more difficult.

### **Conclusion:**

Addressing the Fourth International Congress in 1913, the Earl of Aberdeen speculated on the subject of the inauguration of the anti-trafficking movement fourteen years earlier:

The modern historian calmly surveying those distant events may discuss whether the efforts were worth making, and whether the zeal was well founded. But no future historian of our time will be able to question the need and the worth of this crusade,

for it depends not on opinion, or creed, or policy, but upon the eternal distinction between right and wrong and the sacred claims of justice and humanity.<sup>91</sup>

The NVA played a key role in making anti-trafficking a serious international cause. It helped unite existing, and created new, like-minded groups, forming a global network to rival those established by the trafficker. It raised public awareness of the severity of sex trafficking and drew into its cause sectors of religious and civil society that had previously overlooked the sex crimes perpetrated by, and upon, their number. It, albeit with questionable outcomes, rolled out preventive initiatives of unprecedented scale and, with the JAPGW, pressured what was a reluctant government to review its indifference about the anti-trafficking cause, making considerable ground in bringing the voluntary sector closer to the state in the fight against trafficking. At least structurally, it influenced the League of Nation's global initiative against trafficking that was rolled out following the First World War, as well as the global initiatives conducted today by the United Nations. The achievements of the Association in orchestrating and overseeing the International Bureau are significant.

However, the Earl of Aberdeen's pronouncement seems somewhat ironic in light of the NVA's response to sex trafficking. For, above all, it was upon the 'opinion', 'creed', and 'policy' of the British men of the Association that the group's early domestic and international anti-trafficking initiatives depended. As such, it was often according to a selective definition of 'justice and humanity' that the initiatives were often carried out. Hindsight is easier than foresight, and distinctly easier than uniting nations for the first time in a state-recognised body, in the face of significant government opposition, to fight one of the world's most insidious and destructive forms of organized crime. However, it bears mentioning that, as the leading force in a new international anti-trafficking movement, the NVA (as the British National Committee), could have spoken out about, and acted upon the need to combat sex trafficking as a crime rooted in poverty and mass migration that victimizes regardless of ethnicity or initial consent, the need to provide succour to and rehabilitate every woman and girl subjected to such abuse (rather than merely overseeing their repatriation), and the need to afford unconditional and apposite assistance to those vulnerable to being abused. Moreover, it could have promoted and created an

international taskforce to fight trafficking founded on equal participation that formed alliances with like-minded worldwide movements.

Yet it chose a different course. The Association elected to make statements and take actions based on a misdiagnosis of sex trafficking which, feeding off strands of xenophobia, misogyny and prejudice against the working-classes in the culture of the day, conveyed the idea of ‘guilty victimhood’ and culminated in repressive measures against the women and girls most prone to sexual exploitation ahead of preventive measures directed at their exploiters. Binding its domestic anti-trafficking policy tightly to ‘the immigration question’ and popular anti-alienism, it cast trafficking as a foreign problem that required principally unilateral-national rather than international action. It thereby set a questionable precedent as the British National Committee within the Congress (although evidence suggests that there was significant pre-existing consensus among Congress members over the direction of domestic anti-trafficking policy).<sup>92</sup> Moreover, by insisting on retaining a position of dominance for itself and Britain in the Congress, the NVA via the National Committee, created certain resentment within the new movement which hampered the multi-national accord required to successfully combat trafficking at some key moments.

This said, Britain was not the only country in the Congress to deem itself entitled to a position of superiority, that harboured prejudices towards ‘the foreigner’, or in which certain derogatory ideas of women and the working classes had currency. The question is, would another country have done much differently if it were to have taken upon itself the mantle of Congress leader? Together with the acclaim the NVA deserves for its brainchild of the International Congress, we should not overlook its shortcomings as a founding father, but then, nor should we assume that fatherhood is easy.

With the League of Nations co-opting the fight against trafficking into its agenda shortly after its inception following World War One and the absorption of the League’s anti-trafficking operations into the United Nations, the NVA via the Bureau went on to assume an increasingly collaborative and consultative role in the worldwide anti-trafficking movement. Its members continued for a time to wield influence in global anti-trafficking structures. To the disdain and frustration of those members of the

League of Nation's dedicated Traffic in Women and Children Committee who espoused a liberal feminist and abolitionist stance, it was the social purity philosophies of the Bureau delegates on the Committee that dominated proceedings and found expression in the League's conventions on trafficking that were adopted.<sup>93</sup> However, the Bureau's ideological and practical influence waned progressively. The United Nations' 1949 convention on trafficking criminalized all procurement, regardless of consent, within or across national frontiers thus effectively undermining state regulated prostitution, and required signatory states to implement the measures in their colonies. Britain and other prime countries in anti-trafficking circles failed to ratify the measure not least owing to the 'colonial clause', and the Bureau, which to its credit supported the convention, lost the cooperation of the British government.<sup>94</sup> Suffering increasing financial and organizational disorder, the Bureau reduced its diplomatic remit to encouraging states to ratify the 1949 Convention. During the 1960s, it even struggled to retain its consultative role to the United Nations. It disbanded in the early 1970s, a victim of the progress of the very movement that it had conceived.<sup>95</sup>

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1 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act, 48 & 49 Victoria, c.69. See Judith R. Walkowitz (1982) *Male Vice and Feminist Virtue: feminism and the politics of prostitution in nineteenth-century Britain*, *History Workshop Journal*, 13, p.85.

2 William Alexander Coote (1916) *A Romance of Philanthropy: being a record of some of the principal incidents connected with the exceptional thirty years' work of the National Vigilance Association* (London: National Vigilance Association), pp.20-4; William Alexander Coote (1910) *A Vision and its Fulfilment: being a history of the origin of the work of the National Vigilance Association for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic* (London: National Vigilance Association), p. 4. [Hereafter National Vigilance Association will be referred to as NVA].

3 Obituary: Sir Percy Bunting, *The Times*, 24 July 1911, p.11; Ray Strachey (1931) *Millicent Garrett Fawcett* (London: J. Murray).

4 See Alan F. Turberfield (2003) *John Scott Lidgett: archbishop of British Methodism?* (London: Epworth Press), pp.11-13; Death of Mrs Ormiston Chant, *The Times*, 17 February 1923, p.12.

5 Coote, *A Romance*, pp.20-4.

6 *Ibid*, pp.22-3.

7 Obituary: William Alexander Coote, *The Times*, 28 October 1919, p.40; *Vigilance Record* [hereafter VR], November 1919, pp.81-94.

8 Coote, *A Romance*, pp.18-19. Coote was originally appointed joint Honorary Secretary of the NVA.

9 Percy Bunting cited in Coote, *A Vision*, pp.178-9.

10 NVA *Sixth Annual Report*, 1891, pp. 5, 15; NVA *Ninth Annual Report*, 1894, pp. 1-2; NVA *Thirteenth Annual Report*, 1898, p.18. Not all members of the NVA pursued strictly conservative moral reform projects. A minority of members including Ellice Hopkins, as Sue Morgan suggests, also engaged in speaking publically about, and educating young women about sex using a more radical (albeit sometimes conceptually confused) ideological framework. Sue Morgan (1999) *A Passion for Purity: Ellice Hopkins and the politics of gender in the late-Victorian church* (Bristol: University of Bristol), pp. 26-66, 77-8.

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- 11 See Katherine Mullin (2003) *James Joyce, Sexuality and Social Purity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp.6-11; Barry J. Faulk (2004) *Music Hall & Modernity: the late-Victorian discovery of popular culture* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press), pp. 142-87.
- 12 Lucy Bland (1995) *Banishing the Beast: English feminism and sexual morality, 1885-1914* (London: Tauris Parke), pp. 97-110, 297-304. See Frank Mort (1987) *Dangerous Sexualities: medico-moral panics in England since 1830* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul), pp.143-5.
- 13 Mullin, *James Joyce*, pp.66-7. Helen J. Self (2003) *Prostitution, Women and the Misuse of the Law: the fallen daughters of Eve* (London: Frank Cass), pp.42-6.
- 14 Edward J. Bristow (1977) *Vice and Vigilance: purity movements in Britain since 1700* (London: Rowman & Littlefield), p.88; Julia Laite (2012) *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens: commercial sex in London, 1885-1960* (London: Palgrave Macmillan), pp.100-15; Paula Bartley (1999) *Prostitution, Prevention and Reform in England, 1860-1914* (London: Routledge), pp. 170-3. See Edward J. Bristow (1982) *Prostitution and Prejudice: the Jewish fight against white slavery* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), pp.37-9.
- 15 Stephanie A. Limoncelli (2010) *The Politics of Trafficking: the first international movement to combat the sexual exploitation of women* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), pp.42-70.
- 16 Dyer published an influential pamphlet on the traffic in English girls, after a trip to Brussels during which he confirmed that minors were being detained in licensed brothels with official collusion. See Alfred Stace Dyer (1880) *The European Slave Trade in English Girls* (Dyer Brothers: London, 1880).
- 17 See *London Committee for the Exposure and Suppression of the Traffic in English Girls for the Purposes of Continental Prostitution Third Report*, 1881-3.
- 18 NVA (n.d.) *To Young Ladies Going Abroad: a friendly warning* (London: NVA), p.3.
- 19 See First Minute Book of the Executive Committee, 20 July 1886, 7 December 1886 & 19 June 1888, Records of the NVA, London, The Women's Library@LSE [hereafter TWL], 4NVA/1/1/01; VR, January 1887, p.6; VR, February 1888, p.91.

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20 Second Minute Book of the Executive Committee, 30 November 1897 in Records of the NVA, TWL, 4NVA/1/1/02.

21 First Minute Book of the Executive Committee, 19 July 1887 & 26 July 1887, Records of the NVA, TWL, 4NVA/1/1/01.

22 Compiled using data in The Argentine National Committee, International Bureau Country Files, Records of the International Bureau for Suppression of Traffic in Persons [hereafter International Bureau], TWL, 4IBS/3/003.

23 For illustrative case histories of women trafficked to and/or from Britain see *NVA Fourteenth – Twenty-Fourth Annual Reports*, 1899 – 1909; *Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women [hereafter JAPGW] Annual Reports*, 1899–1909.

24 *Jewish Chronicle*, 4 July 1913, p.28.

25 Coote, *A Vision*, pp.21-2.

26 *Idem.*; Minutes with Case Committee Reports, 17 December 1900, Papers of the JAPGW, Jewish Care Archives, Hartley Library, University of Southampton, MS173, 2/2/5. The JAPGW persuaded the Rothschild family to provide contacts for Coote across Europe and funding for the Congress.

27 See (1905) *International Agreement for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic. Signed at Paris, May 18, 1904* (London, HMSO).

28 Petra de Vries, in an excellent study of abolitionism in the Netherlands, observes this ‘shift from a wider social movement in which women’s rights were articulated to a campaign for more limited legal goals’ in the country’s anti-trafficking campaign. Petra de Vries (2008) Josephine Butler and the Making of Feminism: international abolitionism in the Netherlands, 1870-1914, *Women’s History Review*, 17 (2), pp.257-77.

29 Percy Bunting cited in *VR*, July 1910, p.51.

30 Judith R. Walkowitz (1982) *Prostitution and Victorian Society: women, class and the state* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) esp. pp.90-136; Paul McHugh (1980) *Prostitution and Victorian Social Reform* (London: Croom Helm), esp. pp.125-62, 234-58.

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- 31 Josephine Butler to Miss Priestman, 5 November 1894, Josephine Butler Letters Collection, TWL, 3JBL/33/45.
- 32 NVA (1899) *The White Slave Trade: transactions of the international congress on the white slave trade* (London: NVA), pp.14-6.
- 33 Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance*, p.177.
- 34 VR, December 1904, p.5.
- 35 First Minute Book, 25 July 1900, Records of the International Bureau, TWL, 4IBS/1/1.
- 36 First Minute Book, 22 June 1899, 23 June 1899, 24 June 1899, 30 June 1900 in *ibid.*
- 37 Coote, *A Vision*, pp.140-44; First Minute Book, 25 July 1900, 8 November 1900 in *ibid.*
- 38 First Minute Book, 17 April 1905, 10 November 1905 in *ibid.*
- 39 See Coote, *A Romance*, p.213.
- 40 *International Agreement*, pp.7-8.
- 41 The Agreement's remaining articles applied to contracting governments' internal affairs.
- 42 VR, April 1903, pp.26-30; Coote, *A Romance*, pp.199-200.
- 43 VR, February 1904, pp.1-6.
- 44 Coote, *A Romance*, pp.205-7; Coote, *A Vision*, p.137.
- 45 VR, February 1904 p.4; William Alexander Coote (1910) *Paper Read...at the International Conference on Railway Station Work at Berne, June 1910* (London: NVA), pp.3-6.
- 46 VR, February 1904, p.3.
- 47 NVA *Twenty-Third Annual Report*, 1908, p.21.
- 48 Sally Ledger (1997) *Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), pp.47-8.
- 49 VR, July 1904, p.2.
- 50 VR, December 1903, p.90.
- 51 VR, July 1908, p.56.
- 52 See Dyer, *The European*.

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53 Mrs Henry Fawcett cited in *VR*, July 1904, p.2.

54 See Coote, *A Romance*, p.202.

55 *Ibid.*, p.198.

56 *VR*, February 1904, p.2.

57 *International Agreement*, p.8

58 *VR*, February 1904, p.8; Fourth Minute Book of the Executive Committee, 29 November 1904, Records of the NVA, TWL, 4NVA/1/1/04.

59 *VR*, December 1903, p.90.

60 Arnold White (1899) *The Modern Jew* (New York: Frederick A Stokes), pp. xii, 180-1. See Daniel Pick (1996) *Faces of Degeneration: a European disorder, c.1848 – c.1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp.214-5.

61 Arnold White was one of a minority of anti-alienists to bring Antisemitic ideas to his diatribes. Most attention in the debate over immigration was directed at ‘the alien’ rather than ‘the Jew’. See David Feldman (1989) The Importance of Being English. Jewish Immigration and the Decay of Liberal England, in D. Feldman & G. Stedman Jones (Eds.), *Metropolis, London: histories and representations since 1800* (London: Routledge), pp.56-84.

62 *Idem.*

63 See 1905 Aliens Act, 5 Edward VII, c.13.

64 *VR*, May 1904, p.3

65 *NVA Fourteenth Annual Report*, 1899, p.23; *NVA Twelfth Annual Report*, 1897, p.6; *VR*, December 1903, p.91.

66 *NVA Twenty-Second Annual Report*, 1907, p.6. As time progressed, the NVA would form more of a habit of making ‘recommendations for deportation’ to the Home Office regarding foreign women. See Fifth Minute Book of the Executive Committee, 27 January 1914, Records of the NVA, TWL, 4NVA/1/1/05.

67 Limoncelli, *The Politics of Trafficking*, pp.42-94.

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68 VR, February 1904, p.2.

69 Coote, *A Romance*, p.202.

70 Ibid. pp.202-3. The citation comes from a resolution regarding repatriations passed at the Fifth International Congress in 1913 that was inspired by Coote's proposal to the government from 1905, and led to the NVA gaining more state sanction in repatriations. NVA (1913) *The Fifth International Congress for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic* (London: NVA).

71 Fourth Minute Book of the Executive Committee, 31 October 1905, Records of the NVA, TWL, 4NVA/1/1/04.

72 Fourth Minute Book of the Executive Committee, 2 January 1906 in *ibid.* Magistrates had asked the NVA's help in isolated repatriations for some time. See Fourth Minute Book of the Executive Committee, 31 January 1905 in *ibid.*

73 Evidence of William Alexander Coote (1903) *The Royal Commission on Alien Immigration, Minutes of Evidence*, Vol. 2 (London: HMSO) [hereafter *RCAI Minutes*], pp.425-9.

74 See Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, pp.69-89.

75 VR, May 1904, p.3.

76 David Feldman (1994) *Englishmen and Jews: social relations and political culture 1840-1914* (Newhaven, CT & London: Yale University Press), pp.282-5.

77 *International Agreement*, p.7.

78 Fourth Minute Book of the Executive Committee, 30 June 1905, Records of the NVA, TWL, 4NVA/1/1/04.

79 NVA *Twelfth Annual Report*, 1897, p.6; VR, December 1903, p.91.

80 VR, February 1904, p.12.

81 Coote, *A Vision*, p.136.

82 The prostitution-related offences referred to in the Aliens Act were those defined in the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act and 1898 Vagrancy Act, relating to brothel-keeping, procurement and other sexual

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offences against women and minors, and living off immoral earnings. See 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act, 48 & 49 Victoria, c.69; 1898 Vagrancy Act, 61 & 62 Victoria, c.39.

83 VR, May 1904, p.3.

84 First Minute Book, 27 June 1906, Records of the International Bureau, TWL, 4IBS/1/1.

85 Percy Bunting cited in VR, May 1906, p.38.

86 Mrs Henry Fawcett cited in VR, July 1904, p.2

87 See NVA *Twenty-Second Annual Report*, 1907, pp.16-7.

88 Lord Aberdeen cited in VR, February 1904, p.10.

89 Percy Bunting cited in NVA (1899) *The White Slave Trade*, p.66.

90 Arthur Moro in *ibid.*, p.148; JAPGW (1910) *Jewish International Conference on the Suppression of the Traffic in Girls and Women, 1910* (London: JAPGW), pp.31,140.

91 VR, July & August 1913, p.51.

92 See Limoncelli, *The Politics of Trafficking*, pp.42-70.

93 Carol A. Miller (1995) The Social Section and Advisory Committee on Social Questions of the League of Nations, in P.Weindling (Ed.) *International Health Organizations and Movements, 1918-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp.154-75

94 Limoncelli, *The Politics of Trafficking*, pp.42-94, 144-156.

95 Meeting of the Committee Volume 2, 26 June 1935–12 February 1953, Records of the International Bureau, TWL, 4BNC/A/2.