



Instructions for authors, subscriptions and further details:

<http://hse.hipatiapress.com>

Sex Trafficking of Women. Civil Society Activism Against Sexual Slavery Between the 19th and the Early 20th Century

Guiomar Merodio¹, Elena Duque²

- 1) Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia. España
- 2) Universidad de Barcelona. España

Date of publication: June, 2021

Edition period: June 2021- October 2021

To cite this article: Merodio, G., & Duque, E. (2021). Sex Trafficking of Women. Civil Society Activism Against Sexual Slavery Between the 19th and the Early 20th Century. *Social and Education History*, 10(2), 109-133. <https://dx.doi.org/10.17583/hse.2021.7043>

To link this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17583/hse.2021.7043>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

The terms and conditions of use are related to the Open Journal System and to [Creative Commons Attribution License](#)(CCAL).

Sex Trafficking of Women. Civil Society Activism Against Sexual Slavery Between the 19th and the Early 20th Century

Guiomar Merodio
*Universidad Nacional de
Educación a Distancia*

Elena Duque
Universidad de Barcelona

Abstract

The struggle against human trafficking is not unique to our time. Nowadays, social initiatives and policies are greatly influenced by civil society activism against sexual slavery that emerged between the 19th and the early 20th century. This article presents an analysis and selection of historical landmarks from that period that achieved social and political impact in different countries such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Spain. To do so we followed different strategies including the review of scientific literature and relevant academic historical databases, the examination of theoretical contributions from intellectuals, social reformers and feminist activists from that time, and we also searched for international and national legislation from the early 20th century. Findings show a) the influence of the transatlantic anti-slavery movement in the rise of the feminist movement; b) the evolution of the civil society struggle against sexual exploitation within the feminist movement; c) the arrival of the anti-sex trafficking movement in Spain; d) the political impact of early civil society organizations against sex trafficking in the articulation of policies at the beginning of the 20th century. To acknowledge these historical legacies can contribute to the development of current anti-sex trafficking initiatives.

Keywords: Sex trafficking; anti-slavery movement; civil society activism; women's rights

Trata de Mujeres. El Activismo de la Sociedad Civil contra la Esclavitud Sexual entre el Siglo XIX y Principios del XX

Guiomar Merodio
*Universidad Nacional de
Educación a Distancia*

Elena Duque
Universidad de Barcelona

Resumen

La lucha contra la trata de seres humanos no es exclusiva de nuestro tiempo. Hoy en día, las iniciativas y políticas sociales están muy influenciadas por el activismo de la sociedad civil contra la esclavitud sexual que surgió entre el siglo XIX y principios del XX. En este artículo se presenta un análisis y una selección de hitos históricos de ese período que lograron un impacto social y político en diferentes países como Estados Unidos de América, Reino Unido y España. Para ello se han seguido diferentes estrategias que incluyen la revisión de literatura científica y de bases de datos históricas académicas relevantes, el examen de las aportaciones teóricas de intelectuales, reformistas sociales y activistas feministas de la época, así como la búsqueda de legislación internacional y nacional de principios del siglo XX. Los resultados muestran a) la influencia del movimiento transatlántico antiesclavista en el auge del movimiento feminista; b) la evolución de la lucha de la sociedad civil contra la explotación sexual dentro del movimiento feminista; c) la llegada del movimiento contra la trata España; d) el impacto político de las primeras organizaciones de la sociedad civil contra la trata con fines de explotación sexual en la articulación de políticas a principios del siglo XX. El reconocimiento de estos legados históricos puede contribuir al desarrollo de iniciativas actuales contra la trata.

Palabras clave: Trata con fines de explotación sexual; movimiento contra la esclavitud; activismo de la sociedad civil; derechos de las mujeres

Overcoming trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation is a global priority in democratic societies. At an international level, since the nineteenth century and up to the present time, both women's rights and feminism movement, as the scientific community, civil society or public institutions, among others, have shown a growing interest in addressing the underlying causes that originate and perpetuate human trafficking, a heinous violation of human rights worldwide (Merodio, Duque & Peña, 2020; Melgar, Merodio, Duque & Ramis-Salas, 2021; Ranea-Triviño, 2020). Goal five of the Sustainable Development Goals of United Nations is dedicated to gender equality, which aims to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls in public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual exploitation. In the world, childhood accounts for 21% of the total number of victims of trafficking. In total, the ILO estimated that in 2016, 3.8 million adults and 1 million children suffered sexual exploitation (International Labor Organization, 2017).

Historically, civil society organizations, especially women's organizations, have played a significant role in tackling sex-trafficking. In the last decades, civil society is increasingly committed against sex-trafficking. However, this is not unique to our time, on the contrary, current worldwide initiatives and policies are partially a consequence of the advancements and achievements pushed by the anti-slavery and feminist movement from the mid-nineteenth century to the first decades of the twentieth century. There are little historical studies on this issue particularly on the potential insights that these analyses could provide for understanding their present legacies on politics, human rights and social issues such as gender and race (Limoncelli, 2010).

In this theoretical article, we gather the contributions of some of the first and most influential intellectuals and activists in favour of women's rights and against trafficking from the 19th and the early 20th century. Also, we present a review of a selection of some historical landmarks and its influences in the articulation of the anti-sex trafficking movement in different countries at the beginning of the 20th century. The final purpose of this article is to make visible these historical contributions, not only about what they had achieved and how, but also, to acknowledge their social and educational legacies so that might inspire anti-sex trafficking policies, organizations, and campaigns nowadays.

To answer this aim, we first reviewed the existing scientific literature on Web of Science concerning the legacy of trans-Atlantic anti-slavery

resistance, women's rights, and feminism movement for the abolition of sexual slavery from the nineteenth to early twentieth century. Secondly, we examined theoretical contributions from intellectuals, social reformers, and feminist activists in defence of women's rights and for the eradication of sex trafficking. Thirdly, we looked for international and national legislation from the early 20th century at the United Nations and European Commission databases, and at the historical archives of the Spanish Congress of Deputies. Lastly, we also searched for historical information specialized on all these issues at prestigious academic digital resources like the Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition at Yale University, or the library archives of the National Women's History Museum, or the American Social History Project research centre at The City University of New York.

This paper is divided into four main sections. The first one delves into the influence of the transatlantic anti-slavery movement in the emergence of the early feminist and women's rights activism. The second one gathers the evolution of the struggle against sexual exploitation within the feminist movement in the 19th and the early 20th centuries. The third section focus on how the anti-sex trafficking abolitionist movement arrived in Spain and the social and political impact it had in the first decades of the 20th century. The fourth and last section analyses the political impact of the early civil society organizations against sex trafficking in the articulation of international policies at the beginning of the 20th century.

The Influence of the Transatlantic Anti-Slavery Movement in the Emergence of Women's Rights Activism and the Feminism Movement

Across countries, many people participated and contributed to the abolitionist crusade. The history of this movement is immensely rich due to its diversity, and to the impact they reached in the society of the time and the future. Abolitionism was a democratic and radical movement in favour of the conquest of freedom and some civil rights for those labour enslaved. It began at the end of the 17th and the early 18th century. It succeeded thanks to the black resistance to slavery, and to the idealistic and, in many cases, the religious commitment of political activists, religious leaders, social reformists, women's groups and many others who opposed to the slave trade and slavery in different countries like Haiti, Cuba, France, UK, USA, among others (Bergad, 2007). The struggle against labour slavery influenced other

social movements that blossomed at that time. The participation of women in the anti-slavery movement fostered the beginning of the feminist movement in North America and Great Britain, then extending it to other western countries such as Germany and France (Sklar & Stewart, 2007).

At the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century, black and white women activists for the abolition of slavery also campaigned for the recognition of women's rights. Although there were differences in their claims and racism persisted among a part of white women activists' organizations. In the beginning, the cause focused on black male slaves, and black female slaves were not equally valued (hooks, 1981). Later, prominent black and white women activists played an essential role in advocating for the rights of women and against racism oppressions. Some of these activists understood both crusades as equally important and related. This demand divided part of the abolitionist movement in the United States and the United Kingdom. Most of the anti-slavery movement disagreed and argued that those were different claims and that the vindication of women's rights would divert the purposes of the abolitionist struggle. Most of the women who advocated against the slave trade and the slavery, leading important social campaigns from local and national associations and leagues, were despised by other black or white male anti-slavery activists (Sinha, 2017). However, other male activists such as the American abolitionist and social reformer William Lloyd Garrison, founder of the abolitionist newspaper "The Liberator" and the American Anti-Slavery Society, defended the joint struggle, arguing that abolitionism was a fight for human rights, including women's rights. In early 1832, The newspaper "The Liberator" started publishing a "Ladie's Department" column that included articles, poems and letters by and for women readers. This column was headed by the famous vignette in which a slave black woman in chains was kneeling and exclaiming *Am I not a Woman and a Sister?* (Brown, 1983).



Figure 1: Bourne, 1837.

This vignette might have had later inspired prominent women abolitionist leaders such as Sojourner Truth who delivered her famous speech “Ain't I a Woman?” at the Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio in 1851. Sojourner Truth defended the right of black women to vote for overcoming the submission to black men, and arguing that sexism and racial oppression were a threat to the freedom of black women. However, in 1870 with the Fifteenth Amendment to the United States, black men received the right to vote before women. Women were not guaranteed the right to vote until 1920. These differences between the struggled of black male suffrage and women suffrage placed black women activists in a difficult situation at that time (hooks, 1981).

In 1840 the first World Anti-Slavery Convention was held in London. It was organized by the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, a Quaker society. The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) were the first to ignite the abolition movement founding the Committee for the Abolition of Slave Trade in the U.K. in 1787 (Sinha, 2017). Anti-slavery reformers were greatly influenced by different religious beliefs. The first World Anti-Slavery Convention discussed largely on this issue advocating for the peaceful and the power of religion and moral values for promoting the abolition of labour slavery internationally (Maynard, 1960).

The American white abolitionists William Lloyd Garrison and Lucretia Mott, who was deeply religious and a minister of the Society of Friends, attended the World Anti-Slavery Convention on behalf of the American Anti-Slavery Society (Nash, 2006). From the beginning, the conference vetoed the admission of women. American abolitionists were previously divided

regarding the participation of women in the anti-slavery campaigns. Some of the conservative anti-slavery leaders in America were opposed. Still, many American women activists were appointed as representative delegates for attending the convention by different anti-slavery regional association across the United States. The organizing committee in London informed that only men were expected to attend the conference (Maynard, 1960). However, this did not prevent the participation of women activist, on the contrary. There were six women delegates, among which, the American white abolitionists leaders Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton who attended the convention and protested firmly against what they considered sex-based discrimination. Finally, the organizers let them attend the convention but only as spectators, they were segregated to the spectator's gallery from which they could only silently observe the conference standing. In solidarity, William Garrison joined them in the spectator's gallery reserved for women and did not intervene at the convention (McElroy & Kaminer, 2002). At that time, women were neither admitted at the business meetings of the English anti-slavery organizations in the U.K. (Stanton, Anthony, & Joslyn, 1887), although there were remarkable British Ladies' Society for the abolition of the slave trade and the slavery in the country. When the World Anti-Slavery Convention was coming to an end, a general meeting was organized in which Garrison delivered a speech advocating for woman's rights and universal suffrage (Maynard, 1960). After the convention, in protest the discrimination suffered and, in a context, favourable to the defence of women's rights that in the U.S. had begun at the decade of 1830, the abolitionists activists Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady resolved to hold a women's national convention (Hogan, 2008). Mott and Cady, together with other Abolitionists and campaigners for women's rights, Mary M'Clintock, Martha Coffin Wright and Jane Hunt, organized the historic Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. It was the first convention on the rights of women organized in the United States.

In the U.S., abolitionist women denounced the double oppression suffered by black women and Native American women. They also condemned the violence and abuse suffered by white plantation owners in the United States, including constant sexual coercion, rapes and sexual exploitation to which black women slaves were subjected, in addition to labour slavery (Sublette & Sublette, 2016; Baptist, 2001). The sexual exploitation of black women during slavery, including slave breeding that consisted in systematically forcing pregnancies through coerced sexual relations to increase the number of

enslaved people, contributed to the devaluation of black womanhood with sexist and stereotypical images regarding their sexuality that continued for years after slavery ended and yet persist in contemporary societies. When there were few numbers of black women in the American colonies, immigrant white women were also sexually forced to slave breeding with black male slaves by some white male planters in an attempt to increase the enslaved workforce without incurring the cost of purchase (hooks, 1981). African American women involvement was crucial for their own and others emancipation (Sinha, 2017), their activism was frequently heroic, like the involvement of courage black women leaders Harriet Tubman and Anna Murray-Douglass in the Underground Railroad. Alternatively, for instance, the schoolteacher Prudence Crandall, an African-American suffragist who opened the first school for African American girls. Crandall suffered threats and racist attacks, becoming imprisoned, and even the school was set on fire in 1834. Also, the black abolitionist Frances Ellen Watkins Harper delivered a crucial speech in the International Council of women in Washington in 1888, advocating for women suffrage. The black intellectual and activist Anna Cooper, who was born enslaved and was a domestic servant during childhood, in 1892 published “A voice from the south by a Black Woman of the South”. In this book, she advocated for the right to higher education for black women. Cooper’s contributions largely influenced black feminism and other intellectuals such as the African American sociologist W.E.B. DuBois (Bailey, 2009). Later, at the age of 65, Cooper earned a PhD in history from the Sorbonne in 1924 being the fourth African American doctorate women.

From different positions and with different levels of commitment, women activist abolitionists, both white and black, from different religions beliefs, social classes and ideologies, advocated for the emancipation of women under the thought that enslaved women had, above all, the right to freedom. Black women’s participation in the women’s movement contributed to the emergence of black women’s organizations against racism, segregation, advocating for social equality and for gaining political rights for black women (hooks, 1981). By being involved in the anti-slavery movement, black and white women learned about solidarity and international sisterhood (Cott, 1977), promoting a transatlantic alliance between women that sparked the development of friendships and the exchange of ideas and information to promote the abolitionist cause worldwide (Bader-Zaar, 2011). In the way, they learned and increased their activism in the feminist movement (Carpenter

&Moore, 2014). In turn, they also influenced other institutions such as churches, schools and organizations in which they participated, stirring up a profound and radical social, feminist and political transformation (Resink, 2007).

The Development of the Struggle Against Sexual Exploitation Within the Feminist and Abolitionist Movement in the 19th Century and the Early 20th Century

The transatlantic anti-slavery movement of the late 19th century was crucial for the development of women's rights activism and to denounce sexual slavery, founding voluntary organizations and driving this concern on the political national and international agenda of the moment (Limoncelli, 2010; McMillen, 2008; Sklar & Stewart, 2007). Both in the U.S. and the U.K., pioneer women in defence of the rights of women and anti-slavery activists also opposed to sexual slavery, seeking to protect sexually exploited women and girls, and criticizing the sexual double standards of that time and the behaviour of men clients of prostitution (Addams, 1914; Rosenberg, 1971; Tristan, 1840).

Mary Wollstonecraft contributed with arguments for the anti-sex slavery movement. In "A vindication of the rights for women" published in 1792, Wollstonecraft compared the slavery of sex with the enslavement of Africans (Sinha, 2017). This essay largely influenced other suffragists and abolitionists activists. Women pioneer and social reformers developed the first feminist analyzes of sexual exploitation and oppression, male violence and lack of women's rights over their bodies (Sklar & Stewart, 2007). In the U.S., The sisters Angelina and Sarah Grimké passionately defended women's freedom by seeking to stir consciences through eloquent speeches that included autobiographical references and testimonies about the horrors of slavery and sexual exploitation (Sklar & Stewart, 2007). The Grimké sisters and Angelina's husband, the abolitionist Theodore Dwight Weld, compelled the testimonies of thousands of enslaved black women who suffered sexual assaults and sexual exploitation in the book "American Slavery as it Is Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses" published in 1839 (Sklar, 2007). This book had a tremendous educational influence at that time, and the writer Harriet Beecher Stowe inspired her famous novel "Uncle Tom's Cabin" on this book (Brophy, 1995). African-American abolitionist pioneers also took a

stand against sexual exploitation. The abolitionist leader Sojourner Truth escaped slavery with her daughter in 1826 and dedicated her life to bravely vindicating the rights of black women. Sojourner Truth too belonged to the Magdalene Society, a reformist Methodist mission that provided alternatives to prostituted women (Wayne, 2014). At the end of the 19th and the early 20th century in the U.S., black women activists founded numerous organizations to help African American women migrants who arrived in the north of the U.S. and urban areas in precarious conditions and at risk for being trapped in prostitution or sex-trafficking networks. In 1897, the black social reformer and former enslaved Victoria Earle Matthews founded the White Rose Mission, and the white social worker Frances Kellor founded in 1902 the National League for the Protection of Colored Women. These and other similar organizations helped and prevented southern black women migrating north from being compelled to sexual exploitation when arriving to urban areas by traffickers or employment agencies in exchange of transportation (Robinson, 2006).

In 1839, Michael Ryan, a British doctor, was the first to describe women in prostitution using the term "white slaves" in one of the first studies published on prostitution (Peck, 2004). The study also made a comparison between the cities of London, Paris and New York, (Ryan, 1839). In 1833, after more than fifty years of anti-slavery activism, the British Parliament finally voted for the abolition of slavery in the British Empire. The analogy of the term "white slaves" was employed at that time to contrast it with the slave trade, which was broadly rejected by public opinion. Although the terms "white slavery" or "white slaves" were misleading since at that time, most sex trafficking victims were not white, but Asian (McCulloch, 2000).

Remarkable women activists who also attended the World Anti-Slavery Convention of 1840 in London were also involved in other social movements as feminism and advocating for social reforms. This is the case of the white suffragist Elizabeth Jesser Reid who later funded the Bedford College for Women in London. Three other British conference attendees were also involved in the feminist movement and had a prominent role in defense of prostituted women. Matilda Asurts Biggs created a shelter for prostituted women in Leicester (Crawford, 2003). Likewise, the suffragists and white abolitionists Caroline Ashurst Stansfeld and Eliza Wigham were involved in the reformation of U.K. prostitution laws (Jordan & Sharp, 2003).

120 Merodio & Duque – Sex Trafficking of Women

Between 1864 and 1869, four laws, known as the Contagious Diseases Acts (CDA), were passed by the British Parliament in an attempt to reduce venereal diseases in the armed services in the U.K. and the colonies. The CDA aimed to protect British male soldiers and white men in the colonies from venereal diseases rather than improving the health of prostituted women who were much more vulnerable (Levine, 2003). Instead, the CDA permitted the arrest of women suspected of being prostituted and perform required and non-consensual medical inspections on them under the threat of being imprisoned where they would be forced to further medical tests (Hamilton, 1978). The British social reformer Josephine Butler and the Ladies National Association funded in 1869, campaigned to repeal the CDA. Their activism promoted the abolitionist's feminist struggle against the so-called "white slavery". One of the first Butler's manifest on this issue was signed by 124 different women, among which there was Florence Nightingale, the funder of modern nursing (Jordan & Sharp, 2003). They managed to forge an epic movement of international scope that influenced the first conventions and laws against human trafficking in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Josephine Butler reported that some prostituted girls were between 10 and 14 years old. With their activism, they achieved a critical historical precedent in the U.K.: to raise the age of sexual consent to 16 years old.

The campaigns and activism of these pioneer British women were influenced by the rhetoric of the anti-slavery activism (Mayhall, 2003). The social reformists fought against the tolerance and the normalization of prostitution, making it a national concern. Also, their claims were closely linked to the claims of female suffrage (Walkowitz, 1980). The National Society for Women's Suffrage supported campaigns against the regulation of prostitution. Public campaigns against the "white slavery" in the U.S. and Europe had a huge media impact. Josephine Butler, along with other abolitionists, denounced men clients of prostitution, pointing them as responsible for the degradation, deception, exploitation and power exercised over victims. They also blamed traffickers as responsible for the abuse and deceit of the victims. From the beginning, their alignment, although conservative due to the historical context of the moment, demanded that the laws were aimed to persecute procuring instead of persecuting victims (Doezema, 2002). Josephine Butler's energetic campaign succeeded in repealing the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1886. In 1875, Butler funded The International Abolitionist Federation. The Federation was active in Europe,

North America and in the European colonies. It aimed to abolish regulation of prostitution by the states (Limoncelli, 2010). Butler had a significant influence on the second generation of European feminist reformers who continued working on this concern through the League of Nations in the period between the two world wars (Summers, 2006).

The philosopher and political economist John Stuart Mill also opposed to the Contagious Diseases Acts. Mill is best known for his role in arguing for women's equality at the British Parliament. In 1866 he presented a petition to the House of Commons in favour for women's suffrage. Furthermore, in a historic debate organized at the British Parliament in 1870, Mill defended that the Contagious Diseases Acts was debasing for women, particularly for poor women. Mill pointed to traffickers and defended that the state should act against them. With his approach, Mill argued that if the real objective was to end venereal diseases, then the focus should be placed on men clients (Mill, 1870/2011).

The feminist and socialist Flora Tristan published in 1840 her travel journal, "Promenades dans Londres ou l'aristocratie & les prolétaires anglais", in which she portrayed the social injustice that the working class suffered in industrial London in the first half of the 19th century, and which she witnessed during several trips between 1820 and 1830. Flora Tristan worked in factories and lived in the suburbs where workers and women were crowded together and denied the right to education and emancipation. Tristan, shocked by the high number of poor women in prostitution in Victorian England, devoted a chapter, "Public Women", to this issue in her diary. There she stated that "Prostitution is the most horrific sore produced by the unequal distribution of the goods of this world" (Tristan, 1840/ 2008: 113) The chapter denounced the slavery and prostitution suffered by poor women. For Tristan, prostitution was caused by the lack of alternatives, of access to private property, of work opportunities and decent wages, subject to the authority of the father or husband, and without educational opportunities.

The anarchist Emma Goldman also actively denounced the sexual exploitation and trafficking of women, considering it an extreme representation of the commodification produced by the capitalist system that forces and coerces the poorest, most vulnerable and migrant women. In the essay "The traffic in Women" (1910), Goldman denounced the double standard and argued that the underlying cause of sexual exploitation was capitalist exploitation and discrimination against women, pointing to

marriage, family and political economy (Vance, 2011). Goldman herself shared a prison cell with incarcerated women in prostitution; these relationships and personal experiences greatly influenced her feminism and anarchism (Rosen, 1983: 66). Her contributions include a transformative critique that goes beyond other reformist and moralistic views of sexually exploited women. Goldman denounced the sensationalism and social scaremongering of the public crusades against the "white slavery" of the media of the time, as well as the Victorian double standard, and called for the sexual emancipation and radical freedom of all women. The term "trafficking in women" derives precisely from Goldman's essay, "The traffic in Women" (Schneir, 1972, in Bernstein, 1999).

Just four years after the publication of Emma Goldman, the sociologist and founder of social work in the U.S., Jane Addams, who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931 and promoted the circle of "Women of the Chicago School" formed by prominent theorists who made significant contributions to sociology (Ritzer, 2011), published the "New Conscience and an Ancient Evil" (Addams, 1914). The book is one of the pioneering studies of the time which shows the perversion, dangers and vulnerability to which the most vulnerable women were subjected, as well as the ways of recruitment and deception through attractive proposals such as going to dances or illegal bars. Addams reviewed sentences and court cases, conducted fieldwork and was able to describe some of the entry routes and conditions of sexual exploitation, imposed debts, deprivation of liberty and subjugation to which women were subjected in different cities in the northeastern United States. Addams (1914), included several cases of young women deceived and trapped in sexual exploitation by fraudulent intimate relationships and false marriages such as the case of a Russian immigrant girl deceived and exploited by her partner who moved her away and social workers from the Hull House could not find her until a year of searching. Addams's book concludes affirming:

When the rights of human life have successfully asserted themselves in contrast to the rights of property, it will become impossible to sell the young and heedless into degradation. An age marked by its vigorous protest against slavery and class tyranny, will not continue to ignore the multitudes of women who are held in literal bondage (Addams, 1914: 217-218).

The Rise of the Anti-Sex Trafficking Abolitionist Movement in Spain, social and political legacies in the first decades of the 20th century

The feminist abolitionist movement even arrived in Spain. Concepción Arenal, a pioneer in the Spanish feminism, supported Josephine Butler's contributions and joined the first International Abolitionist Federation (Lacalzada de Mateo, 1991). Arenal was one of the first to extend the abolitionist cause in Spain, although the pressures she received and the loneliness in which she found herself defending this position limited her capacity for dedication to the cause (Guereña, 2003).

In Spain, between the Democratic Sexennial (1868) and the Second Republic (until 1935), most state initiatives were developed to regulate prostitution, allowing the registration of brothels and the mandatory health control of women under the pretext of preventing venereal diseases but which its latent function was persecution and criminalization. The 1903 enactment *El Patronato de la Represión de la Trata de Blancas* (The Patronage for the Repression of the White Slave Trade) was formulated in a European context of criminal persecution of trafficking. However, contrary to abolitionist tendencies, this Spanish enactment regulated prostitution and forced the registration of prostituted and sexually exploited women in the Registry of Hygiene. Looking at the Registry, it can be found records of women aged 15 years, having also found cases of children under 12 years. Historiography has attempted to draw a sociological profile of women in what was then called prostitution. In Spain, between 1869 and 1935, most women were very young, coming from rural areas, who had previously worked as domestic servants and maids. The data point to the link between domestic servitude, abuse, and sexual exploitation. Also, sexually exploited women were transported between brothels in different regions and cities (Guereña, 2003). In 1925 the League of Nations requested Paul Kinsie to travel to Spain to inform about prostitution and trafficking of women in the country. Kinsie found sex trafficking of women by Spanish and French traffickers from north harbours in La Coruña, Barcelona or Santander to countries of South America (Guereña, 2017).

In the wake of Concepción Arenal and other abolitionist activists, pioneering feminists such as Margarita Nelken and Clara Campoamor, among other suffragettes, opposed the 1903 *Patronato de la Represión de la Trata de Blancas* (The Patronage for the Repression of the White Slave Trade) and defended the inefficiency of the measures. They called for the creation of

educational opportunities and the promotion of alternative economic means for women. The first Spanish suffragette demonstration held on May 20th of 1921 went through the centre of Madrid to the Congress of Deputies where they delivered a manifesto with nine demands. The ninth demand consisted of the abolition of prostitution and its persecution (Ortiz, 2017). As in the international context, abolitionism in Spain was under the umbrella of suffragette demands. One year after the recognition of the right to vote for women, in January 1932, at the Republican Courts, Clara Campoamor vehemently defended the state abolition of the regulation of prostitution by appealing to feminist arguments and women's rights:

The law must take care of this aspect and declare, once and for all, that the regulations are abolished, because eighty per cent of the victims of prostitution are underage women. It is really cruelty and even a formidable irony to see our civil laws protecting minors, depriving them of their personality even to enter into a contract, to acquire money on loan, to dispose of property, to express their will, and that, on the other hand, they do not give them any protection when it comes to the freedom to treat their body as a commodity (Clara Campoamor, 1932).

The crisis of the regulatory model and increased international pressure from the abolitionist movement, along with the social and political activism of pioneering feminists and social reformers, led to the suspension of the *Patronato* that regulated prostitution, and the approval of the abolitionist decree of 1935. Years of debate and activism drove the penetration of abolitionist proposals in the Second Spanish Republic. However, this new promulgation did not have time to be developed due to the coup d'état of Francisco Franco and to the beginning of the Civil War. Likewise, the new decree included some controversial measures that placed Spain in a model closer to prohibitionism than to abolitionism (Rivas Arjona, 2012).

Since the end of the 19th century, anarchism movement also denounced the exploitation of prostituted women in Spain. The anarchist feminist movement stood in solidarity with women in prostitution, although a part of the anarchism did not go so far as to condemn consumption by male workers. In fact, except in some localities, the existence and consumption of prostitution services during the Civil War (1936-1939) on the Republican front by militiamen of different ideologies have been widely documented. During the Civil War, on the Republican front, red and red/black flags could

be found in brothels. Something that has been relatively erased from history is that venereal diseases due to consumption of prostitution increased so much that they caused almost as many casualties on the Republican front as bullets from Franco's army (Guereña, 2003).

On the contrary, during the Civil War, the Spanish feminist anarchist organization “Mujeres Libres” (Free Women), a grassroots working-class women’s group active between 1936 and 1939, promoted integral and professional education for prostituted women under an emancipatory and feminist abolitionist perspective that confronted the Second Spanish Republic laws on prostitution (Giner, Ruiz, Serrano & Valls, 2016). The organization did take an active position against regulated prostitution (Nash, 1975), considering prostitution as sexual and economic exploitation of women. They founded the “Laboratorios de la prostitución” an initiative for freeing women from prostitution throughout professional education for prostituted women from an emancipatory and feminist abolitionist perspective (Ruiz, 2011). In 1936 they published in their magazine *Mujeres Libres* an article announcing the “Laboratorios de la Prostitución”:

The most urgent undertaking to be carried out in the new social structure is the suppression of prostitution. Before we take care of the economy or education, from now on, in the midst of the anti-fascist struggle, we still have to end this social degradation radically. We cannot think of production, of work, of any kind of justice, while the greatest of slavery remains: that which makes it impossible to live with dignity. [...] It is not their problem, but ours, the problem of all women and all men. As long as it exists, it will not be possible to reach sincerity in love, affection, friendship, comradeship (Mujeres Libres, 1936).

Political Impact of the Early Civil Society Struggle Against Sex Trafficking at the Beginning of the 20th Century

Concern about human trafficking and especially regarding trafficking in women for sexual exploitation raised as a result of increased migration movements of European and Western women to other countries throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. At that time, it became apparent that many of these women and girls who migrated to other countries were being trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. In 1909, Dillingham led a study for the U.S. Government's immigration commission in which he

analyzed the recruitment, transportation and reception of foreign women who were trafficked into the country. The study identified more than 2,000 European women who were trafficked between November 1908 and March 1909 in New York (Dillingham, 1909). International voluntary associations mobilized to end what they called the "white slave trade", and at the beginning of the 20th century the first political initiatives and international instruments aimed at addressing trafficking for sexual exploitation were promoted. Gradually international anti-trafficking accords started including also the trafficking of black women, boys and later, to combat the traffic in persons in general (Limoncelli, 2010).

In 1895, the first conference on the "white slave trade" was organized in Paris. Later, in 1899, similar conferences were held in London and Budapest. In this context of growing international concern, in 1904, in Paris, the International Agreement for the Suppression of the White Slave Trade was ratified by thirteen countries, including Spain and agreed by other European and non-European countries like United States of America, Brazil, Colombia and Lebanon (United Nations, 2020). Six years after, the International Convention for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic was promulgated in 1910 (United Nations, 1951). In the same vein, the International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women of the Full Age was proclaimed in 1933 (European Commission, n.d.).

International legislation against trafficking in the early twentieth century focused on the recruitment for prostitution and the exploitation of prostitution as a result of civil society action (Lammasniemi, 2020). These first international anti-trafficking accords and conventions were mainly oriented towards criminalization through the prosecution and punishment of crimes related to the prostitution of others and against the intermediaries of prostitution. Although the agreements included the aim of helping victims and protecting vulnerable groups such as immigrants, the actions were mainly focused on controlling migratory flows and female immigration (Lammasniemi, 2017). Despite there were different ideologies among the anti-trafficking movement, first national and international policies considered trafficking and prostitution as heinous crimes and social evils, they addressed this concern from a social purity crusade rather than a human rights perspective (Rodríguez García, 2012). In any case, these agreements encouraged countries to generate public policies and instruments in line with international conventions and agreements, in an attempt to extend political

initiatives to combat human trafficking globally. The legacy of early anti-trafficking legislative proposals and initiatives is present in the most recent anti-trafficking legislation (Lammasniemi, 2017). The early civil society struggle against sex trafficking achieved global political impact from the beginning of the 20th century, and this political impact has influenced for more than a Century the current configuration of campaigns, organizations, mobilizations and political actions against trafficking.

Conclusions

The feminist movement was driven and greatly influenced by the abolition of slavery activism and against racism oppressions in which some black and white men and women participated. By participating in the abolitionist fight against slavery, women became aware of the gender discrimination and oppression they suffered (Bader-Zaar, 2011). The activism of these and many other abolitionist women changed gender relations, driving what has been historically considered as first-wave feminism. Women's rights activists learned from the anti-slavery movement as a precedent for substantial later claims on women's rights, such as suffragism, the right to divorce and custody over children, the rights for widows, equal access to education and private property, against children violence and sexual abuse, and intrafamily violence, among others. The feminist activists and social reformers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were pioneers in naming and studying a hitherto virtually invisible problem: human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The debates, initiatives, campaigns, and activism that they deployed are very relevant today.

However, research has also pointed out some of the limitations and controversies of these early international and abolitionist movements had, for example, regarding the inclusion of diverse groups and classes of women, the limited participation of black and working-class women, or reformist puritanism on the part of the movement (Doezma, 1999; Walkowitz, 1980). Despite this, even many of the radically different debates and perspectives that the movement had on prostitution and sexual exploitation, and the best initiatives for addressing it are present today. Between the 19th and 20th centuries, abolitionists, feminists, women's rights, and anti-slavery activists forged a social movement that overcame impossible obstacles of its time having an outstanding historical repercussion. Through campaigns,

federations, societies, leagues, and different organizations, as well as international and national conventions, they called attention to the horror and consequences of the sexual exploitation of women and girls (Sklar & Stewart, 2007). They educated, raised awareness, and catapulted the problem of sexual slavery onto political agendas abroad. Their contributions left a legacy that inspired the struggle and subsequent research on prostitution and human trafficking for sexual exploitation.

This article has managed to analyze a selection of historical landmarks and intellectual contributions in order to understand historical responses to the abolition of slavery and sex trafficking and its impact on the making of feminism and further social reforms. Current initiatives and civil society organizations might not be aware of the legacies of the past feminist anti-sex slavery movements. This article contributes to answering this gap by making visible the valuable elements that contributed and fostered the successful development and achievements of the feminist, abolitionist movement against sex slavery from the nineteenth to the early twentieth century to inform the contemporary anti-sex trafficking movement.

References

- Addams, J. (1914). *A new conscience and an ancient evil*. New York: The Macmillan Company.
- Bader-Zaar, B. (2011). Abolitionism in the Atlantic World: The Organization and Interaction of Anti-Slavery Movements in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries. *European History Online*, Mainz: Institute of European History. <http://ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/transnational-movements-and-organisations/international-social-movements/birgitta-bader-zaar-abolitionism-in-the-atlantic-world-the-organization-and-interaction-of-anti-slavery-movements-in-the-eighteenth-and-nineteenth-centuries>
- Bailey, C. (2009). Anna Julia Cooper: “Dedicated in the Name of My Slave Mother to the Education of Colored Working People”. *Hypatia*, 19(2). <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2004.tb01288.x>
- Baptist, E.E. (2001). “Cuffy” “fancy maids,” and “one-eyed men”: rape, commodification, and the domestic slave trade in the United States. *The American Historical Review*, 106, 1619-1650. <https://doi.org/10.12987/yale/9780300103557.003.0008>

- Bergad, L. (2007). *The Comparative Histories of Slavery in Brazil, Cuba, and the United States (New Approaches to the Americas)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511803970>
- Bernstein, E. (1999). What's Wrong with Prostitution? What's Right with Sex Work? Comparing Markets in Female Sexual Labor. *Hastings Women's Law Journal*, 1(10),91-117.
<http://repository.uchastings.edu/hwlj/vol10/iss1/6>
- Bourne, G. (1837). *Slavery Illustrated in Its Effects upon Women*. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress. Retrieved from
<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6726/>
- Brophy, A. L. (1995). "Over and above... There Broods a Portentous Shadow,--The Shadow of Law": Harriet Beecher Stowe's Critique of Slave Law in "Uncle Tom's Cabin." *Journal of Law and Religion*, 12(2), 457. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1051590>
- Brown, I. (1983). "Am I Not A Woman And A Sister?" The Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women, 1837–1839. *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies*, 50(1), 1-19.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/27772873>
- Campoamor, C. (1932). Congreso de los Diputados, Diario de Sesiones de las Cortes Constituyentes de la República Española. Legislatura 1931-1933. Cortes Constituyentes. 15-01-1932. Nº 100 (de 3207 a 3242).
https://app.congreso.es/est_sesiones/
- Carpenter, D., & Moore, C. (2014). When Canvassers Became Activists: Antislavery Petitioning and the Political Mobilization of American Women. *American Political Science Review*, 108(3), 479-498.
doi:10.1017/S000305541400029X
- Cott, N. (1977). *The Bonds of Womanhood: Women's Sphere in New England, 1780-1835*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Crawford, E. (2003). *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide 1866-1928*. London: Routledge.
- Dillingham, WP. (1909). *Importing women for immoral purposes. A partial report from the immigration commission on the importation and harboring of women for inmoral purposes*.
<https://curiosity.lib.harvard.edu/immigration-to-the-united-states-1789-1930/catalog/39-990033891540203941>
- Doezema, J. (1999). Loose women or lost women? The re-emergence of the myth of white slavery in contemporary discourses of trafficking in

- women. *Gender Issues*, 18, 23–50 (1999).
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12147-999-0021-9>
- European Commission (n.d.). *1933 International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women of the Full Age*.
https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/legislation-and-case-law-international-legislation-united-nations/1933-international-convention_en#:~:text=The%201933%20International%20Convention%20for,trafficking%20in%20women%20and%20children
- Giner, E., Ruiz, L., Serrano, M.A., Valls, R. (2016). Free Women's contributions to working class women's sexual education during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and beyond. *Teachers College Record*, 118(4),1-38.
- Goldman, E. (2002). *The Traffic in Women*. 13 Hastings Women's L. R. 9 (Original work 1910).
- Guereña, J.L. (2017).La prostitución en España en 1925 según los informes de Paul Kinsie para la sociedad de naciones. *Diálogos Revista Electrónica de Historia*, 18(2). doi 10.15517/dre.v18i2.26612
- Guereña, J. L. (2003). *La prostitución en la España Contemporánea*. Madrid: Marcial Pons.
- Hamilton, M. (1978). Opposition to the Contagious Diseases Acts, 1864-1886. *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, 10(1), 14-27. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4048453>
- Hogan, L.S. A Time for Silence: William Lloyd Garrison and the “Woman Question” at the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention. *Gender Issues* 25, 63(2008). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12147-008-9054-8>
- hooks, b (1981). *Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism*. South End Press.
- International Labour Organization. (2017). *Global estimates of modern slavery: forced labour and forced marriage*. Geneve.
http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_575479.pdf
- Jordan, J. & Sharp, I. (2003). *Josephine Butler and the prostitution campaigns: diseases of the body politic*. London: Routledge.
- Lacalzada de Mateo, M. J. (1991). Concepción Arenal. Contre les normes et pour l'émancipation de la femme en Espagne, in E. Gubin (ed.), *Norme et marginalités. Omportements féminins aux 19e-20e siècles*, Brussels, Université Libre de Bruxelles.
- Lammasniemi L. (2020) International Legislation on White Slavery and Anti-trafficking in the Early Twentieth Century. In: Winterdyk J., Jones

- J. (eds) *The Palgrave International Handbook of Human Trafficking*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-63058-8_112
- Lammasniemi, L. (2017). Anti-White Slavery Legislation and its Legacies in England. *Anti-Trafficking Review*, 9, 64–76, <https://doi.org/10.14197/atr.20121795>
- Levine, P. (2003). *Prostitution race, and politics: policing venereal disease in the British Empire*. New York: Routledge.
- Limoncelli, S. (2010). *The Politics of Trafficking: The First International Movement to Combat the Sexual Exploitation of Women*. Stanford University Press.
- Mayhall, L.E.M. (2003). *The Militant Suffrage Movement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Maynard, D. H. (1960). The World's Anti-Slavery Convention of 1840. *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 47(3), 452. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1888877>
- Melgar, P., Merodio, G., Duque, E., & Ramis-Salas, M. (2021). “Petites Bonnes” minors sex trafficked in Morocco and Spain. *Children and Youth Services Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105719>
- Merodio, G., Duque, E., & Peña, J. C. (2020). They Are Not Romeo Pimps, They Are Traffickers: Overcoming the Socially Dominant Discourse to Prevent the Sex Trafficking of Youth. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 26(8-9), 1010-1018. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800420938881>
- McCulloch, J. (2000). *Black Peril, White Virtue: Sexual Crime in Southern Rhodesia, 1902-1935*. Indiana University Press.
- McElroy, W., & Kaminer, W. (2002). *Liberty for Women: Freedom and Feminism in the 21st century*. Ivan R. Dee
- McMillen, Sally G. (2008). *Seneca Falls and the Origins of the Women's Rights Movement*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mujeres Libres (nº3, July 1936). *Liberatorios de Prostitución*. <http://www.fondation-besnard.org/spip.php?article2701>
- Nash, G. (2006). *First City: Philadelphia and the Funding of Historical Memory*. University Pennsylvania Press.
- Ortiz, N. (2017). *Masonas y republicanas. La historia de 5 mujeres comprometidas con los valores republicanos y la masonería*. Oviedo: EntreAcacia.
- Peck, G. (2004). White Slavery and Whiteness: A Transnational View of the Sources of Working-Class Radicalism and Racism, *Labor*, 1(2), 41–64. <https://doi.org/10.1215/15476715-1-2-41>

- Ranea-Triviño, B. (2020). La banalidad del mal: irresponsabilidad de la demanda de prostitución frente a la explotación sexual. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Gender Studies*, 9(2), 137-159. <https://doi.org/10.17583/generos.2020.5410>
- Resink, J. (2007). Sisterhood, Slavery, and Sovereignty: Transnational Anti-Slavery Work and Women's Rights Movements in the United States during the Twentieth Century. In Sklar, K. & Stewart, J. (Eds.), *Women's Rights and Transatlantic Antislavery in the Era of Emancipation* (pp. 19-54). New Haven; London: Yale University Press.
- Ritzer, G. (2011). *Teoría Sociológica Clásica*. 6ª edición. McGraw-Hill Educación.
- Rivas Arjona, M. (2012). El camino hacia el abolicionismo prostitucional en la II República Española. In IV Congreso Universitario Nacional Investigación y Género, 1661–1679. <http://hdl.handle.net/11441/40604>
- Robinson, L. (2006). *National League for the Protection of Colored Women*. Oxford African American Studies Center. <https://oxfordaasc.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.001.0001/acref-9780195301731-e-42644>
- Rodríguez García, M. (2012). The League of Nations and the Moral Recruitment of Women. *International Review of Social History*, 57(S20), 97-128. doi:10.1017/S0020859012000442
- Rosen, R. (1983). *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Rosenberg, C.S. (1971). Beauty, the Beast, and the Militant Woman: A Case Study in Sex Roles and Social Stress in Jacksonian America. *American Quarterly*, 23(4), 562–84. <http://doi.org/10.2307/2711706>
- Ruiz, L. (2011). *Free Women (Mujeres Libres). Voices and Memories for a Libertarian Future*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Ryan, M. (1839). *Prostitution in London: with a comparative view of Paris and New York*. Open Knowledge Commons and Harvard Medical School. <https://archive.org/details/prostitutioninlo00ryan>
- Sinha, M. (2017). *The Slave's Cause A History of Abolition*. New Heaven: Yale University Press.
- Sklar, K. (2007). “The Throne of My Heart”: Religion, Oratory, and Transatlantic Community in Angelina Grimké’s Launching of Women’s Rights, 1828–1838. In Sklar K. & Stewart J. (Eds.), *Women's Rights and Transatlantic Antislavery in the Era of Emancipation* (pp. 211-241). New Haven; London: Yale University Press.

- Sklar, K. & Stewart, J. (Eds.). (2007). *Women's Rights and Transatlantic Antislavery in the Era of Emancipation*. New Haven; London: Yale University Press.
- Stanton, E. C., Anthony, S.B., Joslyn, M. (1887). *History of woman suffrage, Volume I/Ann Lewis Women's Suffrage Collection*. <https://lewisuffragecollection.omeka.net/items/show/820>
- Stuart Mill, J. (1870). *Sobre el voto y la prostitución*. En De Miguel, A. (2011). Almud, Ediciones de Castilla la Mancha.
- Sublette, N. & Sublette, C. (2016). *American Slave Coast: A History of the Slave-Breeding Industry*. Chicago IL: Chicago Review Press.
- Summers, A. (2006). *Which Women? What Europe? Josephine Butler and the International Abolitionist Federation*. *History Workshop Journal*, 62(1), 214–231. doi:10.1093/hwj/dbl005
- Tristan, F. (2008). *Promenades Dans Londres: L' Aristocratie at Les Prolétaires Anglais*. Global Rhythm Press. (Original work 1840).
- United Nations (1951). *Treaties and international agreements registered or filed and recorded with the Secretariat of the United Nations*, vol 98. <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%2098/v98.pdf>
- United Nations (2020). *International Agreement for the suppression of the "White Slave Traffic" Paris, May 18th 1904*. https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtds_g_no=VII-8&chapter=7&clang=_en
- Vance, C. S. (2011). Thinking Trafficking, Thinking Sex. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 17(1), 135–143. <https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-2010-024>
- Walkowitz, J.R. (1980). *Prostitution and Victorian Society Women, Class and the State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wayne, T. K. (2014). *Women's Rights in the United States*. A *Comprehensive Encyclopedia of Issues, Events, and People*. ABC-CLIO

Guiomar Merodio: Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia
(España)

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8666-4320>

Elena Duque: Universidad de Barcelona (España)

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6444-1997>

Contact Address: elenaduquesa@ub.edu