Coercion and Choice
The "Traffic in Women" between France and Argentina in the Early Twentieth Century

ELISA CAMISCIOLI

ABSTRACT This article employs police investigations of the "traffic in women" between France and Argentina in the first three decades of the twentieth century to highlight the multiple narratives in play when contemporaries talked about trafficking and relayed their experiences of it. While the dominant narrative of "white slavery" in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries emphasized coercion, sexual exploitation, and victimization, many young working-class women described the journey to Argentina in terms of perceived opportunity, whether for money, travel, or freedom. This is not to downplay the social and economic vulnerability of these women and the precarious lives they led in French and Argentine cities. Instead, the article emphasizes the inadequacy of many existing frameworks for discussing sex trafficking, and prostitution more generally, as they rely too heavily on a stark division between coercion and choice.

KEYWORDS prostitution, trafficking, mobility, France, Argentina

On May 23, 1913, Jeanne Thilleu arrived in the southern port city of Bordeaux aboard the *Valdivia*, which had set sail from Buenos Aires several days before. Following instructions emanating from the National Police headquarters in Paris, Commissioner Jean Dhubert met Thilleu at the port and immediately took her statement. The police were building a case against Louis Jolivet, an alleged trafficker of women who recently had been arrested for corrupting a female minor. Because they believed that Thilleu was also one of his victims, they were eager to have her testimony. In a five-page letter sent back to Paris, Commissioner Dhubert painstakingly recorded her account:

About fourteen months earlier, the twenty-year-old dressmaker was walking along the Boulevard de Clichy in Paris when a man named Georges Coutant approached her. He told her that he would like to be friends, and Thilleu followed him back to his hotel room, where he asked her if she would accompany him to Argentina. He was employed as a jeweler in Buenos Aires, he explained, and Thilleu could continue her work as a dressmaker if she joined him there.

French Historical Studies • Vol. 42, No. 3 (August 2019) • DOI 10.1215/00161071-7558357

"We will be very happy and make a lot of money," he stated. "Seduced by his promises," Thilleu agreed to leave France with a man she had just met hours before and stake out a new life in South America. Coutant then inveigled her into procuring her twenty-three-year-old sister's birth certificate so it would appear that she was of age and able to obtain a passport for travel overseas.[1] Next he presented her to Louis Jolivet, the alleged trafficker under investigation in Paris, advising her that Jolivet would accompany her to Argentina while he attended to business in the capital. He promised to join Thilleu a fortnight later.

Thilleu and Jolivet went by train to Barcelona, where they boarded an Italian steamship to Buenos Aires. As soon as they embarked, Jolivet informed Thilleu that she would never see Georges Coutant again and that, rather than going to Argentina to work as a seamstress, she would be employed instead as a prostitute. He threatened to cut her face with a knife if she reported him and forbade her from communicating with the other passengers. She apparently complied. On arriving in Argentina, Thilleu was brought to a brothel and forced to entertain between ten and forty clients a day. Half of her salary went to the brothel keeper and the other half to Jolivet, who threatened to kill her if she went to the Argentine police. Five months later Thilleu managed to escape, only to be tricked back into Jolivet's clutches by his underage German mistress. Next she was deceived by a man called Albert Maury, who claimed to be her protector when, in fact, he was just another pimp who had purchased the recalcitrant prostitute from Jolivet. She contracted syphilis while working in one of three brothels for Maury. Later she met an Argentine man who took an interest in her situation and removed her from the brothel in which she toiled. According to Thilleu, "From this moment I was free, living in Buenos Aires."[2]

Despite the lurid details her story provides, there is nothing exceptional about Jeanne Thilleu's account of being trafficked. Such narratives were commonplace in the early twentieth century, as the popular press, sensationalist novels, and police investigations described how unwitting innocents were kidnapped, deceived, smuggled onto steamships, forcibly removed from their home countries, and coerced into prostitution in foreign lands.[3] In the parlance of the time, the term *white slavery* described "the procurement, by force, deceit,

1. Before 1974 French men and women under the age of twenty-one were legally minors.

2. Archives Nationales (hereafter AN), F/7/14859, Statement of Mlle. Jeanne Thilleu (also known as Palmier), May 23, 1913.

3. Monographs that discuss white slavery, published in the 1980s and 1990s, include Bristow, *Prostitution and Prejudice*; Corbin, *Women for Hire*; Guy, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires*; Levine, *Prostitution, Race, and Politics*; Rosen, *Lost Sisterhood*; and Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*. More recent historical work on this topic includes, for the French case, Watson, "Trade in Women"; Camiscioli, *Reproducing the French Race*, 99–128; and Séquin, "Sex after Slavery." On Argentina, see Yarfitz, "Polacos, White Slaves, and Stille Chuppahs." Other useful historical works include Donovan, *White Slave Crusades*; Hetherington,

or drugs, of a white woman or girl against her will, for prostitution."[4] Like Jeanne Thilleu, early twentieth-century women who ostensibly had been trafficked often presented a particular script to the police and other investigators to accentuate their victimization. Such formulaic accounts of being coerced into commercial sex had strategic advantages for the women who voiced them. Playing on gendered notions of female passivity and sexual respectability, they rendered the alleged victims of trafficking more sympathetic to the men and women who hoped to rescue them. The victim narrative was sustained in the popular press, where the public's fascination with *faits divers*—stories of murders, scandals, and crimes of passion—provided the campaign against white slavery with an irresistible momentum.[5] It was also the cause célèbre of some abolitionist feminists working to combat regulated prostitution, as well as particular factions of the League of Nation's Advisory Committee on the Traffic in Women and Children.[6]

Scholars have noted that white slavery and trafficking narratives follow the conventions of melodrama. Judith R. Walkowitz has shown how in late Victorian London the sensationalist journalist W. T. Stead employed melodramatic representations of power and virtue in his serial publication *The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon*, which first appeared in 1885.[7] The *Maiden Tribute* insisted that a slave trade in young girls was thriving in London; the wide appeal of his investigation among the reading public helped spearhead the international campaign against white slavery.[8] Carole Vance argues that contemporary sex trafficking narratives also conform to the melodramatic genre: despite sprinklings of empirical evidence, the plot is predetermined, and the cast of characters is limited to one-dimensional female victims, lustful men, deceitful men, and male heroes.[9] All the elements described by Walkowitz and Vance are present in the story Jeanne Thilleu recounted more than one hundred years ago,

---

Victims of the Social Temperament; Kozma, *Global Women, Colonial Ports*; Limoncelli, *Politics of Trafficking*; Pliley, *Policing Sexuality*; and Stauter-Halsted, *Devil's Chain*, 117–95.

4. Doezema, "Loose Women or Lost Women," 25.

5. Corbin, *Women for Hire*, 275–98.

6. On the early international antitrafficking movement, see Limoncelli, *Politics of Trafficking*. For the League of Nations study pertinent to the traffic between Europe and Latin America, see League of Nations, *Report of the Special Body of Experts*. Analyses of the League of Nations report include Chaumont, *Le mythe de la traite des blanches*; Rodríguez García, "League of Nations and the Moral Recruitment of Women"; Knepper, "Measuring the Threat of Global Crime"; and Metzger, "Towards an International Human Rights Regime."

7. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, 85–105.

8. Stead, *Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon*. For more on journalistic sensationalism and trafficking narratives, see Soderlund, *Sex Trafficking*.

9. Vance, "Innocence and Experience"; Vance, "Thinking Trafficking, Thinking Sex." See also Andrijasevic, "Beautiful Dead Bodies"; Doezema, "Forced to Choose"; and Schwenken, "Beautiful Victims and Sacrificing Heroines."

demonstrating that similar scripts circulated in both the early twentieth century and the present day.

The formulaic quality of these stories, tailored to highlight coercion, deception, and innocence lost, might tempt us to dismiss them as evidence for understanding women's experiences. When women's voices appear in the archives, as Thilleu's testimony shows, their stories frequently drew from the dominant script on trafficking, one that focused on their entrapment and victimization. Given the widespread belief among late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century social reformers that respectable women would engage in sex work only if entrapped and coerced, or if the most dismal economic circumstances compelled them to do so, it is unsurprising that gendered notions of victimization and vulnerability might condition how women framed their experiences. But what do we miss when we either take these stories at face value or dismiss them because their tellers were purportedly unreliable narrators? Is it always necessary to adjudicate on the veracity of women's accounts of being trafficked? Is it possible that the "very falseness" of these stories is, in fact, "what gives them meaning"?[10]

This article explores a range of stories about trafficking in the documents gathered by the French National Police, which is subject to the Ministry of Interior. While National Police dossiers on white slavery exist for other countries, this article analyzes one particularly robust file that pertains to Argentina.[11] It includes reports submitted in the 1910s, 1920s, and early 1930s by the various municipal police departments, in accordance with a protocol established in 1907 by the creation of local police forces (Contrôle Général du Service des Recherches) in each French department. These bodies were charged with investigating criminal law offenses, including the traffic in women, and reporting back to the National Police in Paris.[12] This archive was enriched by the Ministry of Interior's appeal in 1919 to monitor specifically the traffic in women to Argentina and Uruguay, where the alleged preponderance of French prostitutes in those countries "[discredited] France's reputation abroad." In response, the ministry called for the "attentive and efficacious surveillance" of steamships departing for the Americas.[13] Finally, National Police files on the traffic in women

10. White, *Speaking with Vampires*, 43. My contemplation of the "truth" of women's stories of trafficking was inspired by Louise White's book and by her article "Telling More," along with a rereading of Scott, "Evidence of Experience."

11. The file is AN, F/7/14859.

12. The National Police was institutionalized in the Directorate of General Security (Direction de la Sûreté Générale) or, after 1934, the Directorate of National Security (Direction de la Sûreté Nationale). See Berlière, "Ordre et sécurité."

13. AN, F/7/14854, Dossier Traite des Blanches, Circulaires, 1916–40. See Camiscioli, *Reproducing the French Race*, 112.

were rounded out by more systematic monitoring of this problem after 1923, in response to the discussions of the League of Nations Advisory Committee on the Traffic in Women and Children. A May 1923 memo from the minister of interior instructed all prefects to send data on the traffic in women and young girls, which in turn were forwarded to the League of Nations subcommittee.[14]

To grasp the power of the melodramatic narrative in both contemporary and historical accounts of trafficking, one must revisit feminist debates on prostitution and its relationship to trafficking. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries feminists and other social reformers advocated for the abolition of prostitution and an end to state-regulated brothels, which in France had existed since 1804. Trafficking, they argued, was an extension of regulated prostitution, so abolishing the brothel system within national borders would put an end to trafficking overseas. A century later feminists are generally divided into two camps regarding the question of prostitution.[15] "Neo-abolitionists" have described prostitution as "sexual slavery," a position that lends itself to an understanding of prostitutes as victims.[16] On the whole, proponents of this view reject the idea of "voluntary prostitution" and, most recently, have framed sex trafficking as a violation of human rights. In contrast, the "sex positivist" perspective emphasizes that prostitution is a viable survival strategy for some women and, fundamentally, a form of labor. The decriminalization of prostitution, sex workers' rights, and women's sexual self-determination are at the heart of this position, as well as an emphasis on agency and choice.[17]

Many analyses of trafficking, however, fall into the binary trap of viewing exploitation and agency as two mutually exclusive possibilities.[18] This is the legacy of reading trafficking, whether in the early twentieth century or the present day, through the lens of this contentious feminist debate, which in its most reductive form views women's participation in sexual commerce as the result of either coercion or choice. It is also the consequence of our socially received understandings of these two terms. While we typically define *coercion* as the willful effort to constrain freedom, in actuality coercion consists of a range of experiences that lie within the parameters of legal labor migration, on the one hand, and trafficking, on the other.[19] For individuals with limited economic options,

14. Marsh, "'La Nouvelle Activité des Trafiquants de Femmes,'" 33–34.

15. For a useful summary, see Outshoorn, "Political Debates on Prostitution and Trafficking."

16. The paradigmatic text is Barry, *Female Sexual Slavery*. See also Jeffreys, *Idea of Prostitution*.

17. See, e.g., Chapkis, *Live Sex Acts*; and McClintock, "Sex Workers and Sex Work."

18. Boris and Parreñas, Introduction, 8. Useful critiques of this binary are also found in Doezema, "Forced to Choose"; and Parreñas, *Illicit Flirtations*.

19. Davidson and Anderson, "Trouble with 'Trafficking,'" 18. Of course, the line between freedom and unfreedom is also historically situated and ideologically inflected. On this point, see Davidson, "New Slaveries, Old Binaries."

the line between voluntary choice and involuntary coercion may be fluid and change over time.[20] Choice, moreover, references such liberal—and liberal feminist—understandings of agency as individual autonomy, self-expression, and the "free exercise of self-willed behavior."[21]

This article, in contrast, does not understand women's mobility to be, necessarily, an articulation of freedom or rooted in the spirit of resistance. Instead, it asks what happens when we refrain from either highlighting the victimization of women working in the sex trade or celebrating their agency. Certainly, narratives of victimization were fundamental to the construction of white slavery, the traffic in women, and sex trafficking as perceived social problems, and scholarly accounts are correct to underscore how trafficking functions as a discourse, a narrative, or a "galvanizing metaphor."[22] But archival traces of women's accounts of trafficking are most revealing when we do not impose on them the script of either coercion or choice. In the early twentieth century, like today, multiple narratives were in play when people talked about trafficking and relayed their socially conditioned experiences of it. If the dominant narrative of coercion and victimization had the most purchase, it certainly was not the only way that individuals understood their circumstances.

The lives of French women working in the sex trade in early twentieth-century Argentina oscillated between moments of perceived opportunity and profound vulnerability—points on a continuum between freedom and servitude. In France they led economically precarious lives, employed as maids, dressmakers, seamstresses, factory laborers, milliners, cooks, entertainers, and, indeed, prostitutes. The Manichaean framework of exploitation *or* agency does not apply easily to the difficult choices they made in the context of these structural constraints, because, as Rhacel Salazar Parreñas argues, vulnerability does not automatically translate into trafficked persons and forced labor.[23]

This article therefore reframes the purported victims of white slavery as migrants selling sex in an era of transatlantic displacements between Europe and the Americas.[24] It depicts the circulation of people and of social scripts,

20. Cheng, "Migrant Workers or Trafficked Victims?"

21. Scott, *Fantasy of Feminist History*, 106–7. See also Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, esp. 1–39.

22. Each of these categories—white slavery, traffic in women, and sex trafficking—has an overlapping genealogy that deserves further consideration. See, e.g., Doezema, *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters*. On the discursive nature of white slavery and trafficking, see Doezema, *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters*; Donovan, *White Slave Crusades*; and Vance, "Innocence and Experience." The term *galvanizing metaphor* is used by Boris and Berg, "Protecting Virtue, Erasing Labor." For earlier instances of "white slavery storytelling" in the United States, see Peck, "White Slavery and Whiteness."

23. Parreñas, *Illicit Flirtations*, 13.

24. Agustín, "Disappearing of a Migration Category."

emphasizing women's mobility and the intimate labor they performed in the early twentieth-century global economy. This is not meant to celebrate women's unbridled agency, document their resistance, or describe a clear-cut choice to participate in sex work. In many circumstances the "financial gains afforded by labor migration" came with curtailments of freedom.[25] French women may have boarded trains, steamships, and ocean liners in the hope of a better life, but it did not always work out that way. What was a courageous transatlantic voyage for one woman—and, by extension, the flouting of gendered notions of social space that restricted women's mobility and confined their intimate labor to the domestic sphere—was disastrous for another. Sometimes overseas travel challenged patriarchal forms of surveillance by circumventing the authority of husbands or families, only for women to find themselves subject to other gendered networks of domination. Thus mobility cannot be equated uncritically with more freedom: sometimes it merely reconfirmed or reconfigured the power relationships that existed at home. Nor should mobility be understood as an unmitigated expression of adventure or self-realization, for often it was accompanied by danger and risk and was perceived as a symptom of social instability.[26]

This argument applies to a wide range of early twentieth-century contexts, but the "route to Buenos Aires" was infamous among sensationalist journalists, social reformers, and the League of Nations Advisory Committee on the Traffic in Women and Children, which collected enormous amounts of data on ostensible trafficking to Argentina.[27] As Donna Guy explains, this understanding of Buenos Aires as a debauched city of sin was due to several factors: the mass migration of mostly male European immigrants to Argentina, beginning in the 1880s; the unbalanced sex ratio those migratory waves produced; and the fact that prostitution was regulated in Argentina from 1875 to 1936, following the French model.[28] By the 1920s, according to Mir Yarfitz, European and North American commentators largely associated the international traffic in women with Argentine brothels, identifying Buenos Aires as a "key hub or destination" for white slave traders. At the International Congresses against White Slavery, held in 1895, 1899, 1903, 1904, and 1906, Buenos Aires was identified as the primary locus of the trade, just as it was by the League of Nations subcommittee

25. Parreñas, *Illicit Flirtations*, 14. Parreñas usefully describes this in-between state as "indentured mobility."

26. Davis, "Commentary," 509–11.

27. On white slavery in Argentina, see Alsogaray, *Trilogia de la trata de blancas*; Bott, *Las condiciones de la lucha contra la trata de blancas*; Ciccotti, *La trata de las blanquisimas*; and Londres, *Le chemin de Buenos-Aires*. For important recent analyses of the "route to Buenos Aires," see Guy, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires*; and Yarfitz, "Polacos, White Slaves, and Stille Chuppahs."

28. Guy, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires*.

two decades later. This linking of Buenos Aires with sexual commerce endured through the 1930s.[29]

To some degree, the phantasm of Buenos Aires as a "global brothel" corresponded with actual numbers.[30] The preponderance of foreign prostitutes working in the city was confirmed by a massive study on the traffic in women and children published in 1927 by the League of Nations Special Body of Experts. The report estimated that 75 percent of registered prostitutes in the city were foreign women, who in 1924 amounted to twelve hundred individuals. To this figure must be added between five thousand and ten thousand clandestine prostitutes. This means that, even taking the lower estimate for unregistered sex workers and once again assuming that three-fourths of them were foreigners, 4,500 foreign prostitutes worked in a city whose total population was 2,310,441 people.[31] It does seem that French women were overrepresented in these figures. According to Yarfitz, 15.1 percent of prostitutes registered between 1899 and 1915 claimed to be French, while another sample from 1910 to 1923 puts that proportion at 20.5 percent. In both cases, the percentage of French women was second only to Argentines.[32] While a few early twentieth-century accounts contend that economic necessity propelled European women's migration to Argentina, the consensus in the press and among social reformers was overwhelmingly that foreign prostitutes were "white slaves" rather than labor migrants: they were either duped or forced to migrate, and they worked in brothels against their will.

This was supposedly the fate of Léone Clairé, born in the northeastern province of Normandy in 1904. Clairé had worked as a maid in the cities of Le Havre and Paris. In the capital she eventually moved in with her aunt and took a job at the electric company, but after sustaining an injury on the job, she no longer could make ends meet. At that time, she met a man named André Blanchard, described as a "dangerous Corsican" decorated with "tattoos from his head to his toes." When the nineteen-year-old Clairé relayed her misfortunes to Blanchard, he invited her to come to Buenos Aires with him and promised her a "nice job." He procured a fake birth certificate for Clairé so she could obtain a

29. Yarfitz, "Polacos, White Slaves, and Stille Chuppahs," 54–56, 78. Yarfitz's work focuses on Jewish traffickers and prostitutes in Buenos Aires, an integral component of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century trafficking stories. The documents analyzed for this article are not particularly rich for pursuing this key angle of investigation, however. While traffickers occasionally have Jewish surnames and the infamous Jewish trafficking ring Zwy Migdal appears a handful of times, Jewishness and anti-Semitism are not recurring themes.

30. See Dennis Altman's usage of the term *global brothel* in *Global Sex*, 10–14.

31. League of Nations, *Report of the Special Body of Experts*, 10–11.

32. Yarfitz, "Polacos, White Slaves, and Stille Chuppahs," 92. Yarfitz points out that the numbers on French women may nevertheless have been inflated, because French women were considered the most desirable.

passport to voyage internationally, and in February 1923 the couple embarked on an ocean liner headed for Buenos Aires, with Clairé traveling under the pseudonym of Yvonne Robin, a twenty-two-year-old Parisian dressmaker.[33] Correspondence among the French, Brazilian, and Argentine authorities reveals that Blanchard was being investigated for his role as a "white slave trader." As this story unravels in the archives, it mostly conforms to the conventional white slavery narrative of a young woman forced by a deceiving male criminal into a life of debauchery overseas. We learn more about Clairé and her circumstances, however, if we follow a different thread, one that does not speak directly to the dichotomous framework of either coercion or choice.

Sometime in 1923, the director of general security in Paris asked the police commissioner of Le Tréport, Clairé's hometown, to visit her family as part of the investigation. After a long silence Clairé's parents only recently had received news of their daughter in the form of two letters, penned in breathless and ungrammatical French. Commissioner Pannetier reproduced them in their entirety in his report. The first letter began with an explanation of her long absence: "Dear parents, I permit myself to write to you because it's been six months since I gave you my news. I am very far from you right now because I am traveling to Argentine America [*l'amérique argentine*]. It's already been three weeks aboard the boat. You see, papa, I'm going where you have been!" Clairé's father was a Norman steamship captain. "We passed the Tropic [of Cancer]. What heat! I'll return to France soon. . . . I hug you tight, your daughter, Léone. See you soon."[34]

A subsequent letter contained more details of her journey, emphasizing her movement across the Atlantic and the marvelous things she saw along the way:

> I've passed by Spain, Portugal, Brazil, and now I am headed to South America. I may not stay there too long. If you permit me, when I get back I'll return to our home. I will tell you, dear father, that all the countries I've seen are very nice. I've seen sharks, flying fish, and I think I'll see other things too. I hope you are doing well at the house. I'm doing well at the moment because I was seasick and felt ill but that's finally over. Goodbye and see you soon. Hug Denise [most likely her sister] for me.[35]

It is hard to ignore the sense of adventure and accomplishment in the letters of this nineteen-year-old girl who in 1923 traveled across the ocean just as her

33. AN, F/7/14859, Commissariat Spécial du Havre, Apr. 21, 1923.

34. AN, F/7/14859, Report from the Commissaire de Police du Tréport to the Directeur de la Sûreté Générale, Contrôle Générale des Service des Recherches Judiciaires, n.d.

35. Report from the Commissaire de Police du Tréport to the Directeur de la Sûreté Générale.

father, a ship captain, had done. Her lists of geographic landmarks and marine life capture the dynamism of sea travel, and her confidence that there was still more to experience—"I'll see other things too"—tempts us to see this story as wholly triumphant for Clairé. However, we know from several accounts, including the ship's captain and doctor, that she was beaten by André Blanchard in an altercation that several passengers witnessed.[36] The ship docked in Rio de Janeiro, and Blanchard was arrested at the behest of the French consulate.[37] In a peculiar turn of events, a Czechoslovakian businessman who had witnessed the dispute aboard the ship offered to take charge of Clairé to "get her back on the right foot." In Buenos Aires he promised the Immigration Commission that Clairé would marry his driver, the Bohemian Joseph Soukup, and with those assurances she was permitted to debark. It appears that Clairé did wed Soukup and departed with the two Czechoslovakians to Comodoro Rivadavia, a Patagonian city in the petroleum district of southern Argentina.[38]

It would be mistaken to romanticize Clairé's journey from Europe to Latin America or to assume that her choices matched her desires. And it would be equally wrongheaded to drown out her sense of wonder when viewing sharks and flying fish with the familiar narrative of her victimization. This small glimpse at her life reveals both how she availed herself of perceived opportunities and how she was subject to the vulnerabilities of class and gender. Clairé's letters, moreover, describe an affectionate relationship with her family, despite the claims of many social reformers that such women were outcasts or from dysfunctional homes. Her repeated assurances that she would return to Normandy suggest that she did not intend her work in Buenos Aires to be long-term. In many ways, Clairé's story is typical of women from the laboring poor who worked as prostitutes: they were unmarried, living apart from their immediate families, and employed in unskilled or semiskilled trades, particularly domestic service and the clothing industry. Geographic separation from relatives meant that women had only their own low wages for sustenance, rather than a family economy. Unfortunate circumstances—in Clairé's case a work injury, in other cases the death of one or both parents—exacerbated their financial instability. For many women like Clairé, prostitution was meant to be only a transitional phase in their lives.

The police dossiers on trafficking between France and Argentina confirm these general findings: they describe in plain language how alleged trafficking victims migrated first to urban centers in their native country in search of work,

36. AN, F/7/14859, Procès-Verbal d'Information Sommaire, Feb. 27, 1923.
37. AN, F/7/14859, Captain Privat to the Consular of France in Rio de Janeiro, Feb. 28, 1923.
38. Commissariat Spécial du Havre.

the string of unskilled and poorly paid jobs they held in Paris, Le Havre, or Marseilles, and their modest living arrangements with female relatives, other working-class women, or lovers who, according to the conventional white slavery narrative, invariably became their traffickers. In numerous examples, sex work in French cities was easily transformed into sex work overseas: many suspected victims of trafficking already had worked as prostitutes before their departure. Marie Louise Bichon, for example, arrived in Buenos Aires in September 1913, after spending five years working in Paris as a clandestine prostitute—illegally, outside the French system of regulated brothels—since at least the age of seventeen.[39] Police believed that sixteen-year-old Germaine Madeline, originally from the northwestern Calvados region, had been trafficked from Paris along with three other underage women. Their investigation also revealed that Madeline had been a "very well known" prostitute in Le Havre prior to her travels to Buenos Aires.[40] Lucienne Lefevre, who testified that Charles Turdjman had coerced her into prostitution in Argentina, easily obtained a passport thanks to the fake birth certificate already in her possession, as she had worked as a registered prostitute in Paris since she was seventeen years old and thus already had procured falsified papers.[41]

As in the case of Clairé, letters and postcards to family members from young women purportedly trafficked overseas appear in several police dossiers, expressing heartfelt affection while providing reassurances that all was well in Argentina or, perhaps, documenting their troubles there. Sifting through police evidence and reading beyond the familiar narratives of coercion or choice, we get a glimpse of these women's lives and their place in a network of family and community. Sometimes we even hear their voices, in the sense that the letters convey women's understandings of their experiences. Berthe Bauval first appears in the archives when a concerned family member filed a complaint that she had been trafficked. In October 1925 the twenty-six-year-old homemaker Amélie Bauval Vacca told the Paris police that traffickers had kidnapped her twenty-year-old sister Berthe and that their fourteen-year-old sister Suzanne was now in danger of being brought to Argentina as well.[42] The Bauval family recently had fallen on hard times: their mother was dead; their father, a carpenter and an "inveterate drunk," had abandoned his four daughters nearly a year before. Neighbors described Berthe Bauval as a "sick person" who often had thoughts of

39. AN, F/7/14859, Memo to the Direction de la Sûreté Générale, Third Bureau, Jan. 22, 1914.

40. AN, F/7/14859, Commissaire de la Police Mobile Dhubert to Contrôleur Général des Services de Recherches Judiciaires, Oct. 25, 1912.

41. AN, F/7/14859, Declaration of Lucienne Lefevre, Feb. 21, 1926.

42. AN, F/7/14859, Complaint filed by Amélie Vacca to Commissaire de Police Mobile Joseph Colombo, Oct. 2, 1925.

suicide. She worked sometimes as an embroiderer, sometimes as a maid, and briefly in a small factory that made cardboard, but it is likely that she could not make ends meet, since in June 1925 she was arrested for streetwalking, presumably because she was selling sex outside the municipality's system of regulated brothels, police registration, and mandatory venereal inspections.[43] Two months later she left Paris without informing her sisters, after being spotted with a well-dressed man called René. When speaking with the police, Amélie remained true to the story of Berthe's kidnapping, despite a robust correspondence between the sisters that began in Bordeaux, before Berthe boarded the steamship *Massilia* en route to Buenos Aires. "I am taking the boat in hiding. If in one month you have no news of me, some misfortune has occurred. I have a two-week journey ahead of me, and once there, I will send money. Above all else, don't worry. I will write in two weeks."[44]

She did. The sisters exchanged several letters, in fact, and Berthe kept all the promises she made in them: to write again, to send money, and to provide an address in Buenos Aires where she could be reached. Berthe never mentioned the kind of work she was doing there, although her address, 445 Cerrito, comes up in an entirely different police investigation years later as a suspected brothel and also in the journalist Albert Londres's account of French prostitution in Buenos Aires, where it appears as a French-language bookstore that doubled as a place of rendezvous for French traffickers.[45] Berthe wrote instead about the weather, her seasickness during the journey, and her intention to have her tonsils removed. She boasted that she looked good because she had gained a lot of weight and that she was happy to have left Paris. Mostly she sought to reassure her sister that all was well: "My dear Lilie, I tell you I don't regret this trip because my friend is very nice and I don't want for anything. . . . Don't worry about me, I am happy."[46] "I do not regret coming to America because I am very happy. I was never a lucky person, but that is no longer the case."[47] Otherwise Berthe's letters were devoted to asking for news of her beloved niece and goddaughter Huguette. She fretted over the child's recent illness, urged her sister to send photographs, and despaired of their time apart: "Speak to her often about her godmother. Tell her when I return I will spoil her a lot. She's the only person

43. AN, F/7/14859, Inspecteur de la Police Mobile Genty to Contrôleur Général des Services de Recherches Judiciaires, Dec. 2, 1925.

44. AN, F/7/14859, Berthe Bauval to Mme. Raoul Vacca, n.d. (probably Aug. 1925).

45. The alleged trafficker in this case denied that the address belonged to a brothel, claiming instead that his hatmaking studio was there. AN, F/7/14859, Interrogation of Luigi Fiori by Albert Barbier, Feb. 29, 1924. See also Londres, *Le chemin de Buenos-Aires*, 46–50.

46. AN, F/7/14859, Berthe Bauval to M. and Mme. Raoul Vacca, Aug. 24, 1925.

47. AN, F/7/14859, Berthe Bauval to M. and Mme. Raoul Vacca, Sept. 25, 1925.

I really love."[48] "Tell her that her godmother still loves her a lot and speak of me so she does not forget me."[49]

Then Berthe began sending letters addressed to her fourteen-year-old sister, Suzanne: "Remember that I promised to take care of you. . . . If you want, I think I can bring you here. . . . You can make a lot of money here. . . . If you want to come, write back, you won't be sorry. . . . If yes, my friend will come get you."[50] Her second request was more forceful:

> You see, you can't say that I don't think of you because I'm writing back before I have your response. . . . I'm not an ingrate. . . . I don't regret coming to America because I am happy. . . . If you come, you will see for yourself. . . . My dear little Suzanne, it's up to you to decide your own fate, if you want to be happy, you only need to say yes, and if, on the contrary, you prefer misery, oh well that's what you wanted and I'll leave you alone.[51]

Amélie intercepted the letters and brought them to the police, and because Suzanne was a minor, an investigation was opened. Inquiries at the French consulate in Buenos Aires went nowhere; Berthe Bauval was not listed as a registered prostitute in that city, at least not under her real name.[52] The case devolved into an investigation of René, her alleged trafficker, in an attempt to bring down the network of criminals who purportedly had transported Bauval and several other young women to Argentina, each time aboard the *Massilia* as it made its way between Bordeaux and Buenos Aires. Berthe's last letter to her sister was dated November 10, 1925, after which the archive is silent about her fate.

The evidence in Bauval's police dossier does not contradict definitively her sister's claim that Berthe had been kidnapped and coerced into prostitution. Moreover, it seems plausible that Berthe played a role in attempting to recruit her underage sister for work in the sex industry, even if her desire to help the young girl were sincere. Yet the recurring themes of her letters have nothing to do with prostitution, whether forced or voluntary. Their tone and content—even if tailored to assuage Berthe's sisters, justify her travels, and boast about her life in Argentina—are entirely distinct from the white slavery narrative in ubiquitous circulation. One is struck instead by the florid language in which she relayed her love for her niece and how much she missed her sisters. This includes, of course, her younger sister Suzanne, the underage minor she offered to transport to Buenos Aires, presumably to work in the sex trade.

48. AN, F/7/14859, Berthe Bauval to M. and Mme. Raoul Vacca, Sept. 15, 1925.
49. Berthe Bauval to M. and Mme. Raoul Vacca, Sept. 25, 1925.
50. AN, F/7/14859, Berthe Bauval to Suzanne Bauval, Sept. 12, 1925.
51. AN, F/7/14859, Berthe Bauval to Suzanne Bauval, Sept. 22, 1925.
52. AN, F/7/14859, French Consulate of Buenos Aires to Contrôleur Général, Directeur de l'Office Central Français pour la Répression de la Traite des femmes, Dec. 15, 1925.

Other cases even more explicitly contradict the narrative of victimization, broken promises, and innocence lost. Marie Marguerite Broquedix was born in 1894 in Montpellier. In October 1909, at the age of fifteen, Broquedix left on a Dutch steamship for Buenos Aires, ostensibly to work as a milliner. She was in touch with her family on her arrival and several times thereafter. Her letters included a return address, a hotel-restaurant in Chacabuco, a city in the province of Buenos Aires. She wrote that she was "horribly unhappy" and that "she could not say the type of life she was leading." In December 1912 she provided her family with a new address, a poste restante in Azul. Marie also conveyed that she was sick and had just given birth to a boy.[53]

A police investigation revealed that since 1910 Broquedix had made contact several times with the French consulate in Buenos Aires, including once to collect money sent by her family in France. According to a letter from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Never did this young woman complain to the Consulate that she had been brought to Argentina and detained there by force." In 1911 Broquedix made her way to the Santa Fe Province, adjacent to Buenos Aires. As she was seeking identity papers, a correspondence ensued between the consulates in Buenos Aires and Rosario, Santa Fe. Consular officials urged Broquedix to consider returning to France. The consul general in Buenos Aires wrote: "Perhaps this young woman will agree to leave the milieu into which she has fallen; in any case, it would be possible to proceed with her repatriation, either by soliciting the authorization of the Ministry of Interior or by alerting Mme. Laffite, her aunt, who surely would pay the transportation fees of her niece." The Ministry of Foreign Affairs concluded: "It therefore seems that the minor Broquedix does not fall into the category of victims of white slavery; on the contrary, she is practicing prostitution willingly."[54]

But toward the end of 1913 Broquedix could no longer be located in Buenos Aires. An investigation initiated by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs turned up no leads, and, presumably, she had stopped writing to her family.[55] No additional information was added to her police dossier for nearly twenty years. Then, in 1934, Broquedix resurfaced: she was managing a brothel on the Rue Bucharest in Paris, still working in the sex industry at the age of thirty-nine, twenty-five years after her initial voyage to Argentina.[56] The police closed the case.

53. AN, F/7/14859, Memo of Troisième Bureau de la Direction de la Sûreté Générale, June 18, 1913.

54. AN, F/7/14859, Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Minister of Interior, n.d.

55. AN, F/7/14859, Memo from Chef du Troisième Bureau to Contrôle Générale des Services de Recherches Judiciaires, Nov. 15, 1913.

56. AN, F/7/14859, Memo from Préfet de Police, le Directeur de l'Hygiène, de la Protection de l'Enfance et du Travail to Direction de la Sûreté Général, Contrôle Générale des Services de Recherches Judiciaires, June 28, 1934.

Emphasizing migration more than trafficking does not ignore the structural constraints that circumscribed the choices of the working poor and other women like Marie Marguerite Broquedix. It simply returns us to the findings of groundbreaking social histories written decades ago: the prostitute was an integral part of a larger working-class community, rather than a pariah, and migration was one of many survival strategies possible for women. Olwen Hufton wrote in 1974 that the "scanty evidence on this most tolerated of crimes" demonstrates that prostitution was a "widespread practice in which the daughters of the poor predominated."[57] In 1980 Walkowitz argued that prostitutes were "women who made their own history, albeit under very restrictive conditions. They were not rootless social outcasts but poor working women trying to survive in towns that offered them few employment opportunities and that were hostile to young women living alone."[58] With renewed attention to the working-class origins of "trafficked women" and the broad contours of internal and international migrations, neither coercion nor choice seems adequate to describe the trajectories of women who embarked on the "route to Buenos Aires."

Especially in the latter third of the nineteenth century, displacements of men and women in search of work occurred between the French provinces and urban centers.[59] From the start, these migrations included young and unmarried women from rural areas; by the fin de siècle, women predominated.[60] Rachel G. Fuchs and Leslie Page Moch note that "each generation of nineteenth-century women was more mobile that the last," and "by the generation born in the 1890s, women were more likely than men to leave their home districts."[61] While historians have linked the "sexual vulnerability" of female migrants to significant increases in childbirth outside marriage, prostitution in French cities and abroad is another measure of their economic instability and loss of social protection.

As for transatlantic migrations, a small but not inconsequential number of French men and women entered Argentina legally in the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Between 1857 and 1924, for example, just over 225,000 were counted, with about 28,000 individuals settling in Buenos Aires at the turn

57. Hufton, *Poor of Eighteenth-Century France*, 316–17. For more on the precarious existence of working women in nineteenth-century France, see Harsin, *Policing Prostitution*, esp. 205–12.

58. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, 9 and esp. 13–31, 192–213. For a recent study that echoes these findings, demonstrating prostitutes' connections to family and community, see Laite, *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens*.

59. Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*; Moch, *Pariahs of Yesterday*.

60. Fuchs and Moch, "Pregnant, Single, and Far from Home."

61. Fuchs and Moch, "Pregnant, Single, and Far from Home," 1008.

of the century.[62] But trafficking often consisted of illicit migration: people crossing borders illegally, without papers or with falsified papers. Just as the falseness of white slave narratives imbues them with meaning, so too does the falseness of identity documents. International travel to Argentina and elsewhere raised new questions, especially in the context of the developing "passport regime" at the end of the nineteenth century. The passport, according to Gérard Noiriel, played a crucial role in the consolidation of the French nation-state: by guaranteeing the identity of an individual, it affirmed her or his belonging in the national community.[63] Hence the quest to document one's identity—whether truthfully or spuriously—figured prominently in alleged trafficking cases, which in turn revealed the inadequacy of existing technologies of surveillance.

Specific French legislation structured the procurement of passports and thus, in some cases, fraudulent identity papers. In Paris men and women brought their birth certificates to the Prefecture of Police to apply for passports; elsewhere in France they were issued by local prefects, and overseas, at the consulates. All individuals under the age of twenty-one required parental authorization to apply for passports, and in accordance with article 214 of the 1804 Civil Code, married women needed permission from their husbands. In contrast, unmarried adult women could request a passport themselves, since they were free from the constraints of the Civil Code.[64] Women and girls under the age of twenty-one may have used falsified documents because parents or legal guardians did not grant them permission for overseas travel. Or perhaps it simply attests to the absence of adults in their young lives. In addition, by the turn of the century underage prostitutes had become an object of inquiry for legislators, doctors, social reformers, and feminists. The French parliament passed in 1908 a law banning the registration of prostitutes under the age of nineteen, reflecting the state's growing concern about the sexual exploitation of minors.[65] In this climate young working-class women, along with their identity papers, would be subject to increased scrutiny.

Alleged trafficking cases are replete with reports of fraudulent passports, stolen birth certificates, and pseudonyms that vexed investigators as they attempted to decipher the various participants involved in the crime. The French consulate regularly contacted the Argentine police to ascertain whether the names of women and girls they believed had been trafficked appeared on the lists of registered prostitutes. Typically they came up with nothing. Traffickers

62. Weil, "French Migration to the Americas." See also Otero, *Historia de los Franceses*. On French cultural influence in Buenos Aires, see Daughton, "When Argentina Was French."

63. Noiriel, "Surveiller les déplacements ou identifier les personnes?"

64. Hartoy, *Histoire du passeport français*, 104–5.

65. Donovan, "Combating the Sexual Abuse of Children." See also Fuchs, *Abandoned Children*.

"easily" procured the birth certificates of women who were of age and passed them to their charges; they also provided them with false identity papers to use when they registered at the municipal dispensary.[66]

Women also played an active role in obtaining fake documents for themselves. The minor Jeanne Thilleu, whose story opened this article, posed as her older sister at the town hall in her hometown to obtain the latter's birth certificate. Léone Clairé, also discussed above, traveled to Argentina under the name of Yvonne Robin; it seems that she befriended the real Yvonne Robin in Paris and then stole her birth certificate so she could obtain a passport testifying that she was of age. Henriette Ripplinger, another purported victim of white slavery, borrowed the birth certificate of Adolphine Bonnot, the maid in her Parisian boardinghouse, explaining that she needed to be of age to work in a music hall in the southern French city of Nice. Ripplinger promised to return the document once her contract had been finalized. The maid agreed, allowing Ripplinger, at the young age of sixteen, to procure a passport and make her way not to Nice but to Buenos Aires.[67] Several months later the French consul general in the Argentine capital himself supervised Ripplinger's repatriation, along with three other minors, all of them dubbed victims of trafficking.[68] In each of these cases, birth certificates were easily passed off as the property of another young woman of roughly the same age. In other examples, documents were altered in an astonishingly makeshift fashion. The twenty-year-old singer Thérèse Mignon was already in possession of a legal passport, which she acquired with the authorization of her father so that she could perform in Switzerland. To avoid any "troubles" that might arise while she traveled to Argentina as a *jeune fille mineure*, her lover and alleged trafficker Ferdinand Lanckmann had the zero digit in her true age of twenty modified to read as twenty-one. Mignon also testified that her actual birth date was not included on her passport; only the number 20 was written in the margin.[69]

Thus identity papers, whether legitimate or falsified, played a central role in these young women's lives. They required birth certificates to get a passport for travel abroad, *cédulas* certifying that they were legally residing in Buenos Aires, and papers testifying that they were working in regulated brothels, where they submitted to venereal inspections and other forms of surveillance. Repatriation was, of course, exceedingly difficult without papers. One concerned mother wrote directly to the port commissioner of Le Havre, explaining that her daughter, Berthe Toulotte, had left two years ago for Buenos Aires without

66. AN, F/7/14859, Memo to Contrôle Générale des Services de Recherches Judiciaires, July 31, 1912.

67. AN, F/7/14859, Memo from Inspector Max Cosson to Commissaire Principal Chargé du Contrôle Générale des Services de Recherches Judiciaires, Feb. 27, 1912.

68. AN, F/7/14859, Memo to Contrôle Générale des Services de Recherches Judiciaires, Oct. 7, 1912.

69. AN, F/7/14859, Testimony of Thérèse Mignon, Feb. 21, 1926.

her papers. "Today she asked me if she could come back. What joy I experienced at the idea of seeing my child again. But since she has no papers, I am afraid you won't allow her to debark. So I am sending you her birth certificate, along with one of her most recent photos. I hope, Monsieur, this will suffice." The widow Toulotte informed the port commissioner that her daughter would arrive in Le Havre aboard the *Jamaica* around July 18, 1934. She provided her address in Pierrefitte, a working-class suburb north of Paris, in case he required additional information, and she thanked him "from the bottom of a mother's heart."[70] The port commissioner also received a letter from the French consulate in Buenos Aires, where Berthe Toulotte had requested repatriation. She told consular officials that she possessed no forms of identification and that she had been brought to Argentina by a man called André.[71] In fact, Toulotte did have identity papers: an Argentine *cédula de identidad* in the name of Jacqueline Joly, a Parisian seamstress born in 1910. Toulotte, in contrast, had been born in 1915 and thus would have been sixteen years old when she immigrated to Argentina.[72]

When Berthe Toulotte arrived in Le Havre, she was questioned by a local commissioner reporting directly to the French Ministry of Interior. Her story follows the melodramatic conventions of trafficking narratives old and new. She had met a man named Marcel at a dancehall by the Place de Clichy in Paris; he proposed that they take a trip together, and off they went to Bordeaux. There they decided to "visit" an outgoing transatlantic liner—the *Massilia*, the same boat that appeared numerous times in the investigations surrounding Berthe Bauval's trafficker, described above. While Toulotte was on the gangway, her companion pushed her into a cabin and locked the door exactly as the ship set sail. For the entirety of the journey to Buenos Aires she remained in the cabin, where the ship's nurse, a man named Henri Josse, enforced her confinement. On their arrival in Argentina, Josse sneaked Toulotte off the boat and delivered her to André Lebigot, who had fabricated a fake birth certificate for her, emblazoned with a stamp from the town hall of the tenth district in Paris and christening her Jacqueline Joly. Toulotte worked first in a brothel called Sappho in the city of Rosario and later *en casita*, at a smaller establishment. Eventually an Italian lover, probably a former client, rescued her from this fate and provided her with the money necessary to begin a new life. At this moment she sought repatriation to France.[73]

70. AN, F/7/14859, Amelia Toulotte to Port Commissioner of Le Havre, June 29, 1934.

71. AN, F/7/14859, Consul General of France in Buenos Aires to Commissaire Special au Havre, June 4, 1934.

72. AN, F/7/14859, Official copy of birth certificate issued in the Commune de Pierrefitte, June 20, 1934.

73. AN, F/7/14859, Memo from Commissaire Spécial Chauvineau to Directeur Général de la Sûreté Nationale, July 18, 1934.

We need not get mired in the question of the veracity of Toulotte's story. As Louise White argues with regard to the circulation of vampire rumors in colonial Africa, people do not always "speak from experience" but instead employ stories currently in circulation to explain their circumstances. In so doing, they "construct and repeat stories that carry the values and meanings that most forcibly get their points across."[74] Even if Toulotte's story were false—and the gist of it most likely is—we can marvel at her ingenuity: how she got herself to Argentina at the age of sixteen, how she managed to be repatriated two years later, without a passport, and how she ended up back in her home outside Paris, with a mother who clearly loved her. The narrative of coercion and victimization, even if employed mendaciously, served Toulotte's immediate needs to return, undocumented, to France.

Berthe Toulotte conveyed with aplomb the melodramatic narrative of white slavery, including in her testimony all the stock characters it typically features: female victims, lustful and deceitful men, and male heroes.[75] But as Walkowitz and Vance argue, melodramatic depictions of white slavery and trafficking ignore or even obfuscate the structural factors that influenced women's choices. In all the examples relayed in this article, women could be described as vulnerable. It is possible, however, to distinguish the moralizing and prescriptive lexicon of white slavery—with its exaggerated emphasis on sexual vulnerability—from the economic precarity of young working-class women, living apart from their families and employed in a range of low-paying jobs that may have included prostitution. While white slavery narratives warned of the dangers of prostitution abroad, impoverished French women also resorted to commercial sex at home, without ever boarding a transatlantic liner. As Walkowitz argues in the context of Victorian Britain, "White slavery encouraged the belief that the sinister forces exploiting women existed outside society, and were not fundamental to its basic social and economic arrangements."[76]

Sensationalized accounts of forced prostitution overseas served another purpose, one that also speaks to the larger question of structures. They warned against female mobility by illustrating the perils of leaving the paternal or marital domicile and of traveling unaccompanied or in bad company. They implied that solo migration was a man's business and that overseas travel for women was hazardous. This last point was made even by contemporaries who, reading women's testimonies against the grain, rejected their claims of deception, kidnapping, and coercion. Journalistic accounts of twenty-five-year-old Joséphine

74. White, *Speaking with Vampires*.
75. Vance, "Innocence and Experience."
76. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, 250.

Heitz's alleged abduction serve as one example. Her police dossier attests that between April 1929 and June 1930 she made her way from France to Spain to Argentina and back to France. She began in Metz, the northeastern city of her birth, where she once resided with her husband, to Paris, where she found work as a restaurant hostess and met her traveling companion—some would say trafficker—Maurice Lazare. Their next stop was Barcelona, where Heitz was employed as a dancer, and then Rosario, near Buenos Aires. The French consulate oversaw her repatriation after deciding that she was likely the victim of trafficking.[77]

The journalist Clément Vautel, unmoved by the white slave narrative, rejected the findings of the consulate and the police that Heitz had been forced to leave France against her will. In the pages of the Parisian daily *Le journal*, Vautel transformed Heitz's story into a parody that highlighted the instrumentalism of all woman who claimed to have been abducted into prostitution. Beginning with the altercation between Heitz and her husband that precipitated her journey to Paris, Vautel mockingly noted that "beautiful women are not made for gathering dust in the provinces," suggesting that Heitz's vanity propelled her to seek a new life in the capital. Once in Paris, she met her "Prince Charming," Maurice Lazare, and rapidly forgot her husband. Her infatuation with Lazare and his empty promises landed her in an Argentine brothel. Vautel ends the article by expressing his skepticism about the official account of Heitz's deception and her forced prostitution, as well as his incredulity regarding all tales of trafficking: "That was the story of this new victim of the 'white slave trade.' It proves once again that women [*les blanches*] who are trafficked really do their part. . . . I am still waiting for the true story of a virgin unwittingly dragged by villainous individuals on the Route to Buenos Aires."[78] The popular Parisian daily *Le petit journal* also used the Heitz case to express disapprobation for women who left the confines of the patriarchal home. "If this little story keeps young women from squabbling with their husbands and from wanting to strike it rich somewhere other than in their household, the suffering of Mme. H. at least will be useful for something, and for someone [*quelques-unes*]." In the original French, the word *someone* was conveyed with the feminine plural construction, revealing that Heitz's story should serve as an admonition to all women.[79]

Thus stories of coercion and sexual danger were both socially intelligible and regulatory in early twentieth-century France. Women employed various

77. AN, F/7/14859, French Consulate in Buenos Aires to His Excellency, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Apr. 22, 1930.

78. Clément Vautel, "Mon film," *Le journal*, June 20, 1930, in AN, F/7/14859, Dossier Joséphine Heitz.

79. M.P., "La Route de Buenos-Ayres: Un dangereux trafiquant arrêté à Paris," *Le petit journal*, June 19, 1930, in AN, F/7/14859, Dossier Joséphine Heitz.

elements of the white slave narrative when communicating with the police and other authorities due to its social intelligibility and not because it documented their authentic experiences. Indeed, the "very falseness" of these stories is what gave them meaning, since they served as leverage for women to garner sympathy, gain repatriation, and even escape criminal charges.[80] These false stories were also meaningful because in the end they bolstered a regulatory regime charged with monitoring and constraining women's movement locally and internationally, whether through legislation, police work, League of Nations commissions and conventions, or the actions of social reformers who scoured the ports and train stations in search of women needing rescue.[81] Herein lies the problem with equating mobility and traditional definitions of agency: women's mobility simultaneously produced both the expansion and restriction of opportunities.

If in some contexts this image of forced migrations conditioned and circumscribed French women's accounts, this article demonstrates that other scripts were also in play: those that spoke of adventure and independence, of familial love, and of perceived opportunity overseas. Melodrama may have "set limitations on what could be said, especially in relation to female agency and desire," but it did not preclude or occlude other narratives.[82] This does not mean that women's accounts of love, work, and money in Argentina were more "true" than their testimonies to the police. Because they expressed women's understandings of their experience rather than the "facts" of what happened there, their stories were produced by and productive of their experiences.

When we consider how, in the early twentieth century, narratives on trafficking were used, recycled, and manipulated by both speaking subjects and institutions, it should give us pause before we define the contemporary debate on sex trafficking primarily in terms of the distinction between forced and voluntary prostitution.[83] By focusing on the mobility of French women more than on trafficking, however, this article reinforces the need to situate this problem within a labor and migrant rights paradigm instead. Gendered forms of intimate labor were central to the transatlantic history of population movements between Europe and the Americas, and for working-class women in the early twentieth

80. White, *Speaking with Vampires*, 43.

81. On the carceral turn in debates on white slavery and trafficking, see Luker, "Sex, Social Hygiene, and the State"; and Bernstein, "Militarized Humanitarianism Meets Carceral Feminism."

82. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, 93.

83. Yet some of the most important legislation governing human trafficking today—the UN Trafficking Protocol (2000) and the US Trafficking Victims Protection Act (2000), along with its subsequent revisions—implies that voluntary and involuntary labor are easily distinguished and that sex work constitutes a special category of violation. See, e.g., Doezema, "Who Gets to Choose?"; and Chapkis, "Soft Glove, Punishing Fist."

century, like today, structural vulnerabilities existed in a wide range of professions and circumstances. Thus in the gray zone between coercion and choice, French women traveled with third-class tickets, dubious contracts of employment, and even more dubious identity papers to Argentina. Neither fully free nor wholly subjugated, they labored in the brothels of Buenos Aires.

ELISA CAMISCIOLI is associate professor of history at Binghamton University. She is author of *Reproducing the French Race: Immigration, Intimacy, and Embodiment in the Early Twentieth Century* (2009), along with several articles on the gender of immigration and colonialism.

Acknowledgments

The author is grateful to Caroline Séquin, whose dedicated readings of the manuscript made it much better. She also thanks Carol Harrison, the anonymous reviewers of *French Historical Studies*, and the students in her undergraduate seminar Human Trafficking in History for their thought-provoking comments and questions. Thanks are also due to Jessica Pliley, whose intellectual generosity catalyzed this work.

References

Agustín, Laura. "The Disappearing of a Migration Category: Migrants Who Sell Sex." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 32, no. 1 (2006): 29–37.

Alsogaray, Julio L. *Trilogia de la trata de blancas: Rufianes, polícia, municipalidad*. Buenos Aires, 1933.

Altman, Dennis. *Global Sex*. Chicago, 2001.

Andrijasevic, Rutavica. "Beautiful Dead Bodies: Gender, Migration, and Representation in Anti-trafficking Campaigns." *Feminist Review*, no. 86 (2007): 24–44.

Barry, Kathleen. *Female Sexual Slavery*. New York, 1979.

Berlière, Jean-Marc. "Ordre et sécurité: Les nouveaux corps de police de la Troisième République." *Vingtième siècle*, no. 39 (1993): 23–37.

Bernstein, Elizabeth. "Militarized Humanitarianism Meets Carceral Feminism: The Politics of Sex, Rights, and Freedom in Contemporary Anti-trafficking Campaigns." *Signs* 36, no. 1 (2010): 45–71.

Boris, Eileen, and Heather Berg. "Protecting Virtue, Erasing Labor: Historical Responses to Trafficking." In *Human Trafficking Reconsidered: Rethinking the Problem, Envisioning New Solutions*, edited by Kimberly Kay Hoang and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, 19–40. New York, 2014.

Boris, Eileen, and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas. Introduction to *Intimate Labors: Cultures, Technologies, and the Politics of Care*, edited by Eileen Boris and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, 1–12. Stanford, CA, 2015.

Bott, Ernesto J. J. *Las condiciones de la lucha contra la trata de blancas en Buenos Aires*. Buenos Aires, 1916.

Bristow, Edward. *Prostitution and Prejudice: The Jewish Fight against White Slavery, 1870–1939*. New York, 1982.

Camiscioli, Elisa. *Reproducing the French Race: Immigration, Intimacy, and Embodiment in the Early Twentieth Century*. Durham, NC, 2009.

Chapkis, Wendy. *Live Sex Acts: Women Performing Erotic Labor*. London, 1997.
Chapkis, Wendy. "Soft Glove, Punishing Fist: The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000." In *Regulating Sex: The Politics of Intimacy and Identity*, edited by Elizabeth Bernstein and Laurie Schaffner, 51–66. New York, 2005.
Chaumont, Jean-Michel. *Le mythe de la traite des blanches: Enquête sur la fabrication d'un fléau*. Paris, 2009.
Cheng, Catherine Man Chuen. "Migrant Workers or Trafficked Victims? Structural Vulnerabilities of Women Migrant Workers in Contemporary China." In *Human Trafficking Reconsidered: Rethinking the Problem, Envisioning New Solutions*, edited by Kimberly Kay Hoang and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, 50–57. New York, 2014.
Ciccotti, Francisco. *La trata de las blanquisimas*. Buenos Aires, 1932.
Corbin, Alain. *Women for Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850*. Cambridge, MA, 1996.
Daughton, J. P. "When Argentina Was French: Rethinking Cultural Politics and European Imperialism in Belle-Epoque Buenos Aires." *Journal of Modern History* 80, no. 4 (2008): 831–64.
Davidson, Julia O'Connell. "New Slaveries, Old Binaries: Human Trafficking and the Borders of Freedom." *Global Networks* 10, no. 2 (2010): 244–61.
Davidson, Julia O'Connell, and Bridget Anderson. "The Trouble with 'Trafficking.'" In *Trafficking and Women's Rights*, edited by Christien L. van den Anker and Jeroen Doomernik, 11–26. New York, 2006.
Davis, Natalie Zemon. "Commentary." *French Historical Studies* 29, no. 3 (2006): 509–11.
Doezema, Jo. "Forced to Choose: Beyond the Voluntary v. Forced Prostitution Dichotomy." In *Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition*, edited by Kamala Kempadoo and Jo Doezema, 34–50. London, 1998.
Doezema, Jo. "Loose Women or Lost Women: The Re-emergence of the Myth of White Slavery in Contemporary Discourses of Trafficking in Women." *Gender Issues* 18, no. 1 (2000): 23–50.
Doezema, Jo. *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters: The Construction of Trafficking*. London, 2010.
Doezema, Jo. "Who Gets to Choose? Coercion, Consent, and the UN Trafficking Protocol." *Gender and Development* 10, no. 1 (2002): 20–27.
Donovan, Brian. *White Slave Crusades: Race, Gender, and Anti-vice Activism, 1887–1917*. Urbana, IL, 2006.
Donovan, James M. "Combating the Sexual Abuse of Children in France, 1825–1913." *Criminal Justice History* 15 (1994): 59–93.
Fuchs, Rachel G. *Abandoned Children: Foundlings and Child Welfare in Nineteenth-Century France*. Albany, NY, 1984.
Fuchs, Rachel G., and Leslie Page Moch. "Pregnant, Single, and Far from Home: Migrant Women in Nineteenth-Century Paris." *American Historical Review* 95, no. 4 (1990): 1007–31.
Guy, Donna. *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family, and Nation in Argentina*. Lincoln, NE, 1991.
Harsin, Jill. *Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Paris*. Princeton, NJ, 1985.
Hartoy, Maurice d'. *Histoire du passeport français depuis l'antiquité jusqu'à nos jours: Histoire législative et doctrinale, analyse et critique, renseignements pratiques*. Paris, 1937.
Hetherington, Philippa. "Victims of the Social Temperament: Prostitution, Migration, and the Traffic in Women from Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union, 1885–1935." PhD diss., Harvard University, 2014.
Hufton, Olwen. *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France, 1750–1789*. Oxford, 1974.
Jeffreys, Sheila. *The Idea of Prostitution*. Melbourne, 1997.

Knepper, Paul. "Measuring the Threat of Global Crime: Insights from Research by the League of Nations into the Traffic in Women." *Criminology* 50, no. 3 (2012): 777–808.
Kozma, Liat. *Global Women, Colonial Ports: Prostitution in the Interwar Middle East*. Albany, NY, 2016.
Laite, Julia. *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens: Commercial Sex in London, 1885–1960*. Houndmills, 2012.
League of Nations. *Report of the Special Body of Experts on Traffic in Women and Children*. Geneva, 1927.
Levine, Philippa. *Prostitution, Race, and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire*. New York, 1999.
Limoncelli, Stephanie. *The Politics of Trafficking: The First International Movement to Combat the Sexual Exploitation of Women*. Stanford, CA, 2010.
Londres, Albert. *Le chemin de Buenos-Aires*. Paris, 1927.
Luker, Kristin. "Sex, Social Hygiene, and the State: The Double-Edged Sword of Social Reform." *Theory and Society* 27, no. 5 (1998): 601–34.
Mahmood, Saba. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton, NJ, 2004.
Marsh, Kate. "'La Nouvelle Activité des Trafiquants de Femmes': France, Le Havre, and the Politics of Trafficking, 1919–1939." *Contemporary European History* 26, no. 1 (2017): 23–48.
McClintock, Anne. "Sex Workers and Sex Work." *Social Text*, no. 37 (1993): 1–10.
Metzger, Barbara. "Towards an International Human Rights Regime during the Inter-war Years: The League of Nations' Combat of Traffic in Women and Children." In *Beyond Sovereignty: Britain, Empire, and Transnationalism, c. 1880–1950*, edited by Kevin Grant, Philippa Levine, and Frank Trentmann, 54–79. New York, 2007.
Moch, Leslie Page. *The Pariahs of Yesterday: Breton Migrants in Paris*. Durham, NC, 2012.
Noiriel, Gérard. "Surveiller les déplacements ou identifier les personnes? Contribution à l'histoire du passeport en France de la Première à la Troisième République." *Genèses*, no. 30 (1998): 77–100.
Otero, Hernán. *Historia de los Franceses en la Argentina*. Buenos Aires, 2012.
Outshoorn, Joyce. "The Political Debates on Prostitution and Trafficking of Women." *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State, and Society* 12, no. 1 (2005): 141–55.
Parreñas, Rhacel Salazar. *Illicit Flirtations: Labor, Migration, and Sex Trafficking in Tokyo*. Stanford, CA, 2011.
Peck, Gunther. "White Slavery and Whiteness: A Transnational View of the Sources of Working-Class Radicalism and Racism." *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 1, no. 2 (2004): 41–62.
Pliley, Jessica R. *Policing Sexuality: The Mann Act and the Making of the FBI*. Cambridge, MA, 2014.
Rodríguez García, Magaly. "The League of Nations and the Moral Recruitment of Women." *International Review of Social History* 57, no. S20 (2012): 97–128.
Rosen, Ruth. *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900–1918*. Baltimore, 1982.
Schwenken, Helen. "Beautiful Victims and Sacrificing Heroines: Exploring the Role of Gender Knowledge in Migration Policies." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 33, no. 4 (2008): 770–76.
Scott, Joan Wallach. "The Evidence of Experience." *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1991): 773–97.
Scott, Joan Wallach. *The Fantasy of Feminist History*. Durham, NC, 2011.
Séquin, Caroline. "Sex after Slavery: Prostitution and the Policing of Race in the 'Color Blind' French Atlantic, 1848–1947." PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2019.

Soderlund, Gretchen. *Sex Trafficking, Scandal, and the Transformation of Journalism, 1885–1917*. Chicago, 2013.
Stauter-Halsted, Keely. *The Devil's Chain: Prostitution and Social Control in Partitioned Poland*. Ithaca, NY, 2015.
Stead, W. T. *The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon: The Report of the Secret Commission*, edited by Antony E. Simpson. Lambertville, NJ, 2007.
Vance, Carole S. "Innocence and Experience: Melodramatic Narratives of Sex Trafficking and Their Consequences for Law and Policy." *History of the Present* 2, no. 2 (2012): 200–218.
Vance, Carole S. "Thinking Trafficking, Thinking Sex." *GLQ* 17, no. 1 (2010): 135–43.
Walkowitz, Judith R. *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*. Chicago, 1992.
Walkowitz, Judith R. *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State*. Cambridge, 1980.
Watson, Molly MacGregor. "The Trade in Women: 'White Slavery' and the French Nation." PhD diss., Stanford University, 2000.
Weber, Eugen. *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914*. Stanford, CA, 1976.
Weil, François. "French Migration to the Americas in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries as a Historical Problem." *Studi emigrazione: International Journal of Migration Studies*, no. 123 (1996): 446–60.
White, Louise. *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa*. Berkeley, CA, 2000.
White, Louise. "Telling More: Lies, Secrets, and History." *History and Theory* 39, no. 4 (2000): 11–22.
Yarfitz, Mir. "Polacos, White Slaves, and Stille Chuppahs: Organized Prostitution and the Jews of Buenos Aires, 1890–1939." PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2012.