

Editorial: The Presence of the Past: Lessons of history for anti-trafficking work

Julia O'Connell Davidson

Please cite this article as: J O'Connell Davidson, 'Editorial: The Presence of the Past: Lessons of history for anti-trafficking work', *Anti-Trafficking Review*, issue 9, 2017, pp. 1—12, www.antitraffickingreview.org

This issue of the *Anti-Trafficking Review* is concerned with some of the histories that created, and that continue to shape, both the present-day phenomena discussed under the rubric of trafficking, and the contemporary discourse of trafficking itself. One such history is that of transatlantic slavery. Since the millennium, numerous NGOs have been founded in the US, Australia and Europe with a mission to end what they call 'modern slavery'. Their campaigns have overlapped with, and played a significant role in shaping, the development of media, NGO, policy and political discourse on human trafficking, which is, according to the antislavery NGO Free the Slaves, 'the modern day slave trade—the process of enslaving a person'.¹ In this discourse, the history of transatlantic slavery is invoked by means of visual as well as textual references in order to emphasise the severity of trafficking (and other phenomena included under the umbrella of 'modern slavery') as a human rights violation. The message has been communicated so effectively that although in international law slavery is held to be only one of several possible outcomes of trafficking, in the anti-trafficking rhetoric emanating from national and international policy agencies, as well as NGOs, trafficking is now frequently said to *be* 'modern slavery'.²

¹ Free The Slaves, 'About Slavery: Frequently Asked Questions', Free the Slaves, <https://www.freetheslaves.net/faq>.

² BBC, 'UN Forum Aims to End Trafficking', *BBC News*, 21 February 2008, <http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7242180.stm>; UNODC, 'Transnational Organized Crime: Let's put them out of business', UNODC, 2015, <https://www.unodc.org/toc/en/crimes/human-trafficking.html>; T May, 'Theresa May: The abhorrent evil of human trafficking taking place on London's streets', *Metro Blogs*, 14 October 2013, retrieved 10 January 2015, <http://metro.co.uk/2013/10/14/theresa-may-the-evil-of-modern-day-slavery-taking-place-on-londons-streets-4144671/>.

ANTI-TRAFFICKING REVIEW 9 (2017): 1–12

The primary lesson contemporary antislavery actors draw from the history they reference concerns the importance of antislavery activism. Today, as in the past, they say, activists can play a central role in educating the public about the horror of slavery, mobilising communities against it, and pressing states to take action to end it. They devote very little attention to the historical details of Atlantic World slavery. Indeed, though it makes for powerful rhetoric, the discourse of ‘trafficking as modern slavery’ displays a fairly spectacular disregard for historical reality. The large-scale, profitable, and legally sanctioned business of shipping human beings from Africa into chattel slavery in the New World that flourished between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries relied on overwhelming physical force at every stage—from the moment of kidnap, through the journey to the West African coast, detention in the dungeons of fortresses and castles prior to shipment, during the Middle Passage itself, and on arrival.³ It is true that in the contemporary world, some cases have been documented in which people have been snatched from home or street, forcibly moved across borders or to other regions of their home country, then brutally exploited. But if the term ‘human trafficking’ was applied only to such cases, it would be a numerically small phenomenon, far removed from the estimates of hundreds of thousands or even millions that are routinely touted by state and non-state actors involved in anti-trafficking work. The vast bulk of what is described as trafficking involves individuals who actively wanted to move and/or sought job opportunities in another region or country or at sea. And unlike the Africans who were transported into chattel slavery, they typically had compelling reasons for wishing to migrate, so much so that many were willing to take on heavy debts in order to achieve that end.

At the point of departure, the story of trafficking and that of the transatlantic slave trade could not be more different, and the situation faced on arrival is also unlike that of the Atlantic World chattel slavery in many important respects. Today’s antislavery activists characterise slavery as ‘a relationship between (at least) two people’ that is involuntary, and entails labour exploitation and violence or its threat.⁴ But Atlantic World slavery was much more than simply a relationship between individuals. ‘Slave’ was a status ascribed by the state. It conferred on the enslaved a double character as both ‘things’ (property) and ‘persons’ criminally responsible in law for any effort to escape or resist their owners. It was because Africans and their descendants in the Atlantic World were given this double character in law that people who were ascribed free status could hold property rights in them (i.e., treat them as fungible commodities) whilst simultaneously controlling and exacting labour from them as household dependents. Slavery designated ‘a relation to law, state, and sovereign power; a condition of disfigured personhood, civil incapacitation, and bare life’, as Stephen Best and Saidiya Hartman put it.⁵

³ S Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A journey along the Atlantic slave route*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2007.

⁴ K Bales, ‘Testing a Theory of Modern Slavery’, *Free the Slaves*, 2006.

⁵ S Best and S Hartman, ‘Fugitive Justice’, *Representations*, vol. 92, issue 1, 2005, pp. 1–15, p. 10.

Asking questions about who today stands in similar relation to law, state, and sovereign power might teach us a great deal about relations of exploitation and heavy, often violent, restraints on freedom in the contemporary world. Such questions are, however, absent in dominant discourse on 'modern slavery', which focuses on the powers exercised by individual 'modern slaveholders' over individual 'modern slaves', not the structural conditions that produce the asymmetry of power between them. And it is precisely because this discourse works with such a hollow description of transatlantic slavery that it has such wide, politically crosscutting appeal. Almost everyone can agree that it is wrong for one individual to kidnap or falsely imprison another, starve, rape and beat her or him, and/or use violence or its threat to force them to labour for little or no pay and prevent them from escaping. But there is no consensus regarding what should be done about the legal, political, social and economic machinery that makes some groups, not others, vulnerable to these forms of violent exploitation. Nor is there consensus on the kinds of freedoms that should be universally enjoyed by those who are rescued from such situations. And therein lies another feature of the history of Atlantic World slavery that goes unremarked by today's antislavery campaigners.

In the eighteenth century, many white Europeans and Americans decried the cruelties of slavery and the vicious or licentious actions of individual slaveholders, but did not move from there to argue for slavery's abolition, only its amelioration. Meanwhile, those who, from the late eighteenth century, *did* argue for abolition did not share a vision of the forms of economic and social relationships that should replace it, or of the freedoms that should be enjoyed by emancipated slaves. Not all abolitionists considered the coercive and servile relationship between slave and master as a fundamental wrong of slavery, for example. Industrial wage workers of the same period also had Masters to whom they were often bound, to varying degrees, by highly coercive legal as well as pecuniary pressures,⁶ and in Britain, many of the antislavery movement's key figures were themselves employers with strong views on the need for servants to be industrious, diligent, sober, faithful, and respectful to their Masters. As David Bryon Davis points out, 'A denunciation of colonial slavery... implied no taste for a freer or more equal society.'⁷ This was true in relation to racial as well as class inequalities. Only some antislavery activists struggled for racial equality as well as an end to slavery. William Wilberforce, memorialised as a saintly figure by contemporary antislavery activists, had reservations about the capacity of enslaved Africans and their descendants to exercise freedom so great that his primary concern was to end the transatlantic slave *trade*, rather than slavery *per se*. '[O]ur object,' he explained, 'was by ameliorating regulations, and by stopping the

⁶ R Steinfeld, *Coercion, Contract and Free Labor in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001.

⁷ D Davis, 'The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823' in T Bender (ed.), *The Antislavery Debate*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1992.

ANTI-TRAFFICKING REVIEW 9 (2017): 1–12

influx of uninstructed savages, to advance slowly towards the period when these unhappy things might exchange their degraded state of slavery for that of free and industrious peasantry.⁸

White British and American antislavery thinkers were not all keen to have the slaves they sought to liberate live alongside them as equal members of their society. Abraham Lincoln, for instance, originally favoured a policy of deporting emancipated slaves, either to Haiti or to colonies in Africa: ‘it would be better to export them all to some fertile country with a good climate, which they could have to themselves’.⁹ Even Granville Sharp, one of the more radical figures of the British antislavery movement, expressed concerns about ‘swarms of negroes’ arriving in England,¹⁰ and is reputed to have actively sought to discourage English gentlemen from offering support to destitute black people in London on grounds that ‘charity would blind them to their own best interest’ and discourage them from agreeing to embark for Sierra Leone, a British colony founded for the purpose of receiving Africans ‘rescued’ from illegal slave ships.¹¹

Many aspects of such debate on the fate of emancipated slaves resonate with contemporary debates on trafficking and the rights that should and should not be extended to those redeemed from ‘modern slavery’. But these are not the echoes of the past that capture the attention of today’s antislavery campaigners, presumably because they do not sit well with the broader, celebratory story about liberal modernity that underpins contemporary abolitionist thinking. That narrative glosses over the fact that Atlantic World slavery *was* modern slavery (it emerged and flourished alongside liberalism into the period generally thought of as well and truly modern),¹² focusing only on the fact that modern liberal states abolished slavery in the nineteenth century. It sees only liberalism’s emancipatory aspect, forgetting the central paradox of its history, namely the fact that liberal ideology can be and has been marshalled in support of the violent subjugation of truly immense numbers of people.¹³ This partial and selective approach to history matters for the present. Three examples of the dangers it presents that are particularly important to this special issue are briefly noted below.

⁸ Quoted in M Jordan, *The Great Abolition Sham*, Sutton Publishing, Stroud, 2005, p.181.

⁹ C H Wesley, ‘Lincoln’s Plans for Colonizing the Emancipated Negroes’, *The Journal of Negro History*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1919, pp. 7–21, p. 20.

¹⁰ R Blackburn, *The American Crucible: Slavery, emancipation and human rights*, Verso, London, 2011, p. 151.

¹¹ Davis, p. 100.

¹² C Mills, *The Racial Contract*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1998.

¹³ D Losurdo, *Liberalism: A counter-history*, Verso, London, 2011, p. 243.

The Dangers of Selective Memory

The first risk that attaches to the selective recall of transatlantic slavery in anti-trafficking discourse concerns race. The idea of race as constitutive of borders between flesh and blood human beings in terms of their capacities, moral worth and rights is inextricably bound to the history of Atlantic World slavery. In the course of that history, the freedom/slavery binary of liberal thought came to map onto an imagined racial binary between white and black (and non-white more generally), such that citizenship, which implied enjoyment of the 'rights of Man', was coded as white, and therefore impossible for those racialised as black, whether or not they were enslaved.¹⁴ The abolition of slavery did not mark the end of race as a system of domination. It persisted, and it continues to privilege white and devastate black lives in the contemporary world. The discourse of 'trafficking as modern slavery' actively deflects attention from this. It works to minimise the scale and nature of the atrocity of transatlantic racial slavery¹⁵ (epitomised by the oft-repeated claim that 'there are more slaves today than at any point in human history'),¹⁶ and to dissociate it from the specifically anti-black racism it fostered. It thus produces a lens that occludes the relationship between white privilege and the on-going devaluation and endangerment of black lives in the US, Brazil and other former slave and colonial states.¹⁷

A second risk arising from simplistic analogies between wrongs past and present is that they hamper, rather than facilitate, efforts to secure rights and protections in the contemporary moment. Take trafficking, for example. The definition provided in the UN Trafficking Protocol allows that the process of trafficking can lead to a number of possible outcomes, of which, as already noted, slavery is only one. The (very minimal) obligations to persons recognised as victims of trafficking that many states have committed themselves to and built into domestic 'trafficking'

¹⁴ A Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1972.

¹⁵ K Bravo, 'The Role of the Transatlantic Slave Trade in Contemporary Anti-Human Trafficking Discourse', *Seattle Journal for Social Justice*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2011, pp. 555–597.

¹⁶ T McNally, 'There are More Slaves Today than at Any Time in Human History', *Alternet*, 24 August 2009, retrieved 10 September 2016, http://www.alternet.org/story/142171/there_are_more_slaves_today_than_at_any_time_in_human_history/.

¹⁷ T Woods, 'Surrogate Selves: Notes on anti-trafficking and anti-blackness', *Social Identities*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2013, pp. 120–134; J Alves, 'Police Terror in Brazil', *openDemocracy*, 15 October 2015, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/jaime-alves/police-terror-in-brazil>; A Davis, 'From Michael Brown to Assata Shakur, the Racist State of America Persists', *The Guardian*, 1 November 2014, retrieved 20 August 2017, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/nov/01/michael-brown-assata-shakur-racist-state-of-america>.

ANTI-TRAFFICKING REVIEW 9 (2017): 1–12

legislation should thus, in theory, be extended to individuals who have been moved (by means of deception, coercion, etc.) for purposes of exploitation, whether or not they experience conditions that might be legally understood as ‘slavery’. However, in the early 2000s, the focus in most countries was almost exclusively on women and girls in prostitution, and very often to stand any chance of being identified and assisted as a victim of trafficking by the authorities, a migrant woman or girl working in the sex trade needed to demonstrate first that she did not choose or consent to work in prostitution, and second that she had been subject to immense violence.¹⁸ ‘Trafficked women’ were, as Claudia Aradau put it, ‘dis-identified from categories of migrants, criminals or prostitutes by the emphasis on raw physical suffering.’¹⁹

Over the past decade, there has been a shift in policy discourse on trafficking, with increasing emphasis on what is termed ‘labour trafficking’ as well as what was dubbed ‘sex trafficking’. The extension of the term ‘trafficking’ to non-sexual and non-criminalised forms of labour, whilst logical given the UN Trafficking Protocol definition, potentially transforms it into an even hotter political potato. For where it is often (and wrongly) assumed that no woman voluntarily elects to work in prostitution, it is widely acknowledged that people can and do choose to migrate to work in other sectors, such as agriculture, construction, and domestic work. It is also widely known that migrant workers in what are described as ‘3D’ jobs (difficult, dangerous, and dirty) often labour under poor conditions for low wages, are frequently overcharged for cramped and dilapidated accommodation, commonly have to indebt themselves to cover recruitment, visa and transportation fees, and are not always fully apprised of the terms and conditions under which they will

¹⁸ R Andrijasevic, *Migration, Agency and Citizenship in Sex Trafficking*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, 2010; E Bernstein, ‘Militarized Humanitarianism Meets Carceral Feminism: The politics of sex, rights, and freedom in contemporary anti-trafficking campaigns’, *Signs*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2010, pp. 45–72; W Chapkis, ‘Soft Glove, Punishing Fist: The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000’ in E Bernstein and L Schaffner (eds.), *Regulating Sex*, Routledge, London, 2005; J Doezema, ‘Loose Women or Lost Women? The re-emergence of the myth of “white slavery” in contemporary discourses of trafficking in women’, *Gender Issues*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1999, pp. 23–50; J O’Connell Davidson, ‘Will the Real Sex Slave Please Stand up?’, *Feminist Review*, vol. 83, issue 1, 2006, pp. 4–22.

¹⁹ C Aradau, ‘The Perverse Politics of Four-Letter Words: Risk and pity in the securitisation of human trafficking’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, vol. 33, no. 2, 2004, p. 257.

work.²⁰ Depending on how 'exploitation' is defined, and on the type and degree of deception about arrangements at the point of destination that is considered to nullify consent, the problem of 'labour trafficking' could be accurately described as limited, albeit serious, or vast and virtually endemic to temporary migrant labour schemes around the world.

Again the emphasis on raw physical suffering found in 'modern slavery' discourse helps to rein the term 'trafficking' back onto territory where politicians who have no interest in defending or extending the rights of either migrants or workers are more comfortable. Migrant workers who are exploited and deceived, but have not been bodily shackled, or locked into their squalid accommodation, or raped or beaten or threatened with death, can be ignored in the design and implementation of anti-trafficking policy. 'Trafficking as modern slavery' talk also works on the imagination of frontline actors involved in victim identification, protection and support, and the prosecution of trafficking cases, shaping and restricting understandings of who can be a victim, and who a perpetrator. In the US, Janie Chuang observes that 'strategic use of slavery imagery by defense counsel in trafficking prosecutions can raise jurors' expectations of more extreme harms than anti-trafficking norms actually require. That not only undermines prosecutorial efforts, but it renders accountability and redress for victims even more elusive than they already are.²¹

Likewise, Brenna Bhandar notes that efforts to legally challenge workfare schemes in the UK as forced or compulsory labour under Article 4 of the European Convention on Human Rights²² have failed, in large part because they cannot be demonstrated to be equivalent to slavery, indentured labour, or other forced labour systems employed in colonial settings. And yet:

²⁰ See, for example: B Anderson, *Us and Them: The dangerous politics of immigration control*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013; G Standing, *The Precariat: The new dangerous class*, Bloomsbury Academic, London, 2011; R Surtees, 'At Sea: The trafficking of seafarers and fishers from Ukraine' in M Dragiewicz (ed.) *Global Human Trafficking*, Routledge, London, 2015; B Wu, G Lan and J Sheehan, *Employment Conditions of Chinese Migrant Workers in the East Midlands*, International Labour Organization, 2010.

²¹ J Chuang, 'The Challenges and Perils of Reframing Trafficking as "Modern-Day Slavery"', *Anti-Trafficking Review*, issue 5, 2015, pp. 146–149.

²² Article 4 prohibits slavery and forced labour.

ANTI-TRAFFICKING REVIEW 9 (2017): 1–12

how curious it is to import into contemporary human rights jurisprudence colonial slavery as the standard against which any claims to forced or compulsory labour are measured. Engaging in what one might call a peculiar sort of relativism, it becomes impossible to imagine conditions under which a claimant might be successful in an Article 4 claim against the State.²³

A third danger of the false analogy between trafficking today and slavery historically is that it encourages measures not to promote safer migration but to prevent certain forms of movement *per se*, including children's independent migration. In fact, so far as undocumented migration is concerned, the analogy has been used to justify the very costly and extraordinarily violent, often lethal, controls states have set in place in an attempt to immobilise the people whose presence on their territory is deemed undesirable.²⁴ In political and media discourse on the growing death toll amongst migrants seeking to make the Mediterranean sea crossing from Libya to Italy in the spring of 2015, for example, responsibility was repeatedly laid at the feet of 'people traffickers'. Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi wrote that 'human traffickers are the slave traders of the 21st century, and they should be brought to justice',²⁵ and EU leaders vowed to use their military might to 'identify, seize/capture, and destroy' the vessels used in this modern-day slave trade.²⁶ In commentary on the current so-called 'migration crisis', journalists as well as politicians continue to use the term 'trafficking' interchangeably with 'smuggling' as a catch-all term for the facilitation of movement across borders without state sanction, and trafficking continues to be described as the modern equivalent of the transatlantic slave trade. Represented as such, any and all means employed by the state to suppress unauthorised movement appear morally justifiable. Even

²³ B Bhandar, 'Property, Law, and Race: Modes of abstraction', *UC Irvine Law Review*, vol. 4, 2014, p. 211.

²⁴ R Andersson, *Illegality, Inc.*, University of California Press, Oakland, 2014; T Baird, 'The Business of Militarized Borders in the European Union', *War Resisters International*, 1 September 2015, <https://www.wri-irg.org/node/24759>; Border Crossing Observatory, *Australian Border Deaths Database*, retrieved 9 March 2015, <http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/thebordercrossingobservatory/publications/australian-border-deaths-database/>; International Organization for Migration, *Fatal Journeys: Tracking lives lost during migration*, IOM, Geneva, 2014, retrieved 2 March 2015, http://publications.iom.int/bookstore/free/FatalJourneys_CountingtheUncounted.pdf.

²⁵ M Renzi, 'Helping the migrants is everyone's duty', *New York Times*, 23 April 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/23/opinion/matteo-renzi-helping-the-migrants-is-everyones-duty.html?_r=1.

²⁶ I Traynor, 'Migrant Crisis: EU plan to strike Libya networks could include ground forces', *The Guardian*, 13 May 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/13/migrant-crisis-eu-plan-to-strike-libya-networks-could-include-ground-forces>.

those who illegally facilitate the mobility of people who desperately *want* to move, including those fleeing war, persecution, and other threats to life itself, become legitimate targets of state violence. And even far-right groups mobilising against black and Muslim presence in Europe by disrupting humanitarian efforts to save lives in the Mediterranean can claim to be acting with the noble aim of protecting migrants from trafficking—the contemporary slave trade.²⁷

Sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois remarked that history is indispensable to the task of making sense of contemporary experience, observing that ‘the past *is* the present; that without what *was*, nothing is’.²⁸ But as he also noted, different stories can be told about history, and the histories we choose to tell (and to hear) can produce very different understandings of the present. This special issue critically examines the use and abuse of the history of transatlantic slavery in anti-trafficking discourse. Its contributors explore the dangerous political consequences of the frequent repetition of the false analogy between the transatlantic slave trade and trafficking, and offer insights into other histories that may have more useful lessons for those engaged in anti-trafficking work today.

This Special Issue

The first contribution to this special issue illuminates the race politics that lie beneath ‘modern slavery’ discourse through a critical interrogation of the highly selective forms of remembering and forgetting it sets in play. Lyndsey Beutin begins by analysing the images used in a project dedicated to making the history of the original abolitionist movement ‘usable’ for the contemporary antislavery project, showing how it appropriates black suffering to animate its own anti-trafficking narrative, yet fails to either acknowledge or endorse the on-going black liberation struggle. The current trend of incorporating anti-trafficking exhibitions into institutions that preserve the history of slavery and abolition also serves to conceal the racial logics that underpinned transatlantic slavery and survived its abolition to produce anti-blackness and white privilege in the present, Beutin argues. In addition to sidelining the heavy restraints on freedom that race as a system of domination still implies for those racialised as black in Europe and the Americas, ‘the structural exclusions that colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade forced upon the global South’ are obscured, even though the latter actually form the context in which people become vulnerable to the forms of abuse and exploitation discussed under the heading ‘trafficking’.

²⁷ R Lewis, ‘Stranded Anti-immigrant Ship Gets Help from Refugee Rescue Boat’, *Time*, 11 August 2017.

²⁸ W E B Du Bois quoted in B Quarles, *Black Mosaic*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1988, p. 88.

ANTI-TRAFFICKING REVIEW 9 (2017): 1–12

Contributions from Nandita Sharma and Kamala Kempadoo delve deeper into the history of those structural exclusions. Sharma's focus is on human mobility, and her starting point is the problem it represented for economic and political elites seeking a controllable supply of labour in a post-slavery world. Through a detailed consideration of the legal regulation of the system of indentured, contract labour that replaced slave labour in British colonies in the nineteenth century, she shows how the figure of 'the immigrant' came into being as the person whose movement across space was to be regulated, initially by the British imperial state and later by nationalising states, in order to assure a continuing supply of cheap and malleable labour in a world without slavery. Paradoxically, however, the regulations that severely constrained this new workforce were legitimated as a form of protection against slavery, and Sharma finds powerful echoes of this in contemporary 'trafficking as modern slavery' discourse. The most serious threats to migrating people today come from the immigration systems operated by nation states, she argues, and yet far from demanding an end to states' use of overwhelming physical force against ordinary, peaceful migrating people, that discourse operates to legitimate nationalised states' enactment of drastic and often deadly constraints on their mobility.

In standard liberal accounts of historical development (and even in some Marxist accounts), it is assumed that modernity initiated the incremental growth of freedom as serfs, slaves, and servants gradually threw off the shackles that bound them and free wage labour was established as the norm. Kempadoo's article alerts us to problems with that linear tale, and to the particular light that Caribbean scholarship can shed on questions about labour and freedom, given the many, often overlapping, forms of unfree labour historically experienced in the region. The multiple and often simultaneous histories of slavery and servitude also hold important lessons on gendered and racialised dimensions of freedom and unfreedom. Caribbean history thus provides an extremely useful lens through which to evaluate twenty-first century claims about human trafficking and 'modern slavery'. However, Kempadoo argues, more careful historical attention both to the specificities of the forms of violence, coercion and legalities that shape labour, *and* to working people's lives, hopes and dreams, is necessary if we are to develop the analytical tools needed to pursue and practice freedom in the contemporary world.

In her contribution, Laura Lammasniemi turns to the history of modern anti-trafficking laws in England and Wales. She details a series of interrelated legal interventions enacted between 1885 and 1905 ostensibly designed to protect women and girls from so-called 'white slavery'. These interventions did not in fact provide women with protection against exploitation (either within prostitution or any other context), but because they framed 'white slavery' as a matter of criminal or immigration law, they *did* lead to closer controls over the lives of migrant women and of sex workers—much like present-day anti-trafficking initiatives, Lammasniemi concludes. The theme of 'protective' measures that do

nothing to address the structures that create the need for protection but do further limit freedoms is continued in Stephanie Maher's article on 'irregular' Senegalese migration to Europe. Though today often framed as a problem of trafficking or 'modern-day slavery', there is a centuries long and culturally valued history of Senegalese migration, and it is only Europe's very recent drive to control and restrict migration that has effectively rendered such movements, and the people who undertake them, 'illegal'. The constriction of options for legal mobility has made journeys more treacherous, and more likely to generate the kind of dependencies that leave people vulnerable to exploitation. Yet once again, restrictions on mobility are presented as a humanitarian project to 'protect' the vulnerable from 'modern slavers'.

The final contribution from Samuel Okyere addresses the unintended and extremely negative consequences of 'trafficking as modern slavery' discourse for children in Ghana. Okyere outlines the long history of youth and children's independent labour migration in Ghana, and its connections to the country's wider history of colonisation, as well as to its more recent history of structural adjustment, enforced free-trade policies, land grabs, and the human insecurities all these have engendered. Again, these and other structural factors are absent from the narratives of 'child trafficking' promulgated by antislavery campaigners; narratives that whilst based on extremely dubious evidence nonetheless inform the country's precarious ranking in the US 'Trafficking in Persons' report. Far from stimulating interventions that might better protect the rights and freedoms of Ghanaian children and youth, 'child trafficking' and 'modern slavery' discourse has become 'another mechanism of coercion and control wielded by relatively richer, powerful states' against a relatively poorer and weaker one.

Taken together, the contributions to this issue suggest that the appeal to history made by 'trafficking as modern slavery' discourse can and does work to conceal, legitimate, and sometimes even encourage, heavy restraints on human freedom, mobility and rights, including that to life itself. At the same time, they reveal that more critical engagement with the histories of transatlantic slavery and colonialism and their afterlives can teach us a great deal about the forms of violence, injustice and oppression that are today either tolerated or sanctioned in the dominant liberal world order. A focus on these lessons of history might help open up alternative political possibilities and inform different and more genuinely emancipatory approaches to anti-trafficking policy and activism.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the Leverhulme Trust for the award of a Major Research Fellowship (MRF-2012-085), during which the arguments of this paper were developed.

Julia O’Connell Davidson is Professor of Social Research in the School of Sociology, Politics & International Relations at the University of Bristol. She has researched and written on employment relations, sex work, sex tourism, trafficking, child migration, and debt-funded migration. Her research has also critically interrogated the concept of ‘modern slavery’. She is the author of *Modern Slavery: The margins of freedom* (Palgrave, 2015), and *Children in the Global Sex Trade* (Polity, 2005), and a member of the openDemocracy *Beyond Trafficking & Slavery* editorial partnership. Email: julia.oconnelldavidson@bristol.ac.uk