CONTENTS

Introduction

TWO ROADS TO RIO

MARIE FRANÇOISE Yvonne Biaggioni felt a wave of relief as she stepped onboard the SS *Valdivia* on the evening of April 30, 1924. As the spire of Marseille's Notre-Dame de la Garde Basilica faded into the darkening sky, she reflected on her escape. A ballet dancer, she earned only a limited and insecure income which she sometimes supplemented by selling sex, both in her home of Marseille as well as elsewhere in France. But her boyfriend "abused her and took her money," and so, like many young French women in the aftermath of the First World War, she left home.[1]

Biaggioni was not the only member of her family to do so. Her younger sister had departed France at age 15 to seek employment in Russia, Egypt, Italy, Spain, and Germany, working as an "Oriental dancer" and sleeping with men "to make extra money." After the war, economic devastation pressed many people to migrate and earn money however they could.[2] In Biaggioni's family, at least three and likely all four sisters exchanged erotic and sexual labor for money, security, and survival.

Crossing the Atlantic, Biaggioni knew she would miss her family, especially the 2-year-old girl she called her "adopted daughter"—a term unmarried women often used to avoid the stigma that fell on children conceived out of wedlock. But she knew the money she could earn abroad could change their lives. While she had initially planned to go to Buenos Aires, Argentina, she learned that immigration officials there would not admit women who had previously sold sex. So Biaggioni settled on Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where there were "less difficulties placed in a woman's way."

As the ship crossed the Atlantic, Biaggioni subsidized her voyage through sexual exchange. She had sex with several men on the ship, including the

purser, who changed her cabin at no cost. A slim, 5'4" woman with "reddish hair," Biaggioni looked younger than her 36 years (though we cannot be sure she gave officials on the ship her real age). Upon arriving in Rio on May 16, 1924, Biaggioni immediately set about making money at a pención, or brothel, in the Lapa neighborhood, a bohemian entertainment district where the authorities tolerated commercial sex.

White French women like Biaggioni commanded higher prices and were subjected to less police surveillance and harassment than Afro-Brazilian and Eastern European Jewish women. French women were particularly in demand for practicing "perversion," slang for oral sex.[3] Biaggioni spent most evenings going out to casinos, where she ate, drank, watched the entertainment, and picked up clients. She frequently entertained "high officials, such as members of the Staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Police Delegate of this District, and others of high rank," some of whom kept regular appointments with her.

While Biaggioni paid 70 mil reis (approximately 7 US dollars) a day to the madam for room and board, she earned around 200 mil reis (approximately 20 US dollars) a day, leaving her plenty of money to open a "nice savings account" at the Italo-French Bank of Brazil. She regularly sent money back to France to support her family and "adopted" daughter. But she also harbored more ambitious plans. Using the ship's purser on the SS *Valdivia* to pass messages, Biaggioni sent for her sisters Charlotte, age 25, and Pauline, age 20, and included money for their passage. She planned to "open a pención herself," where she and her sisters could keep all their earnings. After several years, they would all return to France "with a great deal of money saved up."

On July 12, 1924, an American visited the brothel not to purchase sex, but to spy on its dwellers and to learn all he could about the inner working of the vice economy. Tall, with a medium build, brown hair, and brown eyes, he looked to be in his early thirties.[4] We do not know what name he gave, but it was certainly not his real one, Paul Michael Kinsie. He examined the physiognomy of the women and listened to the languages they spoke. In New York–accented English, or perhaps a few words of broken French, he may have chatted with a few of the women and the brothel owner. As he could only speak English and Yiddish, he often had to rely on his observations and instincts—or, perhaps, biases—rather than conversations.

When Kinsie and Biaggioni met, she did not give her real first name, presenting herself as Yvonne Françoise, her middle names. Kinsie soon took his leave and moved on to another brothel—or maybe he stayed longer with one

of the women; the record is silent. When he got back to his hotel, he wrote a report on his findings, signed only with the number 70, to assure that his identity remained concealed.

Did Biaggioni believe the story Kinsie told her? Perhaps he posed as a prospective client or said he wanted to place one of his "girls" at the brothel, or promised to take her to Buenos Aires, where she could make more money. Yet Biaggioni may have found Kinsie suspicious. Indeed, she may have already caught wind of the League of Nations study on the "traffic in women," and suspected Kinsie, as well as another man she spoke with on the SS *Valdivia*, of working as undercover investigators.

To League investigators, Biaggioni appeared doubly suspicious. She traveled from her home country to another to sell sex, making her a potential trafficking victim. But because she planned to send for her sisters—one of whom was under 21 years old, and thus, according to League officials, unable to consent to prostitution—Biaggioni was also a potential trafficker.[5]

Kinsie's journey to Rio took a very different route than Biaggioni's. Born in New York City in 1893, Kinsie grew up in a Jewish family in the Chelsea neighborhood. The 1915 Census listed him as a hat salesman who worked for the family business.[6] But as early as 1913, at just 20 years old, Kinsie also worked as an undercover investigator attempting to root out prostitution in American cities.[7]

In the early twentieth century, reform-minded private citizens and public officials in many American cities worried about the pervasiveness and visibility of prostitution, particularly the red-light districts where police informally tolerated commercial sex, often located in African American and immigrant neighborhoods or just outside the city limits. The American Social Hygiene Association (ASHA), an organization headquartered in Kinsie's hometown of New York City, took the lead in this work. With funding from billionaire businessman and philanthropist John D. Rockefeller, Jr., the ASHA sent its agents around the country to investigate vice districts and stamp them out. Kinsie soon became one of the organization's most valuable employees.

Kinsie possessed a remarkable ability to dissemble. He could pose as a client or pimp to get the measure of a red-light district. He could easily strike up conversations with young women, flirt with them, and get them to reveal information about the commercial sex industry and their place within it. He also misled officials. During one 1913 investigation in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Kinsie lied in a sworn affidavit while describing his findings in the city and gave his age as 24, perhaps to increase his credibility.[8] Although he claimed to have

a college degree from the University of Kentucky, there is no record of him graduating.[9]

When the United States entered the First World War, Kinsie's investigative career took off. He joined the US Army and worked for a special division run by ASHA personnel, which rewrote US military prostitution policy, criminalized prostitution in most states, and helped arrest tens of thousands of women. After crossing the country to eradicate prostitution near military training camps, Kinsie traveled to France to conduct investigations in the aftermath of the armistice, which led to the harassment and arrest of women there. While the war may have been devastating for French women like Biaggioni, making it both more difficult to marry and to eke out a living on their own, it offered an opportunity for the ASHA and its star investigator to spread the anti-prostitution gospel.

In 1923, the League of Nations—the international governing body formed at the war's end—resolved to investigate the international dimensions of the traffic in women. Even though the United States declined to join the League, the League's trafficking committee selected Americans from the ASHA, the self-proclaimed world experts on prostitution, to take the lead. For the ASHA, an international investigation of trafficking provided the perfect pretext to spread American-style policy around the globe, particularly criminalizing commercial sex and curbing the migration of people deemed sexually immoral. As the most trusted and prolific investigator for the ASHA, Kinsie spent three years traversing the Atlantic, roaming Europe, crisscrossing the Americas, and searching for trafficked women in North Africa. In most places he posed as a trafficker to infiltrate the international trafficking rings the League believed were operating. He recorded his conversations and observations from sixty cities across four continents and shared this data with his ASHA colleagues, who compiled it into a final report to present to the League's Committee on Traffic in Women and Children.

Kinsie and his colleagues furnished the League with crucial data for conceptualizing and defining trafficking. "There is a constant stream of foreign women proceeding to certain countries," the final report declared. This "stream" itself provided evidence that "a traffic of considerable dimensions is being carried on."[10]

Their investigation imprinted a particularly American vision of trafficking on the League of Nations' anti-trafficking work, one that understood all women's migration for sexual labor as trafficking. And the final report, full of the supposed hard data extracted through the undercover investigative

process, supported the American viewpoint. These definitions and data formed the basis of international agreements in the 1930s, which defined all prostitution as forced trafficking. The solution to the problem of trafficking, then, involved criminalizing commercial sex and limiting migration, policies framed as a means of protecting women.

How should we understand these two roads to Rio? According to the League's trafficking investigators, prostitution endangered not only Biaggioni, but the moral and physical health of the world. But in the eyes of women like Biaggioni, violent partners, economic precarity, police harassment, and difficulty migrating often posed more pressing dangers than the act of sexual exchange itself. In fact, while Kinsie surely saw himself as part of a prestigious scientific and policymaking community that rescued women around the world, Biaggioni had reason to see his work as nefarious. After all, Kinsie and his ASHA colleagues laid the foundation for policies that entrapped women, deprived them of customers, surveilled them, prevented them from traveling, and made it hard for them to earn a living, even in locales with legal commercial sex industries.

In the end, as this book will show, Kinsie's view won out—we still live with it today. But it is crucial to learn as much as we can from women like Biaggioni. Their archival traces reveal the structural constraints, the everyday dilemmas, and the strategies of mutual aid and creative resistance that shaped women's migration, labor, and lives.[11] From Kinsie's vantage, such factors remained largely irrelevant or invisible.

American Sexual Exceptionalism

In the 1870s, a group of British anti-slavery and women's rights activists began to attack what was a fairly ubiquitous mode of prostitution control in many European countries and their colonies in the nineteenth century. Under this policy regime, termed *réglementation* by the French officials who developed it, and "regulationism" or "regulation" in English, governments tolerated and oversaw the commercial sex industry by licensing brothels and registering prostitutes, whom physicians regularly examined for venereal disease.[12] These British activists, soon joined by their brethren on the Continent and in the United States, termed their movement "abolition" and themselves "new abolitionists," to signal their desire to abolish state-regulated prostitution, just as governments had abolished chattel slavery. Reformers also adopted the phrase "social purity" to describe their goal of purifying society from sexual ills.[13]

At first, this transatlantic abolitionism had a distinctly feminist bent. Its adherents argued that state-regulated prostitution both caused and resulted from women's political, social, and economic inequality, which any real solution to the problem of prostitution would have to address.[14] The feminist abolitionist position rejected licensed prostitution because it infringed on women's civil liberties and constituted state overreach.[15] The state-regulated brothel, they argued, was the primary driver of sex trafficking, the forced transport of women for forced prostitution. But by the late nineteenth century, another group who opposed regulated prostitution increasingly gained power in the United States and Europe. These "paternalist abolitionists," to use Jessica Pliley's term, hoped to abolish regulation not because it harmed women, but because it encouraged prostitution and immorality. They also argued, as feminists did, that regulation caused sex trafficking. Impelled by concerns over disease and crime, however, they worked to replace state-regulated prostitution with "laws that targeted 'bad' women while also treating women as children."[16] Unlike their feminist predecessors, they stressed carceral, rather than economic and political solutions to the "problem" of prostitution.

In the early twentieth century, a group of American reformers took the logic of paternalist abolitionism even further. While Americans initially had worked as junior partners to the British, as the United States gained power on the world stage they also gained power to shape the international fight against prostitution and trafficking. Under the banner of "social hygiene," they continued to reject state-licensed prostitution, but as a part of a larger platform to eradicate prostitution and the prostitute herself.[17] Much like Americans who advocated for the federal prohibition of alcohol and opium in the early twentieth century, these prostitution prohibitionists saw the federal government, particularly the US military, as their most powerful ally.[18] They pushed for laws that criminalized and prohibited commercial sex, as well as immigration restrictions that made supposedly sexually suspicious migrants subject to exclusion and deportation. And they succeeded, passing laws prohibiting prostitution in the 1910s that remain on the books and continue to be enforced. Indeed, the United States has been a global outlier in its insistence on prohibition as a policy approach and its tolerance for creating criminals through criminalizing acts, identities, and substances it deems immoral.[19]

As they attacked commercial sex, Americans developed a strong sense of what I term sexual exceptionalism, that is, the belief that American national character was rooted in—and visible through—the superior sexual morality of the people and their government. The term links the ideology of American exceptionalism to the concept of "sex exceptionalism," that is, that American

culture, as well as law, have treated sex as essentially and categorically distinct from other aspects of human life. Its proponents articulated American sexual exceptionalism through multiple idioms, including the racial language of Anglo-Saxon bloodlines, medical discourses about low rates of venereal disease, religious claims about Protestant Christian sexual reserve, and political arguments about the sexual self-control necessary for democratic self-governance. Debates over prostitution and trafficking buttressed broader national narratives about American exceptionalism. As David Bell notes, "political narratives about America's exceptional character served to justify various projects of national aggression against both Native and foreign peoples, but they also highlighted what Americans saw as their best qualities and their moral duties, giving them a standard to live up to."[20] Reforming prostitution policy at home and abroad were thus two sides of the same coin.

Recent scholarship has shown the value of bringing together the histories of sexuality and statecraft, illuminating how delineating and policing normative sexual arrangements has expanded the reach of local and state governments, as well as the US federal government.[21] *Empire of Purity* examines how the state came to recognize, define, and act on the "problem" of commercial sex. It traces how the US government increasingly circumscribed normative heterosexual intercourse in the decades before—and concurrently with—the period when it also constructed a homosexual-heterosexual binary in federal policy.[22] As scholars have shown, policing prostitution and trafficking created new federal bureaucracies such as the FBI, restructured urban geographies, reinforced gendered and racial hierarchies, and strengthened colonial rule.[23]

Yet the wide-reaching goals and effects of US anti-prostitution and trafficking efforts, I argue, are only visible by following actors and policies as they crossed borders.[24] I trace the exercise of US power across multiple kinds of jurisdictions, from the US mainland, to US territories, occupations, and even other sovereign states. In doing so, a new picture emerges, one that illuminates both the workings of US power and the ideological construction of normative heterosexuality. By focusing on sexuality while attending to gender and race, the book pursues a different kind of "Atlantic crossings" of progressive reform, one in which Americans did not simply adopt European policies, but actively tried to shape them.[25]

This expansion of US power occurred not only through the spread of American ideology, as scholars have suggested of America's "moral empire," but also through direct attempts to shape and enforce policy in other places—both colonies and sovereign states. At times, US prostitution policy followed the model of the "colonial boomerang," as US officials first tested policies in colonies and then applied them on the mainland.[26] Yet at other times, US officials

first implemented mainland policies in one colonial test case and then elsewhere outside of the mainland. While other scholars have revealed the US government's interest in regulating sexual contacts between US soldiers and local women, *Empire of Purity* demonstrates the expansive and interconnected nature of American reformers' efforts, which were not limited to one imperial site but reflected their global ambitions.[27]

Moreover, US prostitution policy was forged through entanglements with other imperial powers. These transimperial encounters reflected the fact that just as countries interact, so do imperial formations, which include both state and non-state actors.[28] Americans had long looked to the British Empire to make sense of their own imperial ambitions and anxieties.[29] In the late nineteenth century, a trans-Atlantic cadre of abolitionists attempted to close British imperial regulated brothels in India, while also calling on US cities not to adopt regulation. After 1898, US officials embraced Spanish imperial forms of regulated prostitution in the Philippines, while an American and European reform network criticized them. France and the United States, both imperial powers during WWI, battled over which country had the more scientific and civilized prostitution policy. And in the post–WWI moment, debates over prostitution policy at the League of Nations were also about how empires should properly govern.

Empire of Purity brings together the insight that public-private partnerships have fueled the expansion of state power, with an interest in zooming the lens out beyond the nation-state.[30] It demonstrates that partnerships between the state and private philanthropic organizations dedicated to eradicating prostitution and trafficking extended the US government's role in the sexual lives of its citizens as well as those who found themselves under its governance around the globe. In fact, such public-private partnerships could advance US policy interests in international governance even in the absence of explicit US state involvement. ASHA members, for example, promoted an American-style prohibitionist prostitution policy at the League of Nations, even as they did not officially represent the United States.

Americans' ambition to spread sexual morality abroad intertwined with their avowed commitment to expanding liberty: proper sexual governance paved the way for the success of democratic political forms. Although by WWI Americans often made the connections between sex and democracy explicit, prior to it they more often used the language of civilization. Leaders of private reform organizations, and, by the turn of the century, the US state, promoted sexual self-control for men and women as the cornerstone of civilization.

Civilizational ideology integrated anxieties about race, gender, sexuality, national identity, religion, and class into a unified, hierarchical continuum that allowed for the ranking of individuals and peoples.[31]

While nineteenth-century Americans employed the language of civilization to claim a status equal to European nations, by the twentieth century they used it to justify American global power.[32] Unsurprisingly, Americans with social, political, and economic clout positioned those like themselves—white, male, American, Protestant, and middle-class—at the top. Reform-minded white women forged their own claims to power by arguing for women's inherently civilized natures—more civilized even than white men—because of women's lack of and ability to control sexual impulses.[33]

Yet, these activists believed, civilizational hierarchies were not completely fixed. Individuals and peoples could move between the stages. With the proper tutelage uncivilized peoples could move forward; but if corrupted by vices, and particularly sexual vices, civilized peoples could move backward. A government that regulated or tolerated prostitution encouraged physical and mental degeneration among its citizenry, a sure path to national decline. Moreover, anti-prostitution activists argued, the problem of prostitution could extend beyond national borders: through trafficking, sexual vice in any part of the world could infect the United States. The efforts of American private reform organizations and US state officials to shape prostitution and trafficking policy abroad could also thus protect the United States itself.

US officials and private reform organizations drew on the growing moral authority of humanitarianism in their quest to disseminate American sexual laws and mores abroad. Many scholars have noted the imperial roots of humanitarianism and humanitarian interventions, often based on upholding the supposedly universal moral values that governed civilized societies.[34] Here again, US officials and private-citizen reformers argued for American sexual exceptionalism. For much of the nineteenth century the US government stood wary of humanitarian intervention into the affairs of sovereign states, concerned that European empires would use it as a pretext to intervene in the United States.[35] But when the United States declared war on Spain in 1898, it soon became a proponent of humanitarian intervention by military force. As Kristin Hoganson has shown, both US officials and the popular press positioned the United States as the masculine savior of feminized Cuba from the rapacious clutches of Spain.[36] Unlike European empires who jostled for supremacy through war, US officials argued, the United States only used force to spread civilization, rather than pursue its own self-interest.[37]

The post–WWI moment marked a new stage of humanitarian activity. The League of Nations claimed oversight over a range of issues, including the traffic in women, further marking the issue as one of universal humanitarian concern rather than national interests. Such framing, however, allowed the US government, as well as other governments, to pursue policies that allowed states to more tightly control the labor and mobility of populations in the name of humanitarian anti-trafficking work.[38]

Ideas about religion played a crucial, though not always visible, role in conceptions of American sexual exceptionalism. Within the United States, native-born white Protestants often framed Jewish and Catholic immigrants as sexually deviant and unassimilable. Drawing on long-standing anti-Semitic tropes of Jews as "prone to lust" based on their practices of circumcision and polygamy, critics claimed that Jews produced the majority of "filthy publications."[39] Catholic clerical celibacy confounded the gendered and familial norms of American Protestantism. Popular exposés of convent life related torrid tales of young nuns—sometimes Protestant-born girls tricked into conversion by conniving nuns and priests—and held captive for the sexual pleasure of lecherous clergymen.[40]

Countries that Americans associated with Catholicism also bore the taint of sexual immorality. The close ties between the Spanish government and Catholic Church rendered the nation sexually suspicious in the American cultural imagination.[41] American popular culture portrayed France, where Catholicism predominated despite the country's avowedly secular political culture, as a place of sexual excess and rampant prostitution.[42] In the early twentieth century, sensationalist white slavery literature decried the "French traders," "Jew traders," and "Polish Jewesses" who entrapped native-born white Protestant girls.[43] Such narratives positioned Protestantism as inherently sexually moral—and fundamentally American—in contrast to the foreign faiths of Judaism and Catholicism. Thus, on a global scale, American Protestants understood religion, sexual morality, and national identity as closely intertwined.

By the twentieth century, American social hygiene reformers had pledged to study sexual problems "in the spirit and with the methods of modern science, education, and enlightened morality," rather than from the supposedly religious and sentimental perspective that had animated the social purity reformers who came before them.[44] Yet the purportedly secular vision of sexual morality they espoused rested on Protestant conceptions of sexual self-control in service of the family and nation.[45] By recasting Protestant sexual morality

in the allegedly secular terms of science, as well as civilization, they argued for its universality, and thus applicability, around the world.

Of course, in many ways, Americans imagined their sexual exceptionalism. Many other countries understood their own sexual mores and policies as the most modern, scientific, and moral. And Americans weren't unique in their concerns over prostitution and trafficking. As many scholars have shown, British, French, Latin American, and Eastern European reformers also attacked prostitution and trafficking with zeal.[46]

But the US government's relationship to prostitution did follow a different path than that of Britain, France, and other European states. First, the United States remained primarily a rural society in the nineteenth century; governments generally implemented licensed prostitution in urban centers. And the US federal government, comparatively weak, left it entirely to local governments to solve questions of prostitution control. Unlike many European powers, the United States did not maintain a strong standing military, the arm of the state that often pushed for licensed prostitution near garrisons. Indeed, the Civil War marked the US military's first small-scale attempt at licensing, when Union commanders oversaw brothels at camps in Memphis and Nashville, Tennessee, but abandoned such projects of prostitution regulation after the war's end.[47]

Moreover, the United States was primarily a settler colonial society until the turn of the century. As imperial powers with administrative colonies, Britain and Spain, for example, had to manage sex between local women of color and white metropolitan troops, administrators, and workers. In contrast, as US federal control expanded westward after the American Civil War, it largely displaced Native American populations and attempted to replace them with white families. Although data on women who sold sex in the West are scarce, white women formed the majority, working in saloons, brothels, and even mobile wagons in the mining towns, construction sites, and military garrisons where single men gathered.[48] Not until the United States gained its own administrative colonies after the War of 1898 did the federal government begin to seriously address the question of regulated prostitution. It quickly followed the colonial model set by the British, Spanish, and Dutch Empires, and regulated prostitution in the Philippines, Cuba, and Puerto Rico.[49]

Yet, much as the United States tried to "hide" its empire more broadly, US officials carefully swept these experiments with regulation under the rug.[50] A stated policy of prostitution prohibition (or at least, prohibiting US officials to license it) sent a clear message to the American people, and indeed, the

world, that the US empire differed from the British or French model. It did not matter that US military and administrative presence expanded the commercial sex markets in Manila and San Juan after the War of 1898. It did not matter that prohibition as a policy left no room to mitigate the harms of sex for pay between soldiers and locals, which, of course, continued to occur. What mattered was that the sex was less visible to mainland Americans.[51]

This sacrifice of women and local communities to maintain the image of exceptional American sexual purity was, as Mary Louise Roberts has termed it, "the price of discretion."[52] As the United States gained power on the global stage in the twentieth century, particularly after WWI, officials and non-state reformers further enforced an American vision of right sexuality abroad, which only served to increase their sense of exceptionalism. Using the fight against prostitution and trafficking, powerful Americans attempted to remake other countries in their own image and enhance US global standing in an imperial age.

Seeing Sexual Labor and Migration

In this book, I approach sex trafficking as a "historically contingent concept," as Philippa Heatherington and Julia Laite call it, rather than a discrete problem.[53] Trafficking has long been a flexible and contested category.[54] Often, state officials as well as non-state reformers have used that flexibility to target some people and leave others be. They mobilized discourses of trafficking at particular moments to obtain their desired political aims, often while occluding those very goals.

Indeed, the flexibility of the terms "white slavery," "trafficking," and "prostitution" was the point. US officials and non-state reformers "institutionalized ambiguity," to use Katrina Quisumbing King's term, by constructing definitions and policies that accommodated seemingly contradictory ideas.[55] Prostitution, as a legal term, was slippery. Police could arrest so-called sexually suspicious women for anything from soliciting to loitering to vagrancy, as well as committing a sex act for money. White slavery and trafficking proved similarly flexible. Both state officials and private reform organizations at times treated prostitutes as victims and at other times as criminals, and debated whether they deserved punishment or protection. These unresolved ambiguities allowed officials to use their discretion, to choose, case by case, from a wide range of options.

How reformers and state officials understood the problem of prostitution mattered too. Some saw it as an issue of women's rights; others, of disease and

public health; some believed it to be a problem of morality; still others considered it one of crime and social order; many insisted it originated from the sexually debased foreigners arriving in the United States; and most understood it as some combination of these factors. The way people defined prostitution had ramifications for who should have the authority to enforce laws and policies. Questions of jurisdiction played out over both governmental and geographic territory.

As US officials and non-state reformers institutionalized ambiguity into the structures of prostitution and trafficking policies, such policies gained teeth through discretionary policing. As Anne Grey Fischer has shown, the power of law enforcement officials to target some women as of concern to the state, signaled largely by virtue of their class, race, and ethnic backgrounds, is a cornerstone of police power. Discretion, states Fischer, is the "power to determine whether a woman is hailing a taxi or soliciting motorists for sex."[56] Even when women arrested for prostitution used the courts to advocate for themselves, they rarely prevailed.[57] Migrating women faced similar discretionary power at borders, as immigration officials evaluated their physiognomy, clothes, and comportment for signs of latent immorality.[58]

Yet women who sold sex, like Biaggioni, often articulated other ways of conceptualizing commercial sex and migration. Then and now, people use the word "prostitute" to signify an identity, a means of dividing women into categories of "good" and "bad" according to their sexual behavior. Most women, however, engaged in commercial sex less as a vocation than a gig, something they interspersed with other work, moving in and out of the commercial sex economy. While I use the term "prostitute" to capture the worldview of my actors, I use terms such as "woman who sold sex" and "sex worker" to reflect my analytical voice. Although "sex work" is anachronistic, coined by the sex worker activist Carol Leigh in 1978, it captures many women's insistence that they sold sex to make money, bringing issues of labor and economics to the fore. Moreover, it positions them as workers: as Heather Berg argues, sex work is not exploitative because it is sexual, but because it is labor under capitalism.[59]

Following several decades of feminist scholarship, I situate prostitution as a form of labor.[60] Like these scholars, I contend that state policing of prostitution often harmed women, and that even feminist efforts to "rescue" prostitutes or purported trafficking victims frequently made their lives more precarious.[61] This is not to say that women who sold sex did not suffer from violence and coercion. Many did. But such abuses threatened all working women—and especially migrant working women—across industries and locations.

To see the exploitation of women as a problem limited to the sex industry conceals the structural "push and pull" factors that led women to migrate and sell sex.[62] To set sexual labor and migration apart from all other forms of labor and migration makes the full lives of women in the commercial sex industry harder to see. It sets up a false dichotomy, as Elisa Camiscioli has shown, between "coercion and choice" that erases the structural factors that constrained women's lives.[63] It obscures the growth of global capitalism and its attendant inequalities of gender, race, and class. It ignores the increased flow and new routes of migration, particularly in the twentieth century.[64] It makes women's sexual, reproductive, and care work invisible.

The story of Americans' global sexual reform projects can only be told by bringing disparate sources together from collections within and outside of the United States. The papers of reform organizations in Europe and the United States, alongside US government documents, disclose reformers' motivations and strategies for attacking sexual vice. French military archives and those of US colonial and military administrations detail how local elites used US anti-prostitution efforts to advance their own goals, while petitions of complaint show working-class people protesting such policies as despotic. League of Nations reports on trafficking and the raw data collected by the League's American undercover agents show the perspectives of women migrants who moved between various forms of labor, including sexual labor, to support themselves and their families. But they also reveal how Americans inserted their own definitions of trafficking into international conventions, definitions that directly contravened what most women told them.

These sources overwhelmingly privilege the voices of those who sought to inflict an idealized vision of sexual order onto the bodies of women. *Empire of Purity* is not a story about the local conditions under which women performed sexual labor and their experiences, though it draws on many excellent works that do just that.[65] When we do see women's accounts, they are usually mediated: taken from interviews at prisons or recorded as investigative reports—much like the story of Marie Biaggioni, whose life we can only glimpse through the notes of two investigators who spoke with her and her family.

But inscribed in state archives are also forceful claims of people and communities who demanded their rights. People like Rubersinda Herrdia, a Dominican woman who lodged a complaint with the US military government denouncing the injustice of her twenty-five-day prison sentence for prostitution. Or Rosita Hall, on whose behalf the West Indian Labour Union wrote to US officials in the Panama Canal Zone to protest Hall's arrest for prostitution.

Or Aline Legros, a French woman whose family decried her arrest and forcible vaginal inspection for venereal disease at the hands of US military doctors.[66]

We need to understand how US power inheres in international prostitution and trafficking policies to reckon with the harm that many of these policies have done and continue to do to people who sell sex; specifically, how carceral and violent state intervention into women's lives came to be framed as protection. In following US officials and members of private organizations around the world, I risk simply reinscribing my actors' blind spots, as well as their own sense of self-importance. Yet I still believe that it is important to track the workings of US power, at once more limited than my actors believed it to be but also more expansive and harmful than they could imagine.

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