

The Story of Human Trafficking

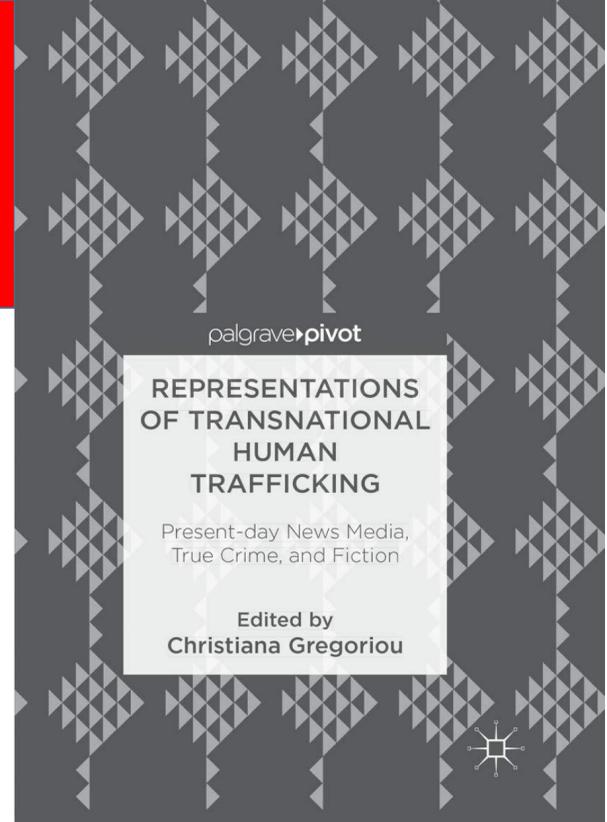
TNOC Snapshot Competition, 16 & 17 September 2021 Dr Ilse Ras (Leiden)

WHY?

- Media representations lend **legitimacy** to interventions, assign identities
- Misrepresentation leads to **misrecognition**
- **Backgrounding** of issues
- **Criminalisation**
- **Gatekeeping** victimhood

THE DATA

- **2000 (Palermo Protocol) – 2016 (after UK MSA)**
- UK national daily and Sunday papers
- Collection via Lexis Nexis



Search terms: bonded labour, child labour, human trafficker, human trafficking, labour trade, slaves, trafficked, trafficked victims, debt bondage, domestic servitude, trafficking, organ harvesting, raid-and-rescue, traffickers, trafficking (in/of) persons, exploitation, exploitative labour, forced sex slave, sex slaves, sex trafficking, sexual trafficking (in/of) human being/s, and woman criminality, forced labour, forced prostitution, exploitation, sexual servitude, slave, slave trafficking

80K ARTICLES; 61.5M WORDS

CACDA

A **mixed-methods CACDA** examination of metaphors; naming and describing of survivors/victims, traffickers, and HT itself; transitivity, modality, and SW&TP.

This was carried out using **SketchEngine** and **Wmatrix** to examine the whole corpus.

A smaller **'spike' subcorpus** was analysed manually.

METAPHORS

- TRAFFICKING IS A **TRADE**;
- TRAFFICKING IS A **SPREADING UNWANTED SUBSTANCE**;
- TRAFFICKING IS AN OBJECT THAT CAN BE **BROKEN**;
- TRAFFICKING IS **THEATRE**.
- RESPONDING TO TRAFFICKING IS **WAR**.
- TRAFFICKERS ARE **VAMPIRIC**.

VICTIMS

Victims are **young, female**, physically **coerced**. In this reporting, victims are also **sexualised**, objectified, defined by vulnerability, and **foreign**.

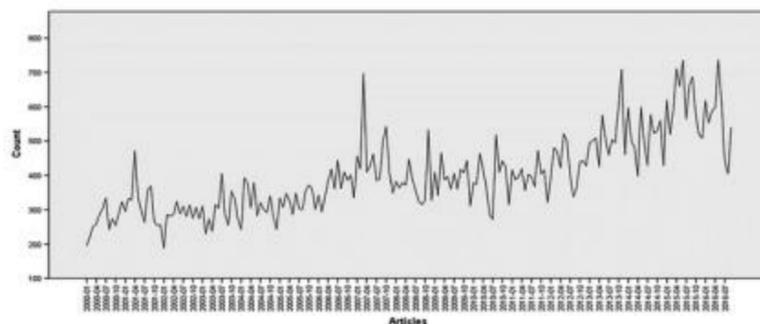


Fig. 2.1 Number of human trafficking-related articles published by UK newspapers between 01/2000 and 09/2016

TRAFFICKERS

Traffickers and other perpetrators are professional, **organised**, described as owners, **numerous**, and **foreign**. Portrayal reminiscent of Christie's (1986) 'narko-hai'.

MODALITY, TRANSITIVITY AND SW&TP

Limited focus on causes. Numerous **agentless passives**. Victims are acted upon; their suffering is the focus of the texts.

HT is portrayed as an urgent problem. However, it is surrounded by much **uncertainty** about scale and victimhood. The reporting is characterised by **dramatic** hypotheses.

There is a privileging of the **perspectives of government and law enforcement**; victims' experiences are told second-hand at best.

CONCLUSIONS

- Victims and traffickers as foreign; trafficking as **'imported'** (non-British) problem.
- Victims **young** and **female**; sexualised.
- Offenders **'big and bad'**.
- Lack of focus on **causes** and responsibility / accountability.
- **Privileging** of government and law enforcement perspectives.

References: Gregoriou, C. & Ras, I. A. (2018). "Representations of Transnational Human Trafficking: A critical review". In: C. Gregoriou (ed). *Representations of Transnational Human Trafficking: Present-Day News Media, True Crime, and Fiction*. London: Palgrave.

Gregoriou, C. & Ras, I. A. (2018). "Call for purge on the people traffickers': An investigation into UK news media's portrayal of transnational human trafficking, 2000-2016". In: C. Gregoriou (ed). *Representations of Transnational Human Trafficking: Present-Day News Media, True Crime, and Fiction*. London: Palgrave.