CHAPTER 5

Who are the Traffickers? A Cultural Criminological Analysis of Traffickers as Represented in the Al Jazeera Documentary Series *Modern Slavery: A Twenty-first Century Evil*

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Abstract The aim of this chapter is to analyse and interrogate the identities of 'traffickers' as represented within a series of television documentaries on modern slavery. The chapter data set is a series of seven 25-minute documentaries entitled *Modern Slavery: A Twenty-first Century Evil* (2011) produced by Al Jazeera. Sections on trafficker identities and the usage of the term 'trafficker' within the different typologies represented in the documentary series are shown, that is, bridal, charcoal, prison, sex, food, child, bonded slavery/trafficking. These are represented within a complex geocultural televisual gaze (Al Jazeera English) upon the global north/west as ultimately the source of the slavery problem.

Keywords Cultural criminology • Documentary • Human trafficking • Modern slavery • Popular criminology • Trafficker • True crime

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Introduction

The misery and abjection of human trafficking (henceforth HT) from the perspective of the victims has been, and continues to be, recognised and well documented in contemporary media representations of HT/modern slavery. This focus upon victims in this context is entirely justified for ethical, humanitarian, historical, economic, political, cultural, and legal-judicial reasons, and this is undisputed in this chapter. However, with a view to a better understanding and response to the plight of victims of HT, recently attention has begun to shift to those who traffic and/or enslave other human beings—commonly and henceforth referred to specifically in the context of human trafficking as 'traffickers' or more generically as 'perpetrators' (e.g., Gotch, 2016; Shen, 2016). Despite the slippages and complexities of the meanings of these two terms (also discussed in this book's Chap. 1), HT/modern slavery as an ontological-historical concept, global market activity, and also cultural-narrative trope is becoming more prominent and recognisable among audiences in the public sphere, not least as the result of the numerous fictional, factual, and hybrid 'factional' (Leishman & Mason, 2004) representations of it in the social and broadcast media and in the press.

The broader exposure of this and other forms of transnational organised crime[1] in the public sphere as a form of crime on the increase has contributed to its rise as a concern for law enforcement, politicians, and policy makers. Hence HT has also become a concern for criminology, whether from cultural, empirical, or policy making perspectives. As media representations of HT develop and expand, public interest and curiosity about it and what it is are invigorated. The market demand is for more, newer, and more revealing presentations of these narratives for the purposes of exposé or consumption, whether for information, public service, or entertainment, or a combination of these. As the criminologist and law professor Philip Rawlings (1998) argues, despite criminology's dismissive attitudes toward what he labels 'popular criminological' texts in the 'true crime' genre, these texts do shape public awareness and comprehension of crime and criminality, and subsequently impact governmental, legal, and

[1] 'Transnational organised crime' (or TOC) is itself a relatively new and in many ways also problematic term that has emerged into the public and global policy-making spheres in recent decades. With its 'apocalyptic' overtones in official and media discourses (Edwards & Gill, 2003, p, 1) it requires careful examination with respect to the processes of definition and its evolution from earlier designations of what came to be known as 'organised crime'.

security responses. It is justified for criminologists, therefore, to take such cultural narrative representations of crime more seriously as worthy datasets for analysis, not least to enhance the less than optimal status and influence of this discipline in the political and public spheres:

> Social historians have long recognised the value of popular crime literature in their work (Linebaugh 2006; Rawlings 1998); might there be something for academic criminologists too? Most important of all, it is popular writing about crime and criminals (fiction as well as fact) that has the greatest impact on people's understanding of crime and on criminal justice policy: Home Secretaries and their Shadows have never been noted for their interest in the views of academic criminologists (Rawlings, 1998: online).

Increasingly, attention is turning from victim accounts of HT to the traffickers themselves, in order to open new narrative and conceptual spaces for understanding and storytelling, and to shed light on their motives and the types of people they are in the representation of this type of crime. This chapter focuses upon the representation within HT narratives of trafficker identities in a particular television documentary series, namely *Modern Slavery: A Twenty-first Century Evil* (Al Jazeera, 2011, hereafter referred to as *S21*) as an example of 'true crime' or 'popular criminology' that portrays the identities and practices of traffickers. The chapter begins with a consideration of the methodological issues involved in conducting such a cultural criminological analysis of this dataset, comparing and relating my analysis and findings to other recent academic research articles focusing on trafficker identities in popular cultural and/or popular criminological media texts. I then turn my attention to the definitions and narrative representations of traffickers in *S21*, analysing the differences and similarities between the narrative representations of traffickers in this documentary series that focus upon various types of HT. I find that the definition and identification of the 'trafficker' and where and how they operate in the international sphere are unclear, ambivalent, and unstable. The deployment and determination of the role or label 'trafficker' is significantly dependent upon the type of HT being discussed, the (perceived generic) gender and sexualities of the main population of victims, and the ethnic, racial, class, and national characteristics of those involved. The legal-judicial and cultural predisposition toward the individual (as opposed to collective groups) in isolating and exposing traffickers

as inherently 'evil' also complicates and obfuscates the agencies (in both senses of the word to designate actors and institutions) involved in the trafficking of human beings. Programmes like *S21* demonstrate how changes to global governance and market economics that enable and exacerbate transnational organised crime as a distinctively modern form of evil HT taken together with the ordinary everyday discourses of victims and the prominence of presenter voices can affect the definition and assignment of the label 'trafficker'. While I concentrate my analysis on the seven episodes of *S21*, I will briefly compare my findings to 'trafficker' representations in a more recent Al Jazeera documentary *Britain's Modern Slave Trade* (Al Jazeera, 2016).

Methodology

The primary dataset for this chapter is comprised of the 2011 Al Jazeera produced documentary series *S21*, and secondarily the single episode documentary *Britain's Modern Slave Trade* (Al Jazeera, 2016). Like all texts examined in this book, the series was produced after the ratification of the 2000 Trafficking Protocol, commonly known as the Palermo Protocol. All book contributors recognise the salience of this statute, which provides a historical-political focus for each of our constituent contributions to the project and to this volume.

The broadcasting organisation Al Jazeera, also known as JSC or AJ, is a Doha-based state-funded broadcaster owned by the Al Jazeera Media Network. Founded in Qatar in 1996, Al Jazeera English was established in 2006. According to the report published in the widely respected journal *The Economist* (2017) attributed to the unnamed 'Cairo Correspondent', the emergence of Al Jazeera in the wake of the jettisoning of the 'irritatingly truthful' BBC Arabic language service from the Saudi operated satellite provided jobs for the previously BBC journalists, which the author accounts for the steeping of Al Jazeera investigative journalism in the early years at least in BBC culture and practice. However, with the growing conflict and political instability in the region, *The Economist* journalist indicates that this has changed, with AJ becoming more of a propaganda tool used to criticise Saudi Arabia and its allies, including the United Kingdom, the European Union and the United States of America. With respect to their factual documentary programming, AJ have and continue to operate something of an industry in the production of documentaries on modern slavery and HT focusing on the so called 'destination countries'

of the global west and north, and this is indeed reflected in the direction of its criticisms toward the USA, Europe and the UK in *S21*.

All seven episodes of *S21* are presented by the Somali born former BBC presenter Rageh Omaar and was originally broadcast in 2011, at the height of the so called 'Arab Spring'. In 2016, the tenth anniversary of AJ English, the broadcaster produced and broadcast *Britain's Modern Slave Trade* (2016) focusing on the UK as a destination country and its role in the international sex, forced labour, and drugs trades. Reference to this other Al Jazeera documentaries will be considered alongside those presented in *S21*, but *S21* will be the predominant dataset and analytic focus of this chapter. As a dataset, this presents an interesting and previously overlooked perspective on these televisual 'true crime' or popular criminology narrative representations from the global south-east to north-west. This adds further dimensionality to the analysis and understanding of geopolitical and cultural discourses in the contemporary political, economic, and public and media spheres, as such geo-political semiotics become increasingly fractured, indeterminate, and unstable. How narrative representations are fashioned from the complex, fast-paced, and contradictory elements of HT in a global multi-media environment poses important questions in the shaping of public and policy knowledge of this and other forms of (trans)national organised crime. Who gets to say what, how, and why, about 'traffickers', and how this influences the construction and development of 'true crime' narratives are issues that will be addressed in light of this analysis in this chapter.

I next turn to the ontological frameworks and concepts with respect to narrative representations of human traffickers. As those responsible for causing harm to others (i.e., their victims), it is overwhelmingly *individuals* who are most commonly and primarily portrayed as 'traffickers' within conventional narrative representations of HT in media, although there is also evidence that the distinction between individuals and collective agencies when it comes to HT is breaking down (as exemplified in the later documentary *Britain's Modern Slave Trade*). The focus in *S21* on traffickers as individuals is consistent with the philosophical and onto-theological 'theodicy' type conceptualisation of narratives of evil. HT is represented in the title of *S21* as a 'twenty-first century evil', and this reflects a strong trend in modern philosophy with its focus on the construction of narrative based on the attribution of blame, guilt, and punishment to individual actors or agents who are deemed to be responsible moral agents for the suffering caused to victims (Dearey, 2014; Ricoeur & Pelauer, 1985). This rationalist

modelling of the problem of evil renders good/evil and victims/perpetrators in a very dichotomous, oppositional, and 'black and white' way. This model has provided a template for the modern Western criminal justice system in the global north-west that endures to this day (Dearey, 2014). As is shown in documentaries like *S21*, such ontologies do not fit well with the lived realities of HT, nor do they (always) capture the evil, agency, or identities of traffickers, the suffering of the victims, or the fuller meanings of victim's discursive frameworks in describing their experiences of HT.

But the failure of 'fit' between theory and practice is not the only fault of traditional theodicy-type ontologies to HT. It is this almost myopic focus upon offenders from the rational-objectivist gaze of the state as adjudicators within the Western criminal justice system solely empowered to deal legitimately with crime. This has historically accounted for the *de facto* derogation or sideling of the victim from the judicial process, and also the disregard for the emotional dimensions and other more local impacts of crime. While the term 'victim' can be traced back to ancient times, and while victims have been the subject of criminological study since the 1920s and the era of the Chicago School, it was not until the 1950s that the social scientific study of victims—victimology—was formally established as a subfield of criminology, and even then, not until the 1970s that the needs and concerns of victims began to be taken seriously and to be catered for within the criminal justice system (Dussich, undated) and their voices prioritised in international law (Engdahl, 2002). Since the 1970s, the profile of the victim has dramatically risen in prominence, from the perspectives of popular and cultural representations of crime particularly, a substantive cultural shift that has fuelled many changes to legal-judicial discourses and practices. This swinging of the pendulum, if you will, to the focus upon the victim could be an unintentional contributing factor to why the identities of traffickers have been until recently somewhat less prominent in popular cultural representations of HT in true crime/documentary formats and fiction, all of which tend to highlight victims' experiences and testimonies. But even so, within victim testimonies such as those presented in *S21*, emerge potent diegetic[2] narratives of those they charge with responsibility for their victimisation—their *traffickers*. It is primarily from these testimonies featured in *S21*, and also presenter voiceover narratives, from which the data on traffickers are recovered.

[2] Diegesis is a form of narrative whereby characters comment upon and portray the thoughts and actions of other characters in their own stories or speech.

Previous Research

This analysis seeks to build upon a small corpus of similarly qualitative and interpretive analytic research of narrative representations of HT in popular cultural media. Two prominent recent examples are articles by Nicolas de Villiers (2016) and Sine Plambech (2016). In his study, de Villiers combines a feminist psychoanalytic film theory and theories of affect to deconstruct and critique a popular television miniseries and film documentary *Human Trafficking* (Lifetime Television, 2005). In his research, de Villiers identifies what he calls the 'hegemony of victimhood', that is, the ubiquity of the figure of the victim in these narratives that I alluded to in the previous section. To this he adds the significance of emotions and the body, particularly the 'affect of abolitionists' (de Villiers, 2016, p. 161) with reference to the strong emotional appeals by anti-prostitution campaigners in the construction of the televisual narrative series he analyses. According to de Villiers, these factors converge most prominently in the narrative conflation of women with HT victims—reflective of their concomitant lack of agency, and reliance upon a convergence of axial tropes relating to 'innocence', purity, exploitation, and the nationalist mythology of 'white slavery'. Though de Villiers considers HT solely within the European context, the white slavery narrative/mythology in popular cultural and media narrative representations of HT extends beyond Europe (see Namias, 1992). In her article, Plambech (2016) notes the prevalence of such 'one dimensional', distorted, and/or misleading dichotomised tropes that are foundational to many popular HT narratives of sex trafficking, exploring the reasons behind production decision-making processes in constructing these narratives, and the possibilities for breaking out of these reified tropes.

Building upon these analyses, in the next section, I interrogate how trafficker identities are defined and presented in *S21*, and how these definitions and representations differ not so much based on the identities or characteristics of the traffickers themselves (though these display some consistent regularities) but rather on what type of HT is being discussed in relation to the predominant gender of the *victims.* These differences within a television documentary series offer significant insights into the underlying presumptions and prevailing attitudes influencing current conceptualisations of HT generally, codified in the representation of traffickers. While my approach is similarly and intrinsically qualitative, in paying attention to the number of times and the narrative contexts in which

the term 'trafficker' is used within and between the different episodes of *S21*, this analysis should be read alongside the more quantitative content analysis of use of terminologies in journalistic discourses about HT included in this volume.

Stigma and Deviance in *S21*

The term 'trafficker' is of relatively recent provenance, even newer than the also relatively current neologisms 'human trafficking' and 'modern slavery'. Though all of these phenomena are probably as old as human society itself, these terms are increasingly represented in the public sphere, in the media, and in academic and law enforcement arenas. But what do these terms mean, and how are they being used? How is the usage of a term like 'trafficker' within a television documentary series shaping understandings of this term, and wider perceptions of who human traffickers are? Do traffickers differ in their narrative construction and characterisation relative to the type of HT being presented, and if so, how, and why? The definition of 'trafficker' is far from clear, but how it is delineated within these documentaries in terms of how it is represented and used (or not) within HT narratives in the various episodes of *S21* is the focus of this section. As will be shown, the meanings and usages of this term are different in the context of different types of HT and in different (inter)national contexts. These differences appear to relate substantially to the gendering of the *victims* of HT, and also to the alignment of these forms of HT to other predominant or secondary ideological frames of HT as a form of modern slavery, which reference to discourses such as those of 'business', 'industry', 'natural disaster', 'state power', 'religious intolerance', 'love, marriage, and family life', and/or 'political dissent'.

Those involved in HT are being referred to as 'traffickers' or more generically as 'perpetrators' (e.g., Gotch, 2016; Shen, 2016). While the word 'perpetrator' is being used by some academics as a synonym or alternative word for 'trafficker', it is worth noting that neither are terms that are widely used in academic criminology, at least not in the UK. 'Perpetrator' is a word that is commonplace in many police procedural and true crime narratives—and has even been shortened to 'perp' in slang parlance in many popular television series—possibly more colloquially used by law enforcement officers and/or popular cultural representations of police procedural programmes in the USA. However, it is not a term that is formally or commonly used in criminology or law, which tend to use

other terms like ‘offender’, ‘suspect’ or even ‘criminal’. The use of slang terms, ‘street’ language, criminal/drug/gang terminologies or ‘true crime’ nomenclature in popular narrative representations of crime is significant here, as demonstrated in the popularity of the critically acclaimed HBO television series *The Wire* (2002–2008) in its representation of another type of (trans)national organised crime: the trade in illegal drugs. One of the most seminal and ground-breaking features of this series was the representation of the narrative in the vernacular dialogue of its characters, with an emphasis on the argot of (mainly) young black males and their communities and the language of ‘the street’. This in turn led to the demand for audiences to learn and become conversant in these terms and discourses and the subsequent provision of numerous online and media dictionaries and glossaries to help viewers to understand what they were saying, with the expectation that this would reveal who the characters were, what they were doing and why, and that this provided audiences with real insights into crime and criminality in the illegal drugs trade. The effect was to give audiences a palpable sense that with this new language ‘skill’ that they had acquired came a new and informed knowledge and understanding of crime and also society, because they could ‘speak’ the lingo and understand the ‘perps’ on ‘the street’ and in the ‘hoods’. Even if viewers had never seen or (knowingly) come into contact with an illicit Class A drug, addict, dealer, vice cop, or been to a housing project, even if they were not young, male, or black, they felt as if they knew the ‘score’ where any of these actors, agents, or their habitats or daily lives were concerned. This has been, and continues to be, an important and potent element of true crime and crime procedural fiction and ‘faction’ in terms of generating what are perceived by audiences to be meaningful narrative representations of crime. The use of language in these narratives conveys a real and abiding sense of knowledge about crime in the sense of how it happens, where, what the motivations are, who the criminals and victims are, and how they should be dealt with in the criminal justice system, primarily through how they talk, their vernacular functioning as a potent simulacrum for what is ‘real’. Hence it is vital from the start to adopt a reflexive critical awareness with respect to the usage of language, images, sounds, and a constellation of different terminologies and tropes, and to pay attention to how and where these are derived and deployed within and between different expert and popular criminological epistemologies such as a true crime or factual television documentary. It is noteworthy here that in *S21*, the terms ‘perpetrator’, ‘criminal’, and ‘offender’ are not

utilised by the programme makers as synonyms for 'trafficker'. Neither are the older terms 'slaveholder' or 'slaver' used, which is perhaps surprising, given the audio-visual tropes linking HT to transatlantic slavery embedded in the series. 'Trafficker' is used, but only in certain types of HT, and also only by certain speakers in specific contexts: most prominently, by the series presenter in voiceovers.

However, those who traffic human beings are certainly talked about, most authoritatively by their victims, and also by the traffickers themselves, the presenter, lawyers, and NGO workers—even if they don't use these words to identify them. I turn now to the terms used by those featured in *S21* to describe those who traffic human beings, or 'traffickers', and analyse how these narrative representations differ depending upon the types of HT victims and the speakers.

In all but two of the episodes of *S21*, 'criminals' are never mentioned. In the one instance that the term 'criminal' is mentioned, it is used to refer to the accusations of a trafficker against his *victims* in the episode on bonded/kiln slaves, in a voiceover by presenter Rageh Omaar:

> Some bonded labourers have sought to gain their freedom through the courts, only to find themselves accused by the kiln owners of criminal offenses. Without the means to defend themselves, they are frequently imprisoned. ('Bonded Slaves')

This statement underscores how powerful traffickers are in shaping and determining who is labelled as 'criminal' and the assignment of criminality, stigma, or deviance, displayed in their ability to marshal the powers of the state and its legal apparatus (or the threat of it) to intimidate and control their victims, and to prevent them from seeking justice or redress. In this episode, the presenter, other advocates, and NGO contributors consistently refer to those who traffic not as 'criminals' or indeed 'traffickers' but rather as 'owners':

> [Hina Jilani, Advocate:] When those who are repressing have ALL the access to state institutions, they have the power to use state institutions against the people they are oppressing. For instance, the police has [sic] always worked for the factory owners. The police has, at the behest of the factory owners, harassed and chased labourers when they have tried to escape. They have kept them in custody and tortured them, at the behest of *owners*. So it's not just the owners. It's the collusion of the state agencies that has made the power dynamics so much tilted in their favour. ('Bonded Slaves' [emphasis added])

There is however one episode of *S21* in which the term 'criminal' is widely used, but again never with reference to traffickers. As in the 'Bonded Slaves' episode where the term 'criminal' is used once, this is also with reference not to those who traffic, but to the victims of HT. These are some examples of how 'criminals' and 'criminalisation' are operationalised in HT in the laogai prison system in China which is the subject of 'Prison Slaves':

> For a year they tried to brainwash me, trying to force me to give up my practice of Falun Gong. They figured me out … so they changed their strategy to force me to feel like a criminal … because, according to their theory, a prisoner should be reformed through labour … So they forced me to do slave labour. [Charles Lee who spent three years imprisoned for religious dissidence in the Chinese laogai]

But the role of the laogai prison system narrated in 'Prison Slaves' is not merely to criminalise victims:

> Chinese president say we want to see two products came from the labour camps. The number one product is the man who has been reformed, who is not going to fight against the Communist. Second product, the product, made by the man. [spoken by former prisoner and political activist Harry Wu]

In this episode, the narrative constructed is about the state using HT/modern slavery as a tactic to control, eliminate, and prevent political dissent and religious freedom, to enable 'reform' and additionally to generate money for the state from slave labour. Punishment through forced labour as a form of HT in this narrative has a multiple function. The state criminalises opposition, criticism, and dissent, forcing victims to conform to state ideology, thereby legitimising HT and absolving anyone involved in it on behalf of the state of any deviant or criminal label like 'trafficker'. This narrative is literally signposted for all those involved in the system to see. In one scene, Wu guides Rageh Omaar through an exhibition he has curated that includes photographs of the signs posted at the entrance to the camps photos. Entrants are presented with a sign that says 'Who are you? What is this place? Why are you here?' and another that states: 'You are a criminal. This is the laogai. You are here to reform through labour':

> [Omaar voiceover:] Abigail was sent to Shenyang women's laogai Camp in northeast China. It holds an average 1,000 inmates, a mixture of drug addicts, criminals and religious dissidents. All are forced to work in its in-house factory.

This criminalisation has the effect of neutralising (inter)national concern or action to address the suffering of the victims. The narrative represents these 'criminals/prisoners' as those who deserve their 'punishment', and thereby fail to warrant protection or judicial intervention by this or other nation states, or the international polis. This is a state of denial (Cohen, 2001). Denial is a key theme of trafficker narratives across these documentaries. Where traffickers are made visible, they tend to deny their guilt, even to the point of claiming to be the victims themselves by default of being accused. Their implicit and sometimes explicit power to control the use of language pertaining to who is identified as criminal or deviant, and also to deflect their own deviance or criminality, is exposed in narratives of *S21*. This phenomenon is redolent of criminologist Lemert's (1967) influential thesis of primary and secondary deviance, whereby social elites are able to use their powerful status and capital to elide labels such as 'criminal' or 'trafficker', and to devolve these labels onto less powerful or lower status people, including their victims. The accusations of criminality (primary deviance) can be denied by social elites and this will be accepted by others in society, up to a point; it is when powerful elites exhaust their social capital in enforcing these narratives and others in society are no longer willing to accept their 'story' as valid that secondary deviance is operationalised. Then such elites are no longer seen as legitimate and their actions and identities are rejected and stigmatised. An integral part of this process is the creation of deviant labels and ideologies, and the power to assign these narratives and identities and to whom. In *S21*, stigmatising terms like 'trafficker' or 'criminal' are often not used in reference to powerful social elites involved in HT; rather, identifiers such as 'employer', 'marriage broker', or 'kiln owner' are used to designate these actors. If the purpose of *S21* is to stigmatise, expose, or denounce traffickers, one might expect that the usage of condemnatory terms such as 'criminal' or 'trafficker' in relation to these social elites is critical in constructing and communicating these narratives to public audiences. However, some actors featured in *S21* are called 'traffickers'. As will be shown in

the next section, the assignment of the 'trafficker' label and the deviance that goes with it are largely dependent upon factors such as the ethnicity, age, nationality, class of those involved in trafficking, and the prevalent gender of the victims according to the type of HT represented.

Representations of 'Traffickers' in *S21* Narratives of HT

The term 'trafficker' is used in *S21*, but inconsistently. In some episodes, the use of 'trafficker' and their presence are predominant. This is most evident in the episodes on the trafficking of women for sexual and/or domestic slavery, where 'traffickers' are referred to frequently by the presenter and programme makers, as for example in the online 'blurb' or text accompanying the episode 'Bridal Slaves':

> [online blurb:] Jamila, a former bride slave, says her **traffickers** kidnapped and drugged her, before selling her to an abusive man…
>
> Shafiq Khan, who runs a grassroots organisation dedicated to tracking down bride **traffickers** and their victims, explains: 'The girls do equal amounts of work in two jobs. They are sex slaves, not just to one man but a group of 10 or 12 men. Apart from that there is agriculture—working on the farms with animals from morning until night.'

In the 25-minute 'Bridal Slaves' episode, the word 'trafficker' is used in total eight times (including the two citations quoted above in the online blurb). In all but one instance, the term is used by the presenter in voiceovers and spoken in English:

> [presenter voiceover] For the past 20 years, bride traffickers have preyed on vulnerable young women from India's vast rural hinterland, promising to deliver them into a traditionally arranged marriage, but, in reality, selling them over and over into a life of sexual slavery and forced labour.

And in another presenter voiceover to describe a young male who is later identified as Shafiq Khan 'who runs a grassroots organisation dedicated to tracking down bride traffickers and the women who've fallen victim to their trade':

> [presenter voiceover:] But there is a shortage of women in this region, sometimes as few as seven women for every ten men. It creates a ready market for bride traffickers.

Only once in 'Bridal Slaves' is the term used by someone else, by the aforementioned Shafiq Khan, in English subtitles:

> We have come to this village before and talked to these people so we were a bit suspicious that he's a middle man and a trafficker.
>
> [Omaar voiceover, walking through village walkways:] But with the men's denial of any involvement in trafficking, Shafiq will need to continue his search for harder evidence. He's now on the trail of a man whose contacts have identified as a marriage broker. Shafiq suspects he may be a bride trafficker.
>
> [Omaar voiceover over scenes of a railway station:] Marriage may seem the best option for a woman who has been the victim of bride traffickers and transported thousands of miles from her home. But the real solution lies in India enforcing its own anti-slavery laws.

Traffickers are described by Omaar in another voiceover introducing a group of women brought together to discuss their experiences of being trafficked as

> taken from their families against their will they claim by traffickers who use a mixture of false promises and violence. They were then simply sold into marriage, some of them many times over.

Presenter voiceover is heavily used across the episodes of *S21* to create the HT narratives. Victim testimonies also feature commonly throughout, but their usage of the term 'trafficker' to describe or label those who they identify as responsible for their trafficking is very different. It must be noted here that many of these victims speak in their own indigenous languages, which is not English. In all episodes of S21, including 'Bridal Slaves', the victims' voices are audible and their words are presented in translation into English in subtitles on the bottom of the screen. In these subtitles, the word 'trafficker' never appears. When the 'Bridal Slaves' women speak (in English subtitled translation) of those who have trafficked or abused them, they typically speak of 'the man' who 'bought', 'sold', 'forced', or 'beat' them. They do not use the word 'trafficker' to describe those who traffic them. What is more, they tend not to directly

refer to a trafficker type agent at all, or only do so indirectly or obliquely, as for example in these typical quotations from the women describing their experiences:

> They injected me with drugs and beat me. Then I was sold on.
>
> I was sold to a man who had 8 girls and 4 boys. He took 6,000 Rupees ($123). After 15 days I was sold again for 10,000 Rupees ($205) to the man I'm with now.
>
> I would have to work all day in the heat then go home and get beaten. Is it worth living? ['Bridal Slaves']

What is also notable in these representations is how traffickers are spoken of in the passive or intransitive cases, as in first and second examples above. This is consistent with that Choi-Fitzpatrick's (2016, p. 10) previously quoted observation that in discourses of HT, traffickers lack 'object status'. They are portrayed above all as active agents who do as they like with relative impunity, but are not spoken of directly. The third example uses the intransitive case to describe what the woman does, which is to work all day and go home to get beaten by the man who has purchased her from the trafficker. These are examples of the diegetic narratives previously mentioned:

> I was brought here by a man to stay with his sister. Before the girls are brought here they're told they will see Delhi. When I was brought over they said I would be a wife.
>
> I was driven in a truck. After that I was sold to a blind man. Then I was sold to someone else and someone else after that. I was constantly being given drugs I said 'I don't want to go any further'. He said, 'Let's see how you don't want to go'. He would put my legs over the fire. ['Bridal Slaves']

Following the above testimony, the documentary cuts back to a previously featured tearful woman victim who is interviewed by Omaar, and whose words are presented in English translation subtitles:

> [unnamed woman:] I was sold for 5,000 Rupees.
>
> [Omaar:] 5,000 Rupees, that's about $120. So how did these men treat you?'
>
> [Woman:] They would hit and punch me. Day and night he would swear and beat me. I would have to work all day in the heat. My mind would be going round and round [makes circles in the air with her finger.] That's no

> life. [Crying] What's the point? You go home and the man hits and beats you. Is it worth living? ['Bridal Slaves'].

The above segment is repeated twice in this episode. Throughout this episode, monetary amounts mentioned are translated by the presenter into US dollar currency, presumably so that western viewers can understand the commodification of people as an essential element of HT.

To briefly summarise, while 'trafficker' is used quite prominently in the episode on bridal slaves (the second most prominent usage of the seven episodes comprising *S21*), it is a term used almost exclusively by the presenter, and once (in subtitled translation) by a local male NGO worker. The women themselves are never quoted using it, though again their voices are audible and their words are presented in English translation subtitles. Rather, as cited above, they are quoted as using more ordinary words when referring to their traffickers as 'men', or alternatively concentrate solely on the abjection or disparity of their own condition, for example, in terms of the violent abuse they suffer at the hands of these men, the work they are forced to do, or the fact that they were falsely promised that they would be a 'wife'.

In contrast, in the episode entitled 'Charcoal Slaves', the term 'trafficker' is never used. This role is heavily implied, but the word itself is conspicuously absent. Like the women in the 'Bridal Slaves' episode which is located in rural India, the men in rural Brazil enslaved to make charcoal speak of those who traffic them in more indirect, oblique, and again passive/intransitive modes using ordinary language and focusing instead not on those who traffic them but their own suffering and plight:

> [in English subtitles, headshot of the man, interspersed with family scenes]: We fell into it. Charcoal became really lucrative around here, you know. Here in Jacunda, unemployment is really a problem. We have to work to earn our day-to-day living and however little we get, it's all welcome. More than welcome.

The narrative focus here is on family, employment, the market for charcoal, and the need for work. There is no mention of criminals or criminality, men or traffickers.

A man is shown shovelling charcoal from a fire, with the presenter Omaar describing in voiceover how he was forced to breathe in the

smoke-filled air. The victim speaks and his words appear in English translation subtitles along the bottom of the screen:

> We had no protective clothing, no masks, not even footwear, face guards or helmets. The place we lived in was a wooden shack. There was no electricity and no fridge. No oven, bathroom or even running water. It caused me lots of health problems. [‘Charcoal Slaves’]

Again, the focus is not on ‘traffickers’ but rather upon living conditions and the lack of proper safety equipment. There is no mention of those who are responsible for this, or should have provided better accommodation or protection. These agents are present only by implication, not explicitly made visible, audible, or otherwise named or known as responsible and accountable individuals. This failure to identify traffickers as criminal actors as a result of their elision of ‘direct object status’ as described by Choi-Fitzpatrick (2016) in narratives of HT could help explain the failures to deal with them via the legal-judicial framework with its concentration upon individual named criminals detailed at the beginning of this chapter. There are substantial divergences in terms of victim/witness discourses and the law when it comes to identifying, discussing, and capturing (in the semiotics of language, visual iconography, and law) ‘traffickers’.

The differences in narrative representations of traffickers even in a single documentary series are paramount. Consider the following example of ow another man describes his enslavement at the charcoal farm:

> Charcoal farming is the worst kind of work that exists as far as I am concerned. It’s the most back-breaking. As you are out there in the jungle, right? People know what that’s like, right? In the jungle, cutting away, getting scratched. I had malaria twice in a row. [‘Charcoal Slaves’]

But in response to this man, Omaar does not refer to ‘traffickers’ but rather ‘employers’:

> [Omaar]: And did the *employers* give you any assistance, whether it was because of getting malaria, or food, or someone else got sick, did you have any help from the employers in the work?’ Man shakes his head ‘No. Nothing. Just work. [‘Charcoal Slaves’, emphasis added]

Similar to 'Charcoal Slaves', the 'Food Chain Slaves' episode also deals exclusively with male victims. Two of the enslaved men interviewed speak of their traffickers thusly:

> They watch.
> They tell you to eat…
> They are referred to by the men as 'security guards'. ['Food Chain Slaves']

As in the 'Charcoal Slaves' example, those responsible for trafficking the men in the 'Food Chain Slaves' are never described by their victims as 'traffickers'. The Soo brothers who are featured in this episode as traffickers who were brought to court to face slavery charges are visually represented in what appears to be amateur video footage walking silently from the court building in the manner of the famous Patterson-Giblin footage of 'Big Foot' (see Bader, Baker, & Mencken, 2011). This is a powerful visual semiotic that connotes a strong cultural narrative of strangeness, uniqueness, elusiveness, and cunning invention of those who traffic other human beings, rendering traffickers visually as mythical, alien, unknown, or even wild creatures who may or may not live among us. As Bader et al. (2011) explain, this constitutes a hyper masculine-oriented ideology of fearful yet desirable 'otherness' in which the uncertain and indeterminate identity of 'trafficker', like 'Big Foot', is semiotically represented and read by many audience members.

The reasons behind this usage of language and semiotics are open to debate, but a difference between these documentaries that immediately springs to mind is that the 'Bridal Slaves' episode is devoted entirely to female victims, whereas the 'Charcoal Slaves' and 'Food Chain Slaves' documentaries relate to victims who are all male. While the Indian women featured in 'Bridal Slaves' speak of those who traffic them as 'men' and not 'traffickers', the presenter uses the term 'trafficker' in this episode on this form of HT frequently. In contrast, the male victims featured in the 'Charcoal Slaves' (Brazil) and 'Food Chain Slaves' (Hawaii) rarely speak of those who traffic them, never use the term 'trafficker', and neither does the presenter. Instead, in 'Charcoal Slaves' and 'Food Chain Slaves' terms like 'employer' or 'security guards' are used to refer to those involved in or responsible for trafficking the men, aligning them and their activities to broader ideological and social discourses relating not to slavery, but to *work*. Narrative representations of this type of HT with predominantly male victims is formulated as a subcategory of business or enterprise, not HT.

Does this usage of 'trafficker' according to the prevailing gender of the victims extend to other episodes of *S21* and other types of HT? Let us return to the episode 'Sex Slaves' which deals exclusively with the trafficking of women in Europe. 'Trafficker' is used seven times in the episode 'Sex Slaves', most commonly by the presenter in voiceovers, but also by a local male lawyer named as Ian Visdova and a female NGO worker identified as Ana Revenco, who both work with female sex trafficking victims from Moldova:

> [Visdova in translation with subtitles]: A public employee earns a salary here of 100–150 Euros per month. That's why everybody wants? to go abroad and find a decent salary. *Traffickers* exploit the gap between life abroad and the poverty in Moldova.
>
> [Omaar voiceover:] The most common ploy used by Moldovan *traffickers* is to place a bogus job advert in the local newspaper *Maklak* [phonetic spelling]. La Strada's team monitors each edition. ['Sex Slaves']

Ana Revenco, Moldovan female anti-trafficking worker, speaking in English:

> The *traffickers* actually use violence, [unclear] it's psychology and emotions. From the very beginning until the very end. They play with that. They use their own fears or hopes to chain the person. ['Sex Slaves']

Undercover footage of traffickers is also presented in this episode. Images of two young local men dressed casually in t shirts and jeans and a recording of their voices translated in subtitles is featured:

> So how many girls do you want to see?
>
> [Omaar voiceover:] [The undercover reporter] was quickly introduced to sex *traffickers.*

This is a revealing excerpt, because while 'trafficker' is used by the presenter in the voiceover for this segment, in the recorded undercover video footage presented on screen, the names of the young men are accompanied by the word 'PIMP' in capitals across the bottom of the screen, for example, 'ALEX: PIMP'. The narrative representation of sex trafficking is thus a layered discursive construction, with the 'trafficker' identity built upon the foundational metanarrative of prostitution and its typical nomenclature. While the presenter describes these individuals as 'traffickers' in

his voiceover, the visual subtext identities them as ‘PIMPS’, not ‘criminals’, or simply ‘men’. What is more, as in this scene, these ‘pimp/traffickers’ are depicted as less powerful than other more socially elite ‘businessmen/traffickers’ featured in *S21*. A lawyer who prosecuted Alexandr ‘Salun’ Kovali, a ‘trafficker’ featured in ‘Sex Slaves’, explains how those who are prosecuted are typically poor, uneducated, low-level, local agents from an ethnic minority background:

> There are a lot of men like Salun who are free and live well here. Most of the time, only simple, low-level traffickers are convicted. [‘Sex Slaves’]

There are clearly different standards being applied to ‘traffickers’ in popular cultural genres and in law, and this is acknowledged in *S21*:

> [Omaar voiceover:] The fate of the two convicted sex traffickers highlights those double standards. Alexandr Kovali will spend the next 19 years locked in a Moldovan prison. Shaban Baran [another convicted trafficker] is back home in Turkey. And free. The Dutch government allowed him out of jail for one day, he absconded and never returned. Until the rich Western countries address the demand for prostitution, rather than profit from it, there will always be men like Kovali and Baran. And there will always be sex slaves behind these windows. [‘Sex Slaves’].

While the word ‘trafficker’ and the figures of traffickers are presented in ‘Sex Slavery’ in the above passages, the language and visual semiotics in this episode tends to refer to these men and their activities in terms of the language typically used to define and discuss prostitution, for example, the sex ‘trade’, traffickers/users as ‘pimps’, ‘clients’ or ‘buyers’ of women who then ‘sell them on’. At the same time, the language of ‘business’ is also utilised, as those involved are referred to as ‘pimps’ and ‘traffickers’, but also as ‘recruiters’ of women for ‘work’ in brothels or clubs.

In ‘Sex Slaves’ Omaar interviews the convicted trafficker Kovali in prison, who recalcitrantly uses the language of business to vehemently deny any involvement in HT. Ironically, he defends himself against charges of trafficking or prostitution by reference to the right to privacy of the ‘girls’ and their freedom to do as they choose outside of business hours:

> [Kovali:] The girls were paid as hostesses. What they did after 5am, after the club closed, is none of my business. It’s their private life. [Kovali shrugs and uses body language that divests and distances him from involvement in prostitution or trafficking.] [‘Sex Slaves’]

As in the 'Charcoal Slaves' episode, this type of 'explanatory' discourse reflected in the various phenomenal narratives of HT constructed by and around those accused of trafficking involves the positioning and semiotics of traffickers as 'businessmen' and their alignment with ideologies of 'entrepreneurialism', 'work', 'recruitment', 'employment', 'supply and demand', and participation in the legitimate global market economy. In this respect, the framing of the problem of HT and traffickers is not strictly speaking in terms of illegal activity or individual criminality, but rather the opportunities offered to 'entrepreneurs' by the international 'market' in women by recent changes to the sex trade itself, or indeed by the trade in men in the charcoal factories for the automotive industry and its demand for pig iron. In these instances, such changes to global market economics and the legalisation of prostitution results in the increase in the trafficking of women from Eastern Europe, specifically Moldova, in response to the decriminalisation of prostitution in destination countries like Amsterdam and the relative economic deprivation in eastern European countries. These relate to the so called 'push and pull' factors cited in Chap. 1.

As Visdova explains, traffickers, poverty and economic migration go together:

> [Visdova in English translation with subtitles]: A public employee earns a salary here of 100–150 Euros per month. That's why everybody wants to go abroad and find a decent salary. Traffickers exploit the gap between life abroad and the poverty in Moldova. ['Sex Slaves']

This quote and its role in the narrative representation of HT in the international sex trade is significant in that it reflects and invigorates broader public ambivalence toward perceptions and narratives of global economic migration (see Plambech, 2016).

Coda

In the 2016 documentary *Britain's Modern Slave Trade* (Al Jazeera, 2016, or *BMS*), the construction and usage of the term 'trafficker' and this identity are similar, but also different. In her testimony presented in English translation this time in a voiceover by a female translation, a female victim of sex trafficking refers to her traffickers as 'they' and 'the guys', similar to the women in 'Bridal Slaves':

> 'They brought thirty guys. Then they tied me to the bed and the guys did their job.' [sex trade]… [*BMST*]

Similarly, traffickers are later referred to by the presenter David Harrison as 'the man' who drops off food to a cannabis farm slave, and as 'pimps' in relation to sex traffickers, as in the 'Sex Slaves' episode of *S21*. The word 'trafficker' appears a number of times in the written text accompanying the *BMST* documentary on the Al Jazeera webpage in which the video is embedded. However, there is a distinct shift in the episode broadcast in the use of labels to identify sex traffickers as 'Romanian captors', 'an ex-boyfriend and his brother', and 'slave masters', and also to refer explicitly to women traffickers as a 'female ringleader', 'madam', and 'the bad lady'.

Other terms for traffickers in other types of HT relate to their activities as '[people] smugglers', 'Vietnamese gangs' or 'criminal gangs', 'drugs gang', each of these in relation to HT for cannabis farming. 'Smugglers' are further identified, in the forced labour trade, as family members, as for example in the example presented of a nail bar in East London, in which the salon owner has 'smuggled' his sister into the UK to work illegally. In an interview in *BMS*, Kevin Hyland, UK Anti-Slavery Commissioner, refers not to legitimate or illegitimate actors or 'traffickers', but rather to the disappearance of these roles in the often-unwitting blurring of 'The legitimate and the illegitimate economies [that have] become one in some ways … because companies and people don't realise … they are … using modern day slaves in their supply chain'. In contrast, the Salvation Army worker who is featured in *BMS* consistently and explicitly uses the term 'traffickers' to refer to those involved in HT.

Conclusion

This chapter presents a selection of representations of 'traffickers' as presented in the seven 25-minute long episodes of the Al Jazeera produced documentary series *Slavery: A Twenty-first Century Evil* (2011), and the 47-minute long documentary *Britain's Modern Slave Trade* (2016), and an analysis of them from a cultural criminological perspective. This analysis reveals multiple aspects of this complex and multi-dimensional roles and the emplotment of traffickers within popular narratives of HT/modern slavery. In accordance with traditional theodicy conceptualisations of, in Leibniz's famous phrase, the 'problem of evil' (Dearey, 2014; Ricoeur & Pelauer, 1985), the focus is primarily on named individuals who are presented as subject to accusation, conviction, and censure, whether in criminal court or less formal social settings. What these narrative representations of traffickers reveal is the fragility and failure of western criminal justice

systems to (a) recognise and (b) deal effectively with traffickers, even on the rare occasions when they do face criminal charges. *S21* portrays these traffickers within narratives of injustice, crimes are not being prevented or dealt with effectively by state(s), and criminals are not being reformed. Even in instances when individual traffickers are accused, convicted, and jailed, they still consistently, and often vehemently, deny any wrongdoing. The semiotics of their identity narratives suggest a potent mixture of mystery, repulsion, fear, and desire, reminiscent of the 'white slavery' mythos cited by de Villiers (2016) and Namias (1992). Victims, as featured in these documentaries, do not identify or speak of them in ways that are amenable with modern criminal justice systems.

In its various usages, the term 'trafficker' is not clearly defined nor is its meaning or application consistent across the different episodes of *S21*. The most decisive factor influencing the usage of the term 'trafficker' is by the *gender of victims*; types of HT that involve only or primarily women and the sex trade tend to feature the word 'trafficker' in the documentary narratives. Whereas forms of HT involving men as victims for non-sexual purposes tend to eschew the label 'trafficker' in favour of terminology relating to business and enterprise to refer to these actors, for example, factory or kiln 'owners', 'security guards', 'employers', 'businessmen', 'barons', 'exporters', and the like. What is more, the lower status, local and ethnic minority men involved in the trafficking of women for sex are also identified as 'pimps' as well as 'traffickers', doubly stigmatising them as the result of their intimate involvement with the women they traffic and their own ethnicities, nationalities, relatively low socio-economic statuses, and masculinities. However, the language of 'business' can also be applied to these actors too, for example, in their role as 'recruiters' as well as 'pimps'. With respect to these lower-level male traffickers, the label of 'victim' or the recognition that these men (and women) can sometimes be victims too is not applied in either *S21* or *BMST*.

The voice of who is speaking, and how, is also significant. There is a liberal use of presenter voiceover throughout the episodes of *S21*, and it is within these that the term 'trafficker' most often appears. When victims of HT are interviewed in *S21*, their testimonies are often presented in English translation and in subtitles. This is somewhat different in the later Al Jazeera documentary *Britain's Modern Slave Trade* (2016). The women victims featured in *S21* do not use term 'trafficker' when discussing those who traffic them, tending to focus more upon their own experiences of what they have suffered at the hands of the 'men' who have abused and/or exploited

them, if they directly refer to these individuals at all. In contrast, the presenter of *BMST* tends to use language relating to forms of transnational organised crime such as 'smuggling' or national or 'gang' related criminality, or terms more reflective of the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator. The term 'trafficker' is eschewed by the presenter of BMST but is consistently and explicitly used in this documentary by a British NGO worker from the Salvation Army who works with HT victims.

Throughout *S21*, even where less powerful men are involved in HT, if their victims are male, they are still less likely to be labelled 'traffickers' than those involved in trafficking women for the sex trade. The presence of males in the victim population is significant in the identification and usage of the word 'trafficker'. In instances where both males and females are trafficked—for example, child slavery, prison slavery, bonded slavery—in *S21*, those who traffic them are never referred to as either 'traffickers' or 'criminals' by the presenter, NGO workers, victims or the traffickers themselves. If it is women only who are trafficked, and if they are trafficked for work in the sex industry, then the word 'trafficker' is used, but almost always by the presenter, never by the victims themselves.

This indicates the primary significance of victims' gender and potency of prostitution metanarratives, and to a lesser extent the ethnicities and social status of HT offenders in the formulation and construction of the narratives and identities of 'traffickers' in popular criminology or 'true crime' discourses. This presents substantial challenges to the necessity or desirability of a special term 'trafficker' as cited in the Palermo Protocol to identify and/or stigmatise these individuals. The appearance and usage of such 'new' linguistic terms could have the effect of generating a sense of 'insider' knowledge on the part of audiences, with very little to substantiate the clarity or stability of the words, or their equitable use as stigmatising labels and/or legal terms. By presenting audiences with a new word to use to understand HT (that is, 'trafficker'), such true crime documentary programmes makers may be conveying a false sense of understanding and knowledge of the realities of HT to viewers, by over-emphasising the exceptionalism, homogeneity, power, cunning, or strangeness of those who traffic human beings by giving them a new label of their own.

One of the most notable elements of the use of 'trafficker' in *S21* is that it is, with one exception, used only by the presenter, almost exclusively in voiceover. Presenter voiceover is heavily used throughout *S21* to construct the documentary narratives of differing types of HT in *S21*. As a feminist cultural criminologist, I am struck by the fact that none of the women featured in *S21* used this term to describe or identify those who trafficked

them. That they referred to 'men' or sometimes even 'husbands', or no one in particular at all, is in many ways more revealing of the realities and lived experiences of HT and human traffickers in their everyday lives. These testimonies are framed by the daily experiences of women (and men) around the world for whom the trauma of (sexual) violence and exploitation is still very much the norm. It does not require a special word, or role, raising the question of why such a term is introduced, who and in what positions the men who use it are doing so, and why. Questions are also raised about what such a term conveys to audiences who purport to understand HT or victims or HT, to enable them to recognise or identify a 'trafficker', as opposed to a criminal, conman, fraudster, kidnapper, or rapist; or indeed a brother, husband, pimp, 'bad lady', businessman, or just a man.

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