Representations of Transnational Human Trafficking

Christiana Gregoriou
Editor

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Present-day News Media, True Crime, and Fiction

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Editor's Preface, Acknowledgments and Recommendations

In September 2017, we convened a group of human trafficking specialist academics, police officers, third sector, Home Office and media reps, creative writers, and filmmakers to discuss findings from the AHRC and ESRC-funded 'Media Human Trafficking Representation' project (under the Partnership for Conflict, Crime and Security Research), findings this book showcases in detail. We take this opportunity to thank our invited speakers: the Police and Crime Commissioner and Chair of the National Anti-Trafficking and Modern Day Slavery Network Mark Burns-Williamson, journalist/writer/filmmaker Paul Kenyon, crime writer Matt Johnson, academic/writer/'Free the Slaves' Foundation founder Professor Kevin Bales (University of Nottingham) and academic/filmmaker Professor Nicola Mai (Kingston University), whose film *Travel*, featuring and produced alongside trafficked women, was screened. Our symposium also featured a talk by project partner Special Policing Consultant Bernie Gravett, who offered comments on the extent to which the described popular media portrayals reflect the realities of trafficking. The input and subsequent discussion highlighted the subject's complexity and brought to light several controversial issues, including media distortions shaped by economic forces that compel creative producers to turn human trafficking accounts into 'newsworthy' stories, and the challenge of communicating these stories in translation. We also identified trends and practices that generate stereotypes, clichés, and reductively formulaic human trafficking narratives. At the same time, documentaries offer powerful and affective representations, while language has the power not just to manipulate but also open up and enable deep understandings.

Given the need for stronger and more effective press regulation, we propose instituting human-trafficking-specific guidance documents, and/or a code of practice for all who report on the issue, who need to fully appreciate the term's legal meaning and relevant ideological implications of their linguistic choices, and avoid seeing stories as mere commodities/entertainment and as areas where truth can be manipulated. Seeking the support of those who can influence the discussion on media accuracy and encourage responsible reporting is key. We propose developing research-led material that can be used for online or in-person training/workshops for relevant practitioners in all fields (including police officers, media representatives, educationalists, and film/soap script writers), but also A-level and university students. We would also recommend generating research-led media footage or actively contributing to mainstream audience films that more accurately and sensitively report on the issue, and seek out to do briefings for various committees, foundations, and even airport/airline staff, helping identify concerning situations/individuals, improving relevant information posters (say, at airports), and ultimately informing better policy development. Lastly, there is a need to encourage and enable victims to represent themselves, in their own words/forums, devolving power down from the conventional editor/journalist decision- and programme-makers. Third-sector representatives, but also migrant rights and sex worker rights organisations, with sensitivity and access to such victims, could help them collaborate with researchers in gaining that power.

Leeds, UK Christiana Gregoriou

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Christiana Gregoriou is an Associate Professor in English Language at Leeds University. She is a crime fiction stylistics specialist and ran the 2016–2017 AHRC/ESRC-funded project on the representation of transnational human trafficking in news media, true crime, and fiction. Most notable are her three monographs (*Crime Fiction Migration: Crossing Languages, Cultures, Media*, 2017; *Language, Ideology and Identity in Serial Killer Narratives*, 2011; *Deviance in Contemporary Crime Fiction*, 2007), and her edited collections (*Constructing Crime: Discourse and Cultural Representations of Crime and 'Deviance'*, 2012; *Language and Literature*, 'Investigating Contemporary Crime Writing' special edition 21(3), 2012).

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