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HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND THE MODERN SLAVERY FRAMING OF THE PROBLEM: BETWEEN RHETORICAL PATHOS AND CONCEPTUAL LIMITATIONS

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Abstract

Trafficking in human beings is a serious problem, which affects vulnerable groups disproportionately. Eastern European countries are among the most affected due to a variety of risk factors. Yet this problem often remains invisible to the mass public. The attempts to bring it into the public consciousness rely strongly on different rhetorical strategies. I argue that the way of social issue framing largely determines its public perceptions and reactions to it. This material examines human trafficking as phenomenon, its definitions and root causes, and then focuses on the framing of trafficking as modern slavery. This framing is made possible by the use of multimodality in media outlets and in prevention campaigns. I will apply the method of content analysis of images used in the Bulgarian digital press or for campaign purposes. The combination of text and imagery is a powerful tool to create the association of slavery, detention, and captivity. These associations are emotionally contagious and can generate pathos; they also convey the idea of a powerless innocent victim in need of rescue, which is a limiting view. The paper argues that this approach has both its positive and negative aspects, the latter being the risks of reductiveness and barriers to the deeper understanding of the problem, its underlying causes, and possible solutions. The alternative framing of this phenomenon as a human rights violation implies the necessity of not just “rescue and salvation” of individuals, but also structural changes in society.

Key words: human trafficking, framing, multimodality, pathos.

1. Introduction

Human trafficking remains a serious problem globally. It is a source of enormous criminal earnings and of immense human suffering. It is also one of the fastest growing forms of international crime with the increased vulnerability and displacement of people in conflict zones contributing to that (FATF-APG, 2018).

As any complex problem trafficking is a mixture of diverse issues, but its representation usually falls within the *modern slavery* frame – something which is understandable as exploitation is at the core of the phenomenon, and also has its powerful emotional overtones, but also simplifies the issues and has its pitfalls and limitations. As Nick Turnbull and Rose Broad write, “public sphere discourse reduces this complexity to simplified accounts” (2022, p. 201). In professional spheres (NGOs, institutions), trafficking is viewed as a serious violation of human rights, but this is an abstract concept and the media depiction is much more simplified. Here we will briefly present the problem, the way it affects Bulgaria and will try to analyze the way it is represented in Bulgarian multimodal media.

We argue that the slavery framework is the dominant one and that multimodality (the combination of written text and images) is instrumental in constructing this framework. The approach I follow relies on both academic analysis and long-term experience in assisting victims of human trafficking as a psychologist and researcher with participation in international projects addressing the issue.

2. Trafficking in Humans: definitions and scope of the problem

The Protocol to prevent, suppress, and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children, supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (also known as the Palermo Protocol) currently provides the internationally accepted definition of human trafficking as in Article 3 of the 2000 UN Protocol:

“Trafficking in persons” shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs (“Protocol to prevent”, 2000).

This definition and the UN Protocol itself are the basis of many legal and normative documents, both national and international, aimed at combating human trafficking, as it emphasizes on different dimensions of the problem and the various approaches to recruitment.

Exploitation of human beings by other humans is not a new phenomenon; it has probably been a part of human history since its early stages. However, nowadays we are in a situation much different than before because of the radical reach of the process of globalization. While it may generally bring more freedom and mobility, for some vulnerable groups—often women and children—it creates new risks of exploitation. Many factors contribute to this: still stable patriarchal stereotypes about the role of women, domestic violence, lack of equal opportunities for work, higher levels of poverty among women and children, especially in economies and countries in transition, as well as failings of the systems for victim protection (Brysk, 2012). War and displacement of individual on a large scale is unfortunately another factor generating risks. The Global Report on Trafficking in Persons published by UNDOC in 2016 indicates that over 70 % of the victims are female and about 30 % were children.

Trafficking in humans is an extremely profitable illegal business. In 2017, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and Walk Free Foundation (in partnership with IOM – the International Organization for Migration) published a report entitled “The Global Estimates of Modern Slavery” (ILO & Walk Free Foundation, 2017). According to it, about 25 million people were in labor or sexual exploitation in 2016, with 64 % in labor exploitation (typically domestic work, construction work or agriculture), 17 % in forced labor imposed by state authorities and 19 % in sexual exploitation. It is difficult to establish a clear figure on the earnings from human trafficking due to the criminal and illicit nature of the activities, but ILO estimated that earnings may amount to 150 billion USD per year (data from estimations published in 2014). Although the percentage of victims of sexual exploitation is not so big, these reports indicate that the majority of profits are generated from this type of exploitation (ILO, 2012).

For Bulgaria, trafficking in human beings has been a serious problem over the past two decades—mostly trafficking for sexual exploitation, with the victims being, above all, women and young girls (Petrova, 2015) —cases of men and young boys are rarely reported (which does not automatically mean they are so rare, they may be reported less often; a general problem when talking about trafficking is the extent of secrecy and invisibility inherent in the practice). Bulgaria

can be described predominantly as a country of origin for victims of trafficking, but also a transit country due to its geographical location. “Its strategic location makes the country especially vulnerable in regard to illegal channels not only for trafficking in human beings but also for immigrants, which try to illegally cross state borders”, states the official website of the Bulgarian National Commission for combating Trafficking in Human Beings (or NCCTHB) (<https://antitraffic.government.bg/en/help#trafficking>). According to the Annual reports of the said Commission, Bulgaria and Romania are the leading countries of origin among EU countries (2021). Trafficking in human beings can be seen as internal (within the borders of country itself) and external (abroad), and domestic trafficking in Bulgaria, again according to the abovementioned report, is concentrated above all in resort villages and is for the purposes of sexual exploitation. Internal trafficking in many cases precedes external traffic and can be viewed as a preparation for it. External traffic has as countries of destination mainly Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, France, Cyprus, Poland, Italy, and the Czech Republic. Trafficking for the purposes of labor exploitation and of children for the purposes of begging or pick pocketing is also a problem, but sexual exploitation remains the most common (and arguably most profitable) form—a fact, related to the demand component of the process.

The reasons for falling into a trafficking situation are complex: the difficult economic situation and limited opportunities for realization in the country in recent decades; the process of transition to a democratic model of governance and a societal value crisis; poverty and lack of education among certain vulnerable groups (for example, institutionalized children, residents of poorer regions); lack of awareness of the risks, as well as the possibilities for assistance and protection; and in many cases a personal history of trauma and increased vulnerability to subsequent situations of exploitation and harassment (NCCTHB annual report, 2020; Petrova, 2015). The COVID-19 pandemic can be said to have increased vulnerability leading to more economic challenges and loss of opportunities, especially for groups of low-skilled workers who cannot work online—they have become more vulnerable to both sexual and labor exploitation. Besides that, many services have not been working in full capacity; courts and other institutions have not been so active in proceedings. Closures and lockdowns have pushed traffickers to search for other ways to “operate”, e.g. private apartments, etc. In addition, the Internet gets involved in victim recruiting. Low-cost companies are the preferred manner of transpiration.

According to the NCCTHB annual report for the year 2020 (“National Commission”, 2021), the ways of recruiting potential victims in recent years fall under the category of the so-called “soft methods” usually related to winning the victims’ trust and tricking them (through misuse of this trust) to go abroad under the pretext that this will bring new opportunities for work or prosperity. Once abroad, without support from relatives and often without knowledge of the language, of their own rights and where help can be obtained, these victims become entirely dependent on traffickers and become subject to exploitation. The “soft” methods also include the “lover boy” method (lover, boyfriend), in which the trafficker courts the victim, wins her affections, and manages to persuade her to go with him abroad – or even to marry him. In some cases, these victims are underage girls, and the trafficker is able to obtain the family’s permission to take her abroad with marriage promises. The victim’s emotional attachment to the trafficker is then exploited and she is manipulated into sex work for the trafficker’s gains. Methods that are more violent are used on the stages of exploitation and control as a means to prevent the victims from looking for help or running away. Yet manipulation through threats to the individuals and their families or debt remains predominant.

We can summarize that causes of human trafficking are deep and complex, not simply kidnapping an unsuspecting victim from the street. Currently, a popular explanation model is that of push and pull factor (Bales, 2007), according to which on one hand, there are economic, social, and political factors that push a potential victim out of their place of living – village, town and/or country. On the other hand, there are the factors that pull them to a different location which are again economic,

social, and political. These factors are often the same, but with different manifestations, e.g. wages and labor opportunities: low wages and lack of opportunities in the country of origin and higher payment in a country of destination. In the majority of cases, victims choose to leave a situation of poverty, lack of opportunities for realization, discrimination, and rejection (due to minority status or marginalization of institutionalized children) and move to another place in search of better life options. Countries of origin are characterized mainly by push factors, and countries of destination by pull ones.

Getting out of a trafficking situation is not easy for the victims and very often happens because of the intervention of the police and other institutions—the victims themselves are much less likely to seek help directly. The reasons are many: not knowing the language of the foreign country, distrust of institutions, suggestions by traffickers that they will be treated as criminals, not as victims, lack of documents, uncertainty about who they can turn to. Another trend in recent years has been to target and victimize women with intellectual disabilities or mental illnesses—as such they prove easier to manipulate by traffickers, and their testimonies in many cases would not be accepted in court if the case came to legal proceedings (Petrova, 2015).

Efforts to tackle trafficking in human beings are both national and international. However, it still remains one of the most profitable forms of organised crime in today's world and thus has its negative consequences not only for victims, but for society as a whole. Moreover, a large proportion of victims are at risk of revictimization: once out of trafficking they can easily fall into such a situation again, as the factors that made them vulnerable in the first place continue to affect them. Their recovery and reintegration is a lengthy process which requires not only the provision of protection and financial support, but also the development of life and professional skills, assertiveness and empowerment.

3. Addressing the issue: framing and rhetoric

The way this complex problem is talked about, written about, even lobbied about to a large extent determines the scope and the success of the efforts to deal with it. In this sense when talking about victims of trafficking and attitudes towards them, it is also important to pay attention to anti-trafficking rhetoric. Gregory Bateson developed the concept of framing in 1972 and defined it as “spatial and temporary bounding of set of interactive messages” (1972, p. 197). The way something is presented to an audience (what kind of ‘frame’ is created) will influence the way the information is processed. The frame is a form of organization of the message and at a metacognitive level, it creates context within which the message is understood/interpreted.

The choice of a certain frame is not a random process; I argue that it is essentially rhetorical or aimed to achieve a persuasive communication goal. As Bitzer defined, “...rhetoric is a mode of altering reality, not by the direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action” (1968, p. 4). The expression of thoughts, ideas, emotions through various means, various texts (oral, written, images) with the aim of influencing other is a rhetorical impact. According to Herrick (2012), rhetoric has some important social functions, some of which are directly related to our topic, namely: the testing of ideas (how the audience reacts when presented with them, how applicable they are), and assisting in the process of social advocacy (for social causes, new initiatives, etc.). The professionals’ understanding of the problem and the needs of the victims of trafficking is one thing, the way common people think about the issue, the attitudes they hold towards the victims can be quite different. Most people never have to face directly the problem of human trafficking in their lives, it is something distant: even if they have contacts with trafficking victims, they most likely would not know this. Therefore, the public perceptions and attitudes are largely formed by the media, by the ways the issue is talked about and presented—in other words, by the anti-trafficking rhetoric, not by direct experiences and impressions. *But how helpful is the typical anti-trafficking rhetoric?*

The problem of human trafficking is extremely complex in the analysis of its roots and causes and in the search of solutions; as it affects millions of people and allows large criminal networks to flourish. Yet at the same time to a vast majority of the mass audience, it is a distant issue, especially in comparison to more pressing problems of everyday reality. Therefore, the representation and framing of the problem tends to be much simplified—it is typically presented as “modern slavery”, “white slavery” (Brysk, 2012; Turnbull & Broad, 2022), with victims as “white slaves”. The term “white slavery” (it exists in different languages, not just English; in Bulgarian the phrase “белу робини” is often used; “*trata de blancas*” in Spanish-speaking countries) is no longer accepted as adequate. Trafficking is carried out via major criminal networks that target not just white persons, but a variety of vulnerable individuals. The accent on the “whiteness” places the focus on victims with this skin color, on one hand acknowledging them as more important and the fact of their trafficking as more shocking and unacceptable than victims of color, and on the other hand ignoring that vast majorities of the victims are coming from the global south and deserve attention and support. That is why “the term “white slavery” has been dismissed for not giving enough visibility of the problem which creates this crime and has been replaced by “trafficking in humans” with the aim of sexual or labor exploitation” (<https://www.gob.mx/segob/es/articulos/trata-de-blancas?idiom=es>). “In a morally regrettable yet politically powerful semantic move, *white* slavery emphasizes the “unnatural” threat of enslavement to a portion of a population generally exempted from this peril”, writes Brysk (2012, p. 3).

However, even beyond the idea of “white slavery”, trafficking is still mainly presented through the slavery framework. Undoubtedly, slavery is a concept with deep and emotional connotations; due to historical factors it is easily perceived as something extremely negative, degrading and evil. This kind of framing has the potential to generate deep emotional impact, the power to create pathos in the rhetorical sense. Pathos is one of the three kinds of artistic proof in Aristotle’s classical rhetorical theory (along with ethos and logos). According to Greene (2001, p. 574), pathos is the appeal that above all three impels the audience to act due to the power of the emotions provoked. He also notes that images are especially effective in arousing emotions, be it visual images, or mentally constructed ones (as memories or imagination).

3.1. Multimodality and the slavery framing of trafficking

Multimodality is a term used to describe the combination of speech, written, texts, images, audio or video materials—“the textual combination of different modes and their integration in terms of structure, discourse semantics and rhetorical function within contexts of social interaction” (Stöckl, 2019, p. 50). Metaphor, for example, can be presented by language, by image, or by a combination of those: a case of multimodal rhetorical figures (Bateman, 2014).

The main goal of rhetoric is to persuade by the selection of the most appropriate means of communicating a message—orally, verbally, or in a different way. Media outlets use the combination of verbal textual message and images or audio and video content; we can say that these combinations create a different and often deeper impact on the audience, which is not simply the sum of its components. “It is ultimately the quality of the multimodal design that builds a rhetorical potential for argumentation and shapes the ways in which a piece of communication will appeal to the reason, the emotions, and the ethical judgment of potential recipients” (Pflaeging & Stöckl, 2021, p. 321).

What are the limitations and pitfalls of this kind of framing? This framework offers a deceptively simple definition of it as modern slavery, which should be abolished the way traditional slavery was abolished in the past. In addition to this, it is often proposed to ban prostitution in general as a way to solve this problem. Such an approach to the problem is a rather a barrier to a more complex examination of the complex factors that allow this type of abuse to flourish. Actions like the prohibition and criminalization of prostitution are more likely to lead to even more abuse

and human rights violations as of something that happens entirely in secret and is beyond any attempts at regulation.

Another aspect, which requires analysis, is that the slavery framework may lead to the implementation of anti-trafficking policies and measures that aim to protect “innocent” victims of modern slavery, but the majority of victims are not snatched from the street, for example, many enter the world of sex work voluntarily or are held via debt and other obligation that would easily make them return to sex work and exploitation even if “freed” (Brysk, 2012).

Equating trafficking with slavery also creates the notion of the “innocent victim” who is captured, abducted and forced to become a “white slave.” Situations that do not fit into this scheme (and these are most) respectively, may not provoke this kind of moral outrage in people, societal intolerance of abuse and urge to help victims. Since many of the victims today voluntarily go abroad and into prostitution, expecting better income or to pay off debts, they do not fall under this scheme – and will not be accepted as “innocent victims”, which easily pushes the thinking in the direction “*They deserve it, they are to blame themselves*”. This kind of thinking is a major obstacle to the deeper understanding of the problem and the search for adequate ways to counteract it and can be even dangerous if it leads to attitudes towards the voluntarily departed as “guilty”, “bad” and undeserving of support. The slavery framework emphasizes “protection over empowerment, and rescue over rights” (Brysk, 2012, p. 4). “Rescuing” victims during police raids not followed by adequate support efforts is not an effective solution. Many of those rescued in this manner are later on held against their will in shelters, pressured to testify, which may pose danger to them or their relatives, and deported. Yet many of them will return even if deported, because they still find no better options, leading to revictimization.

3.2. The “ideal victim”

The image of an “innocent” helpless victim in need of saving is extremely powerful and provokes the public to require action from institutions and stakeholders. Yet it is often very far from the image of the real victim. Nils Christie, a Norwegian professor of criminology, developed his concept of the “ideal” victim with the aim to underline the attributes socially required to grant someone a victim status. His goal was to define the way society constructs the image of the victim: the victim the public would unquestioningly accept as such. Consequently, he defines the “ideal victim” as “a person or a category of individuals who upon their personal encounter with crime are most readily given the complete and legitimate status of being a victim” (Christie, 1986, p. 18).

These attributes include both personal characteristics and external circumstances. In terms of personal characteristics, the victim needs to be perceived as weak and vulnerable. Thus, members of groups perceived by default as more vulnerable (children, old people, girls, women) are more easily “accepted” as victims. According to Christie, another attribute is that the ideal victim is in the process of doing something respectable when victimized—going to school, for example. They are not at a place they are not supposed to be or doing something they are not supposed to be doing. External factors include time and location—again they need to be such that the victim can be seen as “blameless” (not having contributed to their misfortune in any way). The perpetrator also carries a set of characteristics like being intimidating and with perverse intentions, and unknown to the victims, with no previous contacts between them. Depicting the victims as entirely innocent “necessarily amplifies the guilt of the accused” (Schwöbel-Patel, 2018, p. 712).

In Christie’s definition, the victim “must be strong enough to be listened to, or dare to talk. But she (he) must at the very same time be weak enough not to become a threat to other important interests” (Christie, 1986, p. 21). Therefore, the typical concept of the victim is of someone weak and dependent, passive and reliant on “saving”. Therefore, someone may be perceived as a victim as long as they need saving, but not if they become empowered or press demands and develop activism raising questions about migration, e.g. general migration laws and possibilities for legal

migration and integration—at this point this becomes inconvenient and the victim loses this status and may provoke anger and even hostility:

“<...> the normative language of societal discourse prefers victims that are powerless and subordinated; that is, victims who lack the depth and the complexity of an actual human being and embody the unrealistic archetype of complete innocence” (Karamanos, 2018, p. 52).

4. Hypothesis and method

This study applies content analysis of images used in media and other online publications on the topic of human trafficking. In accordance with the abovementioned framing of trafficking as modern slavery, I hypothesize that 1) images creating associations with slavery and captivity would predominate; 2) in most cases the images would be of women and children; 3) the persons on the images would be white.

My research method is content analysis of the visuals accompanying media publications about human trafficking in Bulgaria. This method allows the making of generalizations about the relative frequencies of visual representations in media-circulated content of particular groups of persons, roles, events, situations, etc. (Bell, 2001).

Selection of content. Publications found through the Google search engine and the accompanying images were analyzed via a coding system specially designed for the purposes of this study. The number of publications is limited by the fact that trafficking in humans is not a frequent topic for Bulgarian media. They mainly appear as a part of campaigns (like the European anti-trafficking day 18 October), when there is a new police intervention/raid against a trafficking ring or when a new international report related to trafficking is released. An appendix with links to all the analyzed publications can be found at the end of this paper.

Coding strategy. For this research, I have selected six main categories and subcategories of variables. In my study, I only categorized images depicting victims (all of them are symbolic representation, no images of actual victims are used); other images were beyond the scope of this analysis. According to the general hypothesis, these variables focus on the types of persons shown (age, gender, race, number of persons on an image), on one hand, and on the other on the visual attributes that typically create the metaphor of slavery and captivity (ropes, chains, bars, small enclosed spaces/cells, etc.). The number of persons coded is the number of perceived victims within the image. Some images may show visual details related to the supposed abusers, but these are not coded as the focus is on the way victims are portrayed. When assigning images to a coding category, I took into consideration how clearly the attribute can be seen. If the image was not clear or if it showed only parts of the body so that age or gender, etc. could not be determined, it was ascribed to the *unspecified subcategory*.

5. Results

Table 1 below shows the results of the content analysis of the images accompanying media and website publications (see Appendix) about human trafficking in Bulgaria over the recent years.

Table 1

**Results of the content analysis of image used
in publications on the topic of human trafficking
in Bulgarian online media and websites**

<i>Attribute of human trafficking</i>		<i>Number of images</i>	<i>Total number of images</i>
Images showing a victim/part(s) of a human body		30	30
Number of persons	One	27	30
	Two	1	
	More than 2	2	
Victims' age	Children	5	30
	Younger adults	13	
	Unspecified	11	
Victims' gender	Female	13	30
	Male	2	
	Female and male	2	
	Unspecified, other	13	
Victims' race	White	28	30
	Other	1	
	Unspecified	1	
Attributes of slavery	Rope	10	13
	Chains	3	
Images of captivity	Bars	2	17
	Small spaces, cells	3	
	Other	12	

Most publications analyzed in this paper (see Appendix) are posted on the sites of media outlets (like Vesti.bg, SEGA, TrafficNews, among others) and some serve the purposes of awareness raising (as parts of prevention campaigns). A total of 25 publications were analyzed and all of them contained at least one image. The total number of images is 38 (as some publications contain more than one image), of which 30 images contain a representation of a victim—these are the images under analysis. No videos were found at this stage. The images in most cases were not created by the media outlet itself, but taken from a photo stock site, except for the cases where the photos were created for a campaign and portrayed persons taking part in an anti-trafficking event.

Gender. The majority of images were of women and girls. Only 2 images were of men and 2 depicting both men and women. The images categorized as unspecified most often showed hands or feet. Though these images fall under the unspecified category, most of them look more like parts of a female body (consider figure 1).



Figure 1. A trafficking victim in the EU (“Nad 23 000 zhertvi”, 2019)

Men are depicted much less often (no more than 9% of publications) and usually in pictures of persons of mixed genders. Only one image pictures a man toiling on a construction site, the implications being of labor exploitation.

Age. Most of the images were of younger adults, only four were clearly of children and none was of an older person, even though older people are at risk of labor exploitation. Children do not appear as often in the publication and associated images as I expected, unless the specific focus is child trafficking (see figure 2). In one publication about trafficking of newborns the used image was of a staircase, so there was no symbolic depiction of victims (“Kushta na ujasite”, 2020).



Figure 2. A child victim of human trafficking (“Trafikat na hora”, 2018)

Eleven images are categorized under unspecified because in them, the whole person cannot be seen, at least the depicted persons are not children—this much can be stated.

Number of persons depicted. The majority of the images in my material picture one person, only one shows two, and three images show more than two people.

Race. Almost all images are of white people. In just one image there is a person of color and one image cannot be categorized; it is ambivalent because it displays only silhouettes.

Attributes of slavery. Such attributes are present in 13 of the analyzed images. The most common are ropes (10 images) and chains (3 images).

Images of captivity proved not as common as initially expected. In five images, I noticed visuals depicting bars or small, enclosed spaces. There were however other such visuals—like a hand on the mouth or plaster over the mouth (a supposed captive, to prevent screaming), barcodes (one image, created for the purposes of a prevention campaign shows silhouettes with barcodes, the association being of people put for sale).

6. Discussion

The publications under analysis used a multimodal combination of visual material (images) and text (linguistic mode). As hypothesized, the majority of images are of women, very few are of men. Children are depicted less often than expected and only in publications specifically about child trafficking.

The depicted subjects are young—typically young adults, even where only body parts are visible, they look like belonging to younger persons. The exclusion of older persons has the implication of ignoring them as potential victims. But in reality, they are at high risk if they work abroad as domestic help or caregivers. The racial profile is mostly uniform—the victims are depicted as *white*. The population of Bulgaria however includes a Roma minority, which is in fact quite numerous and at higher risk of trafficking due to economically disadvantaged status. Yet they were out of the media focus in my material. In Bulgaria, the Roma minority often suffers discrimination and social exclusion; in this case—a symbolic exclusion from representation.

By way of example, figure 3 below combines verbal, graphic, and color semiotic resources to create an emotional perception of the picture of a white girl being held captive, enslaved. The dark background typifies the majority of the images, which is often combined with attributes of captivity and slavery like ropes and chains, as well as hands on the mouth, plaster, bars, presence of captors with menacing postures, etc.



Figure 3. A victim breaking a human trafficking network (Yaninska, n.d.)

To summarize, the typical image used in publications on human trafficking is of young white woman in captivity (shown in full or only partially, as body parts, held with ropes or hand over their mouths, in dark and scary spaces or behind bars). This is the predominant visual material accompanying publications about trafficking. Some of the written texts mention the idea of slavery or modern slavery (e.g. “Londonskata politsiya”, 2019); yet they do not use the term *white slavery*. Yet on the level of the imagery the implication is exactly of white slavery and of white female slaves. I argue that even though this term is falling out of favor on verbal level, it is still implied via the use of multimodality. Such images are powerful and emotionally moving but create a very limited idea of a stereotype victim—a suffering, innocent, captive white girl, which results from the influence of the concept of the ideal victim. As was mentioned, the media do not create their own images/photographs for these publications; they typically use ones from stock footage. Nevertheless, image selection is not random—it aims to generate emotional reaction in the target audience and reflects the attitudes of the media to the issue in focus.

As previously mentioned, the use of slavery images, associations and connotations is powerful on emotional level and rhetorically powerful in generating pathos. Concepts of slavery stored in the

public unconscious determine a strong negative reaction to human slavery in most people and metaphors and images evoking the idea of slavery generate moral outrage, anger at the perpetrators, desire to help victims. On this level, the use of this multimodal frame to address the complex problem of trafficking is easily understandable and can be seen as effective. Besides, it can be argued that the media outlets tend to follow the dominant social trends of framing trafficking as modern slavery without much additional consideration. Therefore, on this level the slavery framework can also be seen as easily available and applied; and in the media, is best achieved (or strengthened) through multimodality.

Multimodal slavery framework in the media has its positive effects: it both attracts the attention of the public, who otherwise may not feel involved in the issue of trafficking, and effectively stimulates the public and stakeholders to take action. But at the same time we need to be aware of the limitations and pitfalls of this framing. The image of the white helpless girl who is abducted, held captive, tied and abused may provoke compassion, but it also creates a limiting and often incorrect perception of the victims. The actual victims are persons of different ages, ethnically and racially diverse, and very often not abducted and held in captivity, but choosing sex work or domestic work on their own accord or because of manipulation, after which they are mistreated and exploited. This does not mean they “brought this on themselves” and does not make them less deserving of the victim status. The mismatch between the image of the “ideal victim” and the real victim may have very negative effects—when one the victim stops being seen as “ideal”, there may be a shift to blaming the victims as a common defense mechanism aimed to protect us from feelings of helplessness and too much empathy. Actual victims of crime, trafficking, and war are not perfect or ideal, nor should they be expected to be in order to receive help and protection.

Currently, most NGOs working on the problem prefer the framing of trafficking as a violation of human rights and work to encourage a deeper analysis of the push and pull factors, the risk groups, the factors for vulnerability, and the ways to combat trafficking by not just rescuing (victims) and punishing (perpetrators), but by eliminating the root causes of this dark phenomenon. Lack of opportunities and security, poverty, displacement—all of these lead to human trafficking, not street abductions. In addition, demand is the driving force behind the flourishing of human trafficking and even the worst and most cruel trafficker would be out of business without this demand. However, this is another aspect that is difficult to handle and address—to what extent the ones who use the services of trafficked persons can be held responsible and expected to intervene. This is not within the scope of the current paper but underlines the complexity of the issue and can be a topic for future research efforts.

7. Conclusion

Human trafficking is often explained by economic, social, and political conditions that push victims out of their country of origin and/or pull them toward another country. The basic idea is that victims originally live in futureless poverty and/or are structurally discriminated against in their home society and, for this reason, are easily motivated to leave everything behind and take risky chances. Globalization and easier mobility create new opportunities for the transportation and exploitation of people. Understanding and preventing trafficking requires a deeper understanding of these processes and factors in their complexity and going beyond the view of abduction and slavery. Trafficking victims usually have a level of self-determination in making their choices to migrate and often make conscious decisions to enter the world of sex work, for example. Public expectations of the “ideal” victim who has been abducted, who is “innocent” and helpless, who needs a savior can be both pathos generating as well as misleading and potentially resulting in public “disappointment” and denying the victim status to these persons who have chosen to enter prostitution due to lack of better chances for migration. This is a barrier to more effective support of victims and preventive measures.

Thinking of trafficking victims simply as captives in need of rescue as the only necessary prerequisite for them to start living well again can be an obstacle to generating genuinely working

strategies to eliminate human trafficking and help the people affected by it. Victims need not just "rescue", but opportunities for development, and life change, for work, education, skills development and assertiveness. Tackling a complex problem such as trafficking in human beings requires, above all, the elimination of the risks that create victims, of the factors that make certain members of society vulnerable. Therefore, push and pull factors, the impact of migration and routes to migration (legal and illegal) and of displacement due to armed conflicts and climate change all require research efforts on national and international levels if this problem is to be properly addressed. In this context, multimodal anti-trafficking rhetoric in the media is a valuable instrument to raise awareness and urge people into action. This rhetoric needs further analysis of the complex factors at play and the power of communication strategies to shape attitudes and perceptions.

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**ФОРМУЛЮВАННЯ ПРОБЛЕМИ
ТОРГІВЛІ ЛЮДЬМИ ТА СУЧАСНОГО РАБСТВА:
МІЖ РИТОРИЧНИМ ПАФОСОМ
ТА КОНЦЕПТУАЛЬНИМИ ОБМЕЖЕННЯМИ**

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Анотація

Торгівля людьми є серйозною проблемою, яка непропорційно впливає на вразливі групи. Країни Східної Європи є одними з найбільш постраждалих через низку факторів ризику. Але ця проблема часто залишається непомітною для масової громадськості. Спроби довести її до суспільної свідомості значною мірою спираються на різні риторичні стратегії. Я стверджую, що спосіб постановки соціальної проблеми значною мірою визначає її суспільне сприйняття та реакцію на неї. Ця стаття розглядає торгівлю людьми як явище, її визначення та першопричини, а потім зосереджується на трактуванні торгівлі людьми як сучасного рабства. Такий фреймінг цієї проблеми став можливим завдяки використанню мультимодальності в ЗМІ та в профілактичних кампаніях. Я застосую метод контент-аналізу зображень, які використовуються в болгарській дігитальній пресі. Поєднання тексту та зображень є потужним інструментом для створення асоціації про рабство, ув'язнення та полон. Ці асоціації є емоційно заразливими та можуть породжувати пафос; вони також передають ідею безсилої невинної жертви, яка потребує порятунку, що применшує цю проблему. У статті стверджується, що цей підхід має як позитивні, так і негативні аспекти, останніми є ризики редукціонізму та перешкоди для глибшого розуміння проблеми, її глибинних причин і можливих рішень. Альтернативне трактування цього явища як порушення прав людини передбачає необхідність не лише «порятунку» індивідів, а й структурних змін у суспільстві.

Ключові слова: торгівля людьми, фреймінг, мультимодальність, пафос.