Human Trafficking: Unweaving the Web of Online Human Trafficking

Meeting 1, Thursday 28th March
University of Dundee

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Speakers

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Kathryn Sharp (Coordinator, Dundee Violence Against Women Partnership)

Chair: Jonathan Mendel (University of Dundee)
What is Human Trafficking Represented to Be?

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understanding public knowledge + attitudes towards human trafficking

http://cps.ceu.hu/research/trafficking-in-human-beings
Introduction

Writing and talking about THB:
  – Conflicting theoretical perspectives and policy-making approaches
  – Absence of reliable data, and
  – Accusations of bias and taking sides

Yet, the consensus: THB = problem = requires specific legal, political and economic responses

Recent literature on trafficking:
  – more innovative studies and approaches, and
  – new methodologies
Outline

• Political framing of THB: decides and formulates adopted policy responses.

Outline:

a) How THB is vectored in the UK anti-trafficking policy (‘Human Trafficking: the Government's Strategy’ 2011)

b) Representations of THB as crime, immigration or prostitution: conceal the economic dimension

c) THB: as a form of migration - responds to the growing global demand for exploitable labour within the context of neoliberal globalisation
THB: What it is and what it is not represented to be

Reports, policy statements and research: know little about the scale, data difficult to collate, fragmented and unreliable
+ a specific representation of trafficking:
  – victims & immigration (number of people trafficked, identified and ‘rescued’)
  &
  – crime (trafficking-related arrests, prosecutions and convictions)

Carol Bacchi (2009): ‘What’s the Problem Represented to be?’ (WPR) approach: every policy contains an explicit or implicit interpretation and diagnosis of what it describes to be a problem

WPR methodology: ‘deconstructing knowledge’ by ‘working backwards’ to identify issues not problematised in the first place and policy solutions not considered.
**THB: What it is and what it is not represented to be**

WPR & THB: a story of victims, illegal immigrants, criminals & ‘social helpers’ and ‘anti-trafficking humanitarians’ (Agustin 2007)

Anti-THB policies: ‘...a good thing’ because policies ‘fix things up’ (Bacchi 2009).

However:

- Impact of current THB policies: difficult to assess
- When assessed: outcomes patchy

Recent criticism of the UK Government’s efforts by the UK Centre for Social Justice (2013)

**Qs to ask:**

- How current anti-trafficking policies are formulated?
- Which of the claims about trafficking become institutionalised and how?
- What they represent the problem of trafficking to be?
- What do they not say it is?
THB: Vectoring and Niche-ing

Ardau (2008): THB as a socially constructed category, a discourse.

‘Vectoring’: a force which acts in certain direction

Migration, crime and prostitution: ‘vectored’ or transmitted into what we understand THB to be

Anker and Liempt (2012): three ‘niche and narrow’ conceptions of trafficking: migration, labour rights or accessibility of human and citizenship rights

Anderson (2008), Andrijasevic (2010):

– the very concept of trafficking as ideologically constructed & redundant
– need to re-focus from movement (the migration aspect) and crime (the criminal justice aspect) to exploitation
Trafficking as Crime

**THB as crime:** accepted and widespread in media, policy-making and academic literature

**Imagery:** ruthless criminals + security threat = moral panics about THB and migration

UK tabloid newspapers:

**Criminals vs. Victims**


‘Parents sell virgins aged 12 for sex’ (The Sun, 2009), ‘2,600 hookers trafficked to UK’ (The Sun, 2010)
Trafficking as Crime

**Law enforcement level:** raids & ‘clampdowns’ to rescue ‘victims’ & prosecute and deport ruthless criminals

‘Anti-trafficking stakeholders’: policy-makers, border control, police, judiciary, and voluntary sector.

**UK THB strategy: very specific ‘vectoring’ of THB as crime**

- External threat, originating from outside UK borders
- Solution: disrupt criminal networks abroad ‘before [the problem] reaches our borders’ & prevent ‘the importation of serious and organised criminality into this country’.
- ‘Us’ vs. ’them’, ‘this country’ vs. ’the rest of the world’ - amplify the sense of external threat – more control and tough action
- No acknowledgement of diversity of situations and contexts
- No recognition of businesses and consumers relying on trafficked labour exploited in the UK or ‘exported’ from overseas in the shape of goods and services
Trafficking as illegal immigration

Opening up of national borders for global finances, information, political and cultural ‘elites’, and disposable cheap labour (where and when needed)

vs.

Tightening up of national borders for ‘non-Western others’

Economic convergence within the enlarged EU

vs.

cultural discourses on ‘true’ Europeans and ‘others’

‘Tougher’ stance on migration that ‘works in the national interest’ (Home Office 2012): transposed into restrictive legislation and policies

• No acknowledgement of immigration controls in producing and reinforcing relations of dependency and power

• No consideration of a variety of migration determinants
Trafficking as illegal immigration

• The immigration vector of the UK THB strategy: strengthening the UK border to ‘stop victims being brought into the UK’

• The Strategy: military terms - ‘creating an offshore line of defence’

• Two broad categories: ‘the right people’ to be ‘allowed to come the UK’, and ‘Others’ - presumably the ‘wrong people’, including traffickers and their victims to be stopped before they cross the Border

• The victory in the UK’s war on THB: once the UK border becomes impenetrable to criminals and their victims
Trafficking as prostitution

Conflation of trafficking with prostitution:
- Abuse and violence inherent in THB as the actual site of work and a form of labour
- Elimination of trafficking = elimination of prostitution

Outcomes:
- Complexity of migratory processes reduced to a narrative of sexual trauma of deceived, exploited and abused ‘women and children’ sex slaves (Andrijasevic 2007, Galusca 2012)
- ‘Raid and rehabilitation’ strategy is deployed within the context of moral panics and fears
- Questions about the role of the state in constructing poor work and vulnerable workers are never asked
Trafficking as prostitution

Solution: criminalising prostitution

Sweden, 1999: outlawed the purchase rather than the sale of sex.

Success story vs. further violence as prostitution is pushed further underground

The UK THB strategy:

- People who pay for sexual services as a ‘key part of the chain that leads to women being trafficked’ into the UK
- ‘Targeting’ such people: key element in disrupting markets for trafficking
- No direct endorsement of the Nordic/Swedish approach, however
- ‘Clients’ are targeted
- Salvation Army appointed to deliver support services for trafficking victims
Trafficking and poverty

2008: UK Government - direct connection between THB and widespread global poverty

**Solution:** ‘spending more money in ‘fragile states’

**However:** ‘the governments we give money to’ fail to ‘tackle poverty, uphold human rights and keep a tight grip on finances’

Implicit diagnosis of the problem as inhabiting uncivilised, undemocratic and impoverished spaces ‘out there’

The UK’s Policy on Promoting Human Rights Internationally (2012b): denial of human rights around the world as a problem, deserves a response from the UK Government but only if it increases Britain’s security and protects its citizens overseas.

Issues of torture, abolition of death penalty, freedom of expression and religious belief, gender equality and free elections: no mention of trafficking, migration or labour exploitation
Trafficking as isolated instances of labour law infringements

**Labour exploitation within the EU:** evidence of systematic exploitation of migrants in low-paid low-skilled jobs

**However:** represented as an outcome of poorly regulated working practices by individual employers

‘Excepted’ workers (Khosravi 2010):
- exploitation is not sanctioned yet not actively disrupted by authorities
- migrant workers are ‘included’ economically but **excluded** socio-politically: incomplete, partial or ‘precarious’ citizens

**UK & exploitation of migrant workers:**
- NMW - one of the main mechanisms to protecting ‘low income workers’ from being exploited or treated badly.

However: low levels of compliance + lack of enforcement

UK Parliament & the proposed Bill on Transparency in the UK companies’ supply chains
Constructing and addressing the ‘problem’

• Problem: THB as crime, migration, prostitution or poor working practices
• Responses:
  – identifying and prosecuting traffickers
  – identifying and rescuing victim
  – improving immigration and border control systems
  – criminalising prostitution
  – identifying and penalising employers
• However: no significant difference to many trafficked and exploited persons (Anker and Liempt 2011).
• Wylie and McRedmond’s (2010) ‘prosecuting the occasional trafficker is not going to have a significant impact on globalisation, global inequality, civil war and political instability’
Political economy of trafficking

Political economy approach:
- Neoliberal economic policies ‘free up’ marginal and vulnerable groups
- Easily exploitable and controllable: drawn into specific sites of low-paid low-skilled locally or across patrolled borders: trafficked, smuggled or crossing the border voluntarily

THB:
- As a form of irregular migration in response to the increasing demand for labour
- As a mechanism to transport the vulnerable and disadvantaged to the sites of work

Vs.

Policies and media representations: THB as individualised act of criminality that happens to vulnerable individuals through the evil doing of immoral traffickers

Outcome: removal of the the links between exploitation for labour and consumption of commodities and services; THB and exploitation generally irrelevant to the daily lives of ordinary consumers.
Conclusion

• Addressing THB:
Must be recognised by governments, businesses and consumers not as a abnormal deviation from otherwise normal and human-centred patterns of economic development, but as a phenomenon located within a broader structure of neoliberal capitalism.

Three levels:
- (re) Individualising the problem
- (re) Focusing national efforts
- (re) Setting the International Framework

Thinking globally and acting locally
Thank you and Qs

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