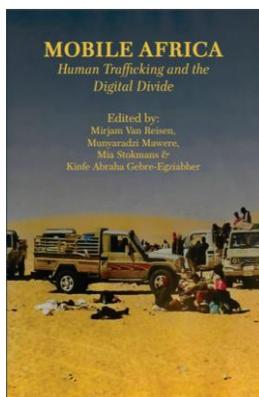


# The Representation of Human Trafficking in Documentaries: Vulnerable Victims and Shadowy Villains

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## Chapter in: Mobile Africa: Human Trafficking and the Digital Divide

From the book Series:  
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# The Representation of Human Trafficking in Documentaries: Vulnerable Victims and Shadowy Villains

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*“The victims of Sinai trafficking were men and women of all ages, including young children, babies (some born in captivity), and the elderly.”*

Van Reisen, Gerrima, Ghilazghy, Rijken, & Van Stam, 2017, p. 147

### Introduction

This chapter investigates the contemporary framing of human trafficking by comparing five documentaries on the topic. The documentaries focus on

trafficking from the Horn of Africa and portray the causes and outcomes of human trafficking, as well as the onward path of its survivors.

By comparing the documentaries, this chapter aims to identify the different ways in which the problem of human trafficking is perceived and presented. This is highly relevant as the framing of the problem influences the emergence of possible solutions: “By

rendering events or occurrences meaningful, frames function to organize experience and guide action, whether individual or collective” (Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986, p. 464). If many different frames exist, the understanding of a problem also

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*How the problem of human trafficking for ransom is framed shapes how people and policymakers react to the issue, thereby impacting on the solutions employed. By looking at the framing of human trafficking for ransom in documentary films, this study found that there is no connected framing of the problem, making it difficult to put it on the policy making agenda in a consolidated way. A unified framing may facilitate the emergence of more successful policies to address the issue.*

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varies and divergent views on a problem do not facilitate an easy policy response. In such circumstances, it is difficult for public campaigns to have an impact on policymakers and politicians towards addressing the problem.

The documentaries selected for this study deal with human trafficking from Eritrea and are made by documentary film makers from Israel, Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands and Sweden. The interest of documentary film makers in human trafficking from Eritrea can be explained by the magnitude of the problem, both in terms of the number of victims from Eritrea in absolute terms and per capita (despite the small population of Eritrea) and the violence perpetrated against the victims. The oppressive conditions in Eritrea have caused an average of 5,000 refugees a month to flee the country over the last decade:

*Human rights organisations have increasingly pointed to the forced military conscription in Eritrea combined with severe conditions with regards to rule of law, human rights and governance as well as the lack of economic opportunities, rampant poverty and lack of freedom as a lethal cocktail which produces vast numbers of refugees. (Van Reisen & Rijken, 2014, p. 115)*

Many Eritreans have tried to escape to neighbouring countries, or even make their way to Europe, despite the risks: “If people flee Eritrea, they are likely to end up in refugee camps in neighbouring countries where they run the risk of being kidnapped, recruited or lured by smugglers or traffickers” (Van Reisen & Rijken, 2014, p. 121). New forms of human trafficking have emerged, such as Sinai trafficking, also known as human trafficking for ransom, capitalising on the exodus of vulnerable Eritreans (Van Reisen & Rijken, 2014). Human trafficking for ransom involves the victims being held under inhumane conditions, tortured, raped, and even killed in order to extract a ransom from their relatives or friends, using mobile phones to show the victim being tortured (Van Reisen & Rijken, 2014, p. 115). There is no legal divergence regarding the view that these constitute criminal acts. Yet, if there is such clarity regarding the

illegality of the practice, why has this form of human trafficking not been rooted out?

As human trafficking for ransom is a relatively new phenomenon, which emerged only in 2009 (Van Reisen & Rijken, 2014, p. 113), it is understandable that many aspects of it still need to be identified and described. However, the diverse perceptions of it make finding a solution to the problem difficult. There is no clear solution or policy in place that would address the issue effectively and at the one time. Thus, the main research question asked in this chapter is: *How is the problem of human trafficking for ransom framed in documentaries and how does this framing affect how we react to the problem?* To answer this question, it looks at: how refugees are portrayed, how human traffickers and smugglers are portrayed, the genderised representation of victims of human trafficking, the representation of the trauma suffered by the victims of human trafficking and what agency is awarded to the actors in the context of human trafficking.

The next section describes the methodology used for this comparative study, followed by the theoretical framework, which describes the concepts used to analyse the framing of human trafficking in the different documentaries. A detailed description of the five documentaries is then presented, followed by the findings (each section addressing one sub-question). Finally, a brief conclusion is presented.

## **Methodology**

This chapter uses documentary analysis to investigate the framing of human trafficking. Documentaries are a great source of information on the topic for a number of reasons. First, documentaries collect expert opinions in the field. Some of the documentaries analysed in this chapter contain interviews with researchers, policymakers, and authorities, who share their first-hand experiences with the victims and perpetrators of human trafficking. Second, documentaries show real footage from the problematic setting, such as interviews with the survivors of human trafficking and footage of the phone calls made while the victims were being tortured to extract ransom. Thus, it

makes them a highly credible and transparent source of information. Finally, before the documentary is filmed, a lot of preparatory research takes place, which makes the information rich and valuable.

The research was organised in five steps. The first step, was to conduct a literature review on the topic of human trafficking for ransom and the divergent problem frames used to explain it. The dominant themes of problem-sets running through the literature were identified. The second step was to select documentaries for analysis that focused on aspects of human trafficking for ransom. The documentaries selected have in common that they highlight this modus operandi in relation to mainly Eritrean refugees. Thirdly, the documentaries were each analysed based on five key areas of representation (the portrayal of the victims, the portrayal of traffickers and smugglers, the genderisation of victimhood, the representation of trauma and the representation of agency). The fourth step was to interview the film makers of the documentaries *The Gatekeepers of Europe* and *The Hunt for the 'General'* (Christian Jacob and Ali Fegan), as well as key persons appearing in the documentaries (Selam Kidane, Meron Estefanos and Mirjam Van Reisen). The interviews allowed verification of the content and background of the documentaries and revealed how the documentaries were produced. In the interviews, the resource persons explained the background to the documentaries and the motivation for the questions raised. Their perspectives gave a deeper understanding of the overall situation of human trafficking in Africa and the role of the European Union (EU) in border control. Finally, the fifth step was to compare the documentaries based on the problem frames identified in step two. Because of the nature of this research, making a comparison was necessary to identify the different problem frames emerging in the documentaries.

### **Theoretical framework**

The representation of the victims and perpetrators of human trafficking is an important element in the framing of trafficking as a problem and ties in with the assignment of agency. This

representation informs the policy agenda: “Media representations inform public and practitioners as to the nature of HT [human trafficking]: they are seen and referenced by policymakers and therefore shape discourse on HT” (Gregoriou & Ras, 2018b, p. 3). Accordingly, this section looks at the various concepts that relate to the framing of human trafficking, its victims, survivors and perpetrators.

### ***Frame***

The term ‘frame’ (and framework) is borrowed from Goffman (1974, p. 21) and refers to a "schemata of interpretation" that enables individuals "to locate, perceive, identify, and label occurrences within their life space and the world at large" (Snow *et al.*, 1986, p. 464). One possible explanation for the different representations of a topic is the different kinds of framing of the topic that might take place. There are a number of tools that can be used to reconcile these framings. For example, frame bridging links “two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue or problem” (Snow *et al.*, 1986, p. 467) and frame extension is where a frame is extended “beyond its primary interests to include issues and concerns that are presumed to be of importance to potential adherents” (Snow *et al.*, 1986, p. 625). Both of these tools help to describe the topic better and allow the connection of layered topics under one overarching theme.

### ***Problem definition***

The frame through which a topic is seen influences how a problem is defined. And, problem definition is an important part of shaping the agenda in public policy. In this case, how migrants and refugees are seen (framed) governs public policy on the issue (facilitating refugees to apply for asylum versus the introduction of border controls to stem the flow of ‘illegal’ migrants). Put simplistically, “public policy making can be considered to be a set of processes, including at least: 1) the setting of the agenda, 2) the specification of alternatives from which a choice is to be made, 3) an authoritative choice among those specified alternatives, as in a legislative vote or a presidential decision, and 4) the implementation of the decision” (Kingdon, 2014, pp. 2–

3). The agenda itself is “the list of subjects or problems to which governmental officials, and people outside of government closely associated with those officials, are paying some serious attention at any given time” (Kingdon, 2014, p.3). Agenda-setting is a process that starts with the definition of a problem, which is influenced by how the problem is framed.

### ***Push and pull theory***

A leading framework for defining the problem of human trafficking (and migration) is the ‘push-pull’ theory. This is the “intuitive and empirically grounded idea that structural forces shape migration processes” (Van Hear, Bakewell & Long, 2018, p. 928). In other words, it is the idea that people are ‘pushed’ out of their country of origin by things like conflict and poverty and ‘pulled’ towards the country of destination by economic opportunities and a better standard of living. Because “Twenty-five years ago, labor migration was a major component of immigration flows to industrial nations” (Boyd, 1989. p. 638), it is still believed that refugees are attracted to places of economic growth from disadvantaged zones. This view is, however, oversimplified. It ignores the much more complex socio-cultural circumstances that motivate migration: “We see drivers as structural elements that enable and constrain the exercise of agency by social actors” (Van Hear *et al.*, 2018, p. 1). Stereotypically, the ‘grass is greener’ and people are in search of better lives, as described by the push-pull theory of migration. This provides a dominant framing of the problem. But there are doubts as to whether the theory is relevant for understanding migration-related phenomena such as human trafficking (Kidane & Stokmans, 2018).

### ***Human trafficking and smuggling***

Human trafficking is “a crime against an individual and can be intranational” (Gregoriou & Ras, 2018b, p. 4); it can lead to prostitution, forced labour, slavery, organ removal and more. Smuggling, on the other hand, is a transportation-based crime “against the state and is, necessarily, transnational” (Gregoriou & Ras, 2018b, p. 4). Human trafficking is based on exploitation, in which the

victim has no consent. Smuggling is the facilitation and transportation of people abroad and is considered a violation of the laws of the state. While the difference between human trafficking and smuggling in international law is clear, the reality may not always be so clear-cut (Gregoriou & Ras, 2018b, p. 4). Smuggling often leads to trafficking and victims can sometimes start out paying people who they think are smugglers to transport them across borders to only find out that they are traffickers, or linked to traffickers, who then exploit them or hold them for ransom (Van Reisen *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, Gregoriou and Ras emphasise that the representation of human trafficking and smuggling often lacks clarity: “The difficulty in representing human trafficking accurately is illustrated by the misuse of labels such as ‘trafficking’ and ‘smuggling’” (Gregoriou & Ras, 2018b, p. 4). They argue that victimhood is a key aspect of the representation of human trafficking: “victims are presented as having little agency” (Gregoriou & Ras, 2018a, p. 47). These authors go on to state that:

*Previous research on the representations of human trafficking shows that these narratives are often overly focused on only one form of human trafficking and one particular type of victim, with the highly damaging effect of ignoring or even criminalising (other) victims of other types of human trafficking.* (Gregoriou & Ras, 2018b, p. 3)

This raises an important question: “Are human smugglers inspired by anything other than greed and disregard for human life?” (Achilli, 2018, p. 77). In most cases, “Contemporary mainstream narratives of migration tell us that smugglers are the most immoral people of our time, and that smuggling networks are mafia-like cartels of hardened and greedy criminals dedicated to the systematic deceiving and conning of migrants” (Achilli, 2018, p. 77). However, according to Gregoriou and Ras, this picture of smugglers is one dimensional, concealing a deeper understanding of the problem of human trafficking. In reality, the situation is more complex. Although, “Human smugglers certainly are responsible for many tragedies that we have witnessed in the Mediterranean and elsewhere” (Achilli, 2018, p. 78), this can also be explained by the unstable situation in the host country. In addition, “for migrants, smugglers constitute a

valuable resource, one that allows them to escape misery and extreme danger” (Achilli, 2018, p. 89).

### ***Genderised victims and perpetrators***

In most cases, the victims of human trafficking are assumed to be women: “The stereotypical global victim of trafficking is a “young, naive woman who seeks a better life [...] then ends up a sex slave” (Gregoriou & Ras, 2018b, p. 6). As a result, these authors argue that “Human trafficking victims are idealised, with those not according to this ideal being criminalised” (Gregoriou & Ras, 2018b, p. 2). This creates a gender bias: “Men are seldom considered as victims, meaning that male victims are generally overlooked” (Gregoriou & Ras, 2018b, p. 7). This leads to a distorted understanding of human trafficking and, as argued by Gregoriou and Ras, “a particular version of the human trafficking story has become the new normal” (2018b, p. 4). The presentation of perpetrators is also genderised: “The trafficker [...] is painted as ‘big and bad’, a shadowy, mysterious, powerful figure, often male” (Gregoriou & Ras, 2018b, p. 7). The great problem of genderised victimhood is that: “Male irregular migrants are generally presumed smuggled, thus presumed as having consented to their movement, whereas female irregular migrants are generally presumed trafficked, as not having consented to movement” (Gregoriou & Ras, 2018b, p. 5). This has a huge impact on the lives of victims. “As a result, the (male) smuggled migrant is criminalised, whilst the (female) trafficked migrant is assigned victim-status” (Gregoriou & Ras, 2018b, p. 5).

### ***Trauma***

In the context of human trafficking, trauma comes up as an important issue that impacts on how problems are perceived (Kidane & Van Reisen, 2017, p. 317). Trauma is an emerging theme in scholarly approaches to human trafficking: “The impact [of trauma] on individual victims is catastrophic and particularly worrying given the limited opportunities for therapeutic intervention to allow victims to heal from their experiences” (Kidane & Van Reisen, 2017, p. 317). Trauma is relevant to how problems are perceived by those who suffer from trauma. The research shows that “people attend to their

momentary feelings as a source of information in forming judgements, essentially asking themselves, ‘How do I feel about this?’” (Schwarz, 2010, p. 290). The feelings-as-information theory “provides a general framework for conceptualizing the role of these experiences in human judgement” (Schwarz, 2010, p. 289).

Trauma is not only defined as individual trauma, but also as collective trauma, which can be understood as “when people who have a sense of belonging to one another feel that they have been subjected to fearful and painful events that have left a mark on their collective consciousness and memory” (Kidane & Van Reisen, 2017, p. 318). Thus, the circle of people who are traumatised by critical situations increases and involves those who somehow participate in or hear about the unfortunate events. “It is argued that such events do not just affect individuals and their respective families, but whole communities, [...] society, [...] and even [...] culture” (Kidane & Van Reisen, 2017, p. 317). Secondary trauma “occurs indirectly and is defined as: “Learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member or other close associate” (Kidane & Van Reisen, 2017, p. 320).

The experience of trauma by all those involved in human trafficking related experiences and its meaning is difficult to represent and often does not receive adequate attention. Kidane (2018) argues that trauma should receive more attention as a problem: “It is important that refugee policy and practice developments make serious considerations of the impact of trauma on refugees and address these in order to provide better support and protection for refugees at the earliest possible opportunity”.

### ***Agency***

The representation of agency in victims, survivors and other actors in the context of human trafficking gives us an understanding of the nature of the involvement of actors in human trafficking. Agency is generally understood as “acts done intentionally” (Bandura, 2001). “Agency embodies the endowments, belief systems, self-regulatory capabilities and distributed structures and functions through which

personal influence [is] exercised, rather than residing as a discrete entity in a particular place” (Bandura, 2001, p. 1). Thus, agency ties in with all the other concepts through which human trafficking is framed as a problem and affects the representation of refugees, perpetrators, victims and their trauma. This is important because “The core features of agency enable people to play a part in their self-development, adaptation, and self-renewal with changing times” (Bandura, 2001, p. 1).

### **Five documentaries**

This section provides a short description of the five documentaries analysed in this chapter: *It Will be Chaos* (Luciano & Piscopo, 2018), which highlights the chaotic, dangerous and unstructured path that refugees and migrants take from Africa to Europe, the *Sound of Torture* (Shayo, Trabelsi & Cahlon, 2013), which shows how mobile phones are used to extract ransom from relatives of trafficking victims while they are being tortured, *Under the Skin* (Deloget & Allegra, 2015), which focuses on Sinai human trafficking and the trauma experienced by survivors, *The Gatekeepers of Europe* (Schäfer, Schindwein, Jakob, & ARTE/ZDF, 2018), which explains the political participation of Europe in the crisis, and *The Hunt for the General* (Fegan, 2018), which looks at the investigation around the smuggler ‘the General’ and how the wrong man was accused.

#### ***It Will be Chaos (2018)***

*It Will be Chaos* (Luciano & Piscopo, 2018) is a 93 minute German HBO documentary that follows a refugee from Eritrea and a Syrian refugee family on their journey to Europe. The documentary opens with the shocking image of the arrival of over three-hundred coffins in Lampedusa in 2013 carrying the corpses of the refugees who did not survive the journey. Directed by Lorena Luciano and Filippo Piscopo, the documentary follows the dangerous journey of the refugees. Through two life stories, viewers are shown the difficulties and dangerous situations the refugees have to overcome to reach a place of safety. The title *It Will be Chaos* describes the complicated and unorganised journey the migrants undertake on their way to Europe.

### ***Sound of Torture (2013)***

This documentary was produced in Israel in 2013 and directed by Keren Shayo (Shayo *et al.*, 2013). It introduces a new form of human trafficking for ransom that emerged in around 2009 and involved entire Eritrean families at home and in the diaspora. The name of the documentary gives the viewer a hint of what is going to be shown. The documentary opens with the actual sounds of torture, communicated by mobile phone. It shows the footage of the phone call between a relative and one of the victims to extract ransom. The film highlights the desperation of the situation and the horrific torture that the victims are subjected to. During the film, the viewers get to know the relatives of the victims of human trafficking, who feel powerless and desperate as they try to free their loved ones. The documentary follows Meron Estefanos, Swedish-Eritrean radio journalist and human rights activist, in her quest to help the victims of human trafficking.

### ***Under the Skin (2014)***

*Under the Skin* (Deloget & Allegra, 2015) is a documentary produced by French film makers Cécile Allegra and Delphine Deloget. It shows the consequences of human trafficking through the eyes of the survivors. Young men share their touching life stories, as well as what happened to them when they were captured by the traffickers. Through multiple interviews all around the world, starting in Sweden and ending in Egypt, the reality of being trafficked is revealed. The documentary starts by showing the scars of one of the survivors. The name of the documentary, *Under the Skin*, refers to the trauma that they carry under the skin in addition to their visible scars.

### ***The Gatekeepers of Europe (2018)***

The documentary *The Gatekeepers of Europe* (Schäfer *et al.*, 2018) is produced by Franco-German free-to-air television network ARTE and German public-service television broadcaster Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF). It deals with the border control policies of the African Union and the role of Europe in their facilitation and financial support. It represents the migration problem from a political perspective, as the result of the cooperation by two powerful actors. It shows how people become victims of this uneasy system.

Describing the situation in detail, the producers clarify the political context as well as technological aspects, such as the development of advanced devices to decrease and even stop migration flows. The territory surrounding the borders is physically impossible to secure with foot patrols. Thus, they do so using movement detectors in the most hard to reach areas, to supplement patrols by the border officials.

### ***The Hunt for the General (2016)***

This documentary *The Hunt for the General* (Fegan, 2018) is produced in Sweden and shows the prosecution of human trafficking. What happens when, in the search for the trafficking leaders, the wrong people are arrested and judged? The documentary presents the case of the arrest of one of the ‘boss’ smugglers, who was believed to have transported thousands of people to Europe. After a long and huge public celebration by the media and law enforcement bodies, it was claimed by the Eritrean community that they had arrested the wrong person. The narrative explains the identity mistake which led to the wrongful arrest of 29-year old Medhanie Tesfamariam Behre, who was mistaken for the real human trafficker, Medhanie Yehdego Mered, also known as ‘the General’. The Italian court has still not recognised this mistake and has kept what seems like the wrong man in prison since 2016, despite convincing evidence of his innocence.

### **Portrayal of refugees**

The terminology used to define refugees and migrants is important in the way they are perceived and treated. Basically, they can be described as refugees entitled to protection under the Geneva Convention, or treated as economic migrants who have entered Europe illegally in search of a better standard of living. What they are called affects how they are perceived and treated, including their reception by local populations.



*Figure 17.1. Mayor of Lampedusa defending the need for clarity of terminology when referring to refugees and migrants in 'It Will be Chaos'*

Source: Luciano & Piscopo (2018)

Two of the documentaries studied raise the definition of refugees explicitly (see Table 17.1). *It Will be Chaos* (Luciano & Piscopo, 2018) has two primary narratives. One of them tells the story of an Eritrean refugee called Aregai. After fleeing Eritrea, undergoing various hardships in his journey across the African continent, he nearly dies at sea trying to reach Europe via the Italian city of Lampedusa. The same chaotic lack of structure follows the Syrian family on their way from Turkey to Germany (Luciano & Piscopo, 17:45). Wael, the father of the family, tries to contact a smuggler, as it is the only option left to him and his family to cross the sea. But even when he does, he ends up putting his family and himself at risk. Both cases show us the chaotic situation in which the refugees find themselves. Refugees fleeing war and oppression are often driven towards illegal status as they seek international protection, finding themselves labelled 'illegals migrants'. Table 17.1 shows which of the five films analysed in this chapter deal with the portrayal of refugees.

Table 17.1. Documentaries dealing with the portrayal of refugees

Documentary	Representation of refugees
It Will be Chaos	x
Sound of Torture	
Under the Skin	x
The Gatekeepers of Europe	
The Hunt for the General	

The representation of refugees and migrants takes place on multiple levels. In the documentary *It Will be Chaos*, the audience sees the chaotic system, which, instead of helping refugees, puts them in danger. The refugees face contradicting policies and demands wherever they are. Moreover, the documentary shows the refugees in Europe living in terrible poverty, dealing with asylum rejections, facing anti-refugee rhetoric and unwelcoming populations, and living in chaos and uncertainty, all the while dealing with the aftermath of trauma. All of this highlights the fact that the idea of ‘push-pull’ does not adequately explain the situation.

This brings us to another problem, the differentiated nature of responses among the population in the countries through which the refugees travel, some of which believe that all newcomers are ‘illegal migrants’. In the documentary, we see people voice negative reactions and even stage protests against the refugees on behalf of a political candidate, who uses it as a chance to push his agenda. In some cases, refugees take action to voice their complaints in a forceful way. The documentary shows how, after being held in inhumane conditions in refugee camps for months, the refugees are tired and desperate to be heard. This is one more aspect of the chaos: trying to get a little attention, after you have lost everything.

The documentary shows the chaos surrounding the transportation of the migrants to Europe. Because of the complexity of the legal mechanism for entering Europe, refugees have to look for indirect and unofficial ways to reach Europe. This puts their lives in danger. The Syrian family has to search for life jackets and they barely make

it to the coast of Greece. Aregai loses two of his best friends and nearly his own life on the boat to Lampedusa. Once he arrives, he is arrested and accused of entering Italy illegally. He is treated as a criminal and implicated in a court case. The film shows him traveling on a bus with nine refugees escorted by eight policemen, with multiple cars to control them. One of the refugees in the documentary says: “We can’t understand if we are prisoners or refugees” (Luciano & Piscopo, 2018, 1:14:55). To avoid complications with the law in Italy, Aregai is pushed into making a fake ID to go to Sweden (Luciano & Piscopo, 1:17:09). On arrival in Europe, he receives no support.

The documentary *Under the Skin* (Deloget & Allegra, 2015) makes the audience aware of the problem of human trafficking. It sheds light on the plight of its victims. The documentary shows the implications of the different policies on migration and how the victims of trafficking are received in various countries. Many refugees mention problems with applying for residence permits and documents. Refugees are generally not provided with enough social support, after everything they have been through in search of protection. Many refugees suffer from mental health problems, such as post-traumatic stress and depression.

In order to apply for legal status, the survivors of human trafficking are required to tell their stories to the officials, who often do not believe them. In a moving shot, the documentary shows how the refugees are urged to show their skin as evidence of what they have been through. Even though they are not called ‘illegals’ in the film, we can see that the tension between the refugees and officials in Europe is intense.

### **Portrayal of human traffickers and smugglers**

Almost every documentary mentions the role of human traffickers and smugglers in controlling the movement of refugees. Table 17.2 shows which films deal with the portrayal of human trafficking and smuggling.

Table 17.2. Documentaries dealing with the portrayal of human trafficking/smuggling

Documentary	Representation of human trafficking/smuggling
It Will be Chaos	x
Sound of Torture	x
Under the Skin	x
The Gatekeepers of Europe	x
The Hunt for the General	x

In *It Will be Chaos* (Luciano & Piscopo, 2018), Wael, the father of the Syrian family, tries to contact a smuggler to help his family move from Turkey to Greece. After being scared off by police the first time, they try to repeat their escape the next day. As well as showing that smuggling is illegal, the film highlights the fact that the smuggler does not give any guarantees to the people who use his services. Wael and his family buy their own life vests before the journey. The viewers do not see the smugglers in the documentary. They are portrayed as mysterious people who only contact their clients by mobile phone.

The documentary *Sound of Torture* (Shayo *et al.*, 2013) deals with human traffickers. They are blamed for the situation of the victims. It is implied that the traffickers are men. They are described as hot-tempered, cold-hearted, brutal and violent people, who harm their victims and demand ransom. They are also portrayed as mysterious, as no one can reach them in the documentary.

In the documentary *Under the Skin* (Deloget & Allegra, 2015), the producers manage to get close to the Sinai traffickers. They interview one trafficker who explains his decisions in relation to the hostages in terms of agency. He talks about the economic side of the issue and how he decides to hire guards and allows them to ‘put pressure’ on a few people from the group. By showing the trafficker, the documentary challenges how they are usually portrayed. The trafficker is no longer a shady and mysterious figure with unimaginable power. This removes the cinematic rush around his

persona. On the contrary, the trafficker is portrayed as a simple man. He talks about his wife leaving him and explains that he is involved in trafficking to earn money in his economically-challenged country.

Even though the person being interviewed gives a fake name, Abu Abdullah, and does not show his face, it is plain to see that he is just a simple man. He sits on the couch and talks about his hard life in the country and his wife, just like anyone else. The producers, thus, challenge the stereotypical norms used when portraying traffickers and they do so in the most truthful way possible, showing the reality of the situation.

The film *The Gatekeepers of Europe* (Schäfer *et al.*, 2018) looks at migration from a political perspective. The documentary shows in detail the EU's external border management measures. It shows how many of the measures used to stem the flow of migrants are ineffective, despite the large amounts of money invested in these measures, as migration is caused by a “variety of factors, including deepening poverty, deteriorating living conditions, persistent unemployment, conflicts, human deprivation, and hopelessness [which have] fostered the environment for human trafficking to flourish in the region” (Adepoju, 2005).



*Figure 17.2. Border control in 'The Gatekeepers of Europe'*

Source: Schäfer *et al.* (2018)

*The Gatekeepers of Europe* describes the political system from within. With the help of careful journalistic investigation, the migration issue is clarified for the viewers from a broad political perspective. According to the documentary, while the rhetoric of politicians sounds positive towards refugees, the reality is that billions of euros are being spent to prevent African refugees from entering Europe. The documentary tries to show how this situation provokes the development of and demand for illegal ways to cross borders.

The documentary *The Hunt for the General* (Fegan, 2018) deals with the smuggling of migrants and refugees to Europe. It shows how the authorities arrested a man suspected of smuggling thousands of people to Europe, but that the evidence suggests that they arrested the wrong man, a refugee. The injustice of the refugee being tried for smuggling highlights the vulnerability of refugees in the judicial system in Europe. The documentary also sheds light on another element. The actual smuggler, ‘the General’, does not perceive himself as a criminal. Rather, he likes to think of himself as a rescuer.



*Figure 17.3. Photographs of the suspect (left) and the real ‘General’ (right), in the documentary ‘The Hunt for the General’*

Source: Fegan (2018)

The documentary shows the point of view of the smuggler. It also gives viewers a perspective on the scale of the crimes involved in transporting people from Africa to Europe. What is also highlighted in the film is the way that countries in the EU cooperate to fight smuggling in the region, resulting in the criminalisation of refugees.

**Genderisation of victimhood**

In relation to the genderisation of victimhood, two documentaries deal with the issue, both with different attitudes towards victimhood: *Sound of Torture* (Shayo *et al.*, 2013) and *Under the Skin* (Deloget & Allegra, 2015). The documentary *Sound of Torture* reinforces the traditional image of victims as women, someone’s sisters or wives, who need to be taken care of. The film emphasises the fact that some of the women are pregnant, which plays on the viewers’ sympathy, as well as highlighting the victims’ vulnerability. Moreover, the victims are almost entirely absent from the documentary and only appear as mysterious people in the background of those trying to save them. As a result they are not shown with any agentic capacity. The film focuses on how the victims are kept and treated. It highlights the conditions in which the hostages are kept and how the ransom is extracted. Table 17.3 shows which films deal with the portrayal of victims.

*Table 17.3. Documentaries dealing with the portrayal of victimhood*

<b>Documentary</b>	<b>Representation of victimhood</b>
It Will be Chaos	
Sound of Torture	x
Under the Skin	x
The Gatekeepers of Europe	
The Hunt for the General	

On the other hand, although *Under the Skin* also focuses on victimhood, it does not contain a strong gender bias. It shows predominantly male victims as survivors with agency. What is important about this documentary is that it challenges the stereotypical image of victims and traffickers in the media. It shows

that most hostages in the Sinai are male. And, most importantly, they have something to say about their days in the Sinai. Men do suffer from human trafficking and their stories deserve to be heard. They also have wounds and scars on their bodies. Men face specific types of torturing, such as ones involving the genitals (Deloget & Allegra, 2015, 25:15). As Filmon says in the film, “What you went through will stay under your skin”. In the film, people call themselves ‘survivors’. They show their wounds and they describe the torture they experienced in precise detail. The survivors are happy to be alive and ready to share their experiences. The agency of the survivors is apparent as they share their difficult life journeys with the audience.

**Trauma**

Three of the documentaries focus on trauma: *It Will be Chaos* (Luciano & Piscopo, 2018), *Sound of Torture* (Shayo *et al.*, 2013), and *Under the Skin* (Deloget & Allegra, 2015). In these films, the viewer is introduced to the traumatic situations of the victims of human trafficking, but also their relatives and others who happen to become involved in the situation. Table 17.4 shows which films deal with the representation of trauma.

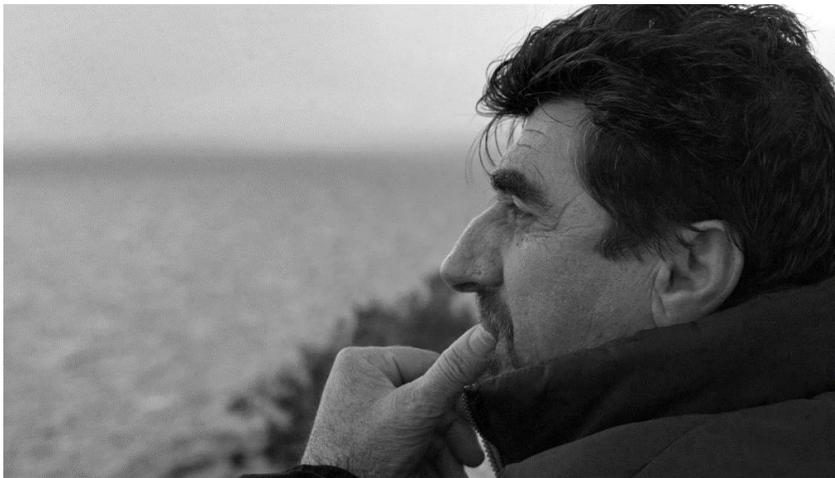
*Table 17.4. Documentaries dealing with the portrayal trauma*

<b>Documentary</b>	<b>Representation of trauma</b>
It Will be Chaos	x
Sound of Torture	x
Under the Skin	x
The Gatekeepers of Europe	
The Hunt for the General	

*It Will be Chaos* shows the poor mental health of the father of the Syrian family, Wael, due to trauma. It is said that he does not interact with others much and suffers from depression (Luciano & Piscopo, 2018, 1:30:05). This is a problem for many refugees, but it is not spoken about in broader society. Wael sees his house completely destroyed and shoulders the huge responsibility of taking care of five

people and himself on the way to another country. His wife says that the only way not to have a breakdown is to treat the situation with humour. In the film it is shown how Wael suffers from stress. Mental health support is not available in such cases. However, even if it was, we might still ask the question: is it possible to fully recover from what you have seen?

This leads us to another aspect of trauma. Trauma not only concerns the lives of those who experience it directly, but also those around them. The film shows the situation of one of the sailors who helped rescue some of the refugees in the Lampedusa tragedy (Luciano & Piscopo, 2018, 12:24), who describes the trauma he experienced. Secondary trauma is also supported by technology such as mobile phones (which are used to show the torture of victims of human trafficking when demanding ransom) and social media (which can spread collective trauma among members of a particular community).

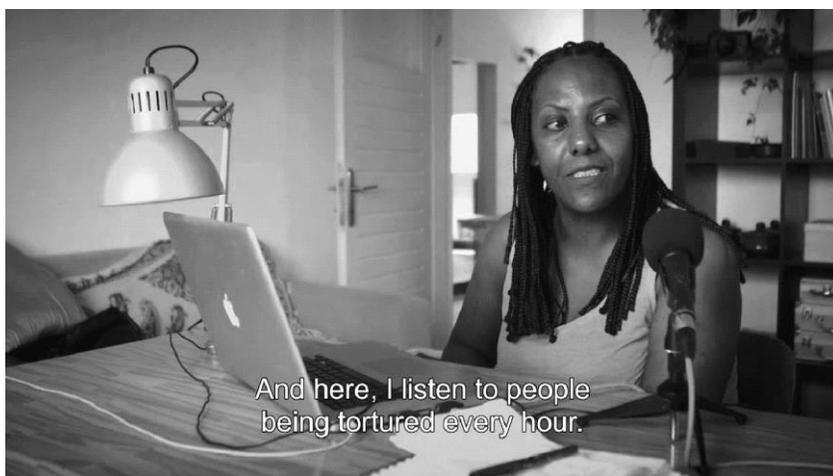


*Figure 17.4. A sailor recalls his trauma after saving some of the refugees in Lampedusa in 'It Will be Chaos'*

Source: Luciano & Piscopo (2018)

The documentary *Sound of Torture* (Shayo *et al.*, 2013) also deals with secondary trauma. The viewers can see how personally affected and involved Meron Estefanos is in the lives of the victims of trafficking

for ransom and their relatives. The relatives of the victims also experience secondary trauma. Since the connection is made via mobile phones and, thus, the actual sounds of torture are real and simultaneous, it leaves a mark on people who are related to the hostages, who experience the trauma personally. As Van Reisen emphasises, “ICTs have impacted on the forms and scope of human trafficking, with particular reference to their enabling of a new form of trafficking – human trafficking for ransom” (Van Reisen *et al.*, 2017, p. 146).



*Figure 17.5. Swedish-Eritrean radio presenter and human rights activist, Meron Estefanos in ‘Sound of Torture’*

Source: Shayo *et al.* (2013)

What is also highlighted in the documentary, is the way the Eritrean community grieves for those who are still in captivity. They try to help each other and to figure out how to stop human trafficking. Their shock, as a community, also shows their collective trauma and the influence Sinai human trafficking has on their lives.

The documentary *Under the Skin* (Deloget & Allegra, 2015) talks about the poor mental condition of survivors of human trafficking. It shows how they feel apathy, do not sleep at night, and keep replaying the memories of traumatic events in their heads. Clearly, they are dealing

with post-traumatic stress. The documentary shows the lack of support for survivors, support that could help them overcome the trauma and post-traumatic stress. The documentary deals primarily with the situation in which refugees find themselves when they reach their final destination. Their mental state is shown in the documentary from multiple perspectives and is one of the main focuses of the documentary.

**Agency**

The different documentaries show agency in different ways, as they depict the situations in which the refugees carry out their lives. Table 17.5 shows which films deal with agency.

*Table 17.5. Documentaries dealing agency*

<b>Documentary</b>	<b>Representation of agency</b>
It Will be Chaos	x
Sound of Torture	x
Under the Skin	x
The Gatekeepers of Europe	
The Hunt for the General	

In the *Sound of Torture* (Shayo *et al.*, 2013) we see the situation mostly through the eyes of Meron Estefanos, journalist and radio presenter for Radio Erena in Sweden. She experiences her agentic decisions, as she tries to fix the problem from Sweden, Israel and Egypt. One of the main messages of the documentary is the importance of personal help to the victims. The film portrays scepticism on the part of victims and Estefanos of the possibility of international organisations and law enforcement agencies stopping this form of human trafficking. We also see the relatives collecting money to save the hostages, as in the case of Amanuel and Hariti. Some do all they can and keep searching for their relatives, as shown in the case of Timmit and Dessale. The documentary also shows the lack of ability of the refugees and their families to improve the situation and the limited possibility of rescue.



*Figure 17.6. Eritrean community in Israel trying to decide what can be done about human trafficking for ransom in the 'Sound of Torture'*

Source: Shayo *et al.* (2013)

Different narratives are used in the film as artistic tools to highlight specific problems. For example, the narrative about a brother searching for his sister allows the film makers to show the cruelty of the customs officers and police at the border in Israel and Egypt. The narrative about a husband and wife shows the emotional pressure exerted on relatives by the traffickers to extract ransom. Meron represents someone from the 'outside' and shows how such people have huge potential to help. Semhar's story shows life after such experiences, full of grief and pain.

All of these narratives show the lack of power of Eritrean refugees and those trying to help them. The people shown in the film, do not have the ability to investigate the situation themselves and are in desperate need of help from volunteers from outside the country and the situation. The documentary encourages viewers to help the refugees. The stereotypical representation of victimhood in this film is perhaps motivated by this goal and, in theory, is understandable, as the documentary was filmed when human trafficking in the Sinai was still prevalent (before 2015), but received little international attention.

In the film, Sinai trafficking is shown as involving a new modus operandi and the commoditisation of human beings, “which is particularly brutal and is characterised by abduction, displacement, captivity, extortion, torture, sexual violence and humiliation, serial selling and killing” (Van Reisen & Rijken, 2014; Van Reisen *et al.*, 2017, p. 117).

The documentary *Under the Skin* (Deloget & Allegra, 2015) gives us a first-hand perspective on trafficking in terms of agency and context. Usually, “victims are presented as having little agency” (Gregoriou & Ras, 2018a, p. 47). In this film we see people who are oppressed and desperate, but still able to make decisions to survive and improve their lives. “People are not only agents of action but self-examiners of their own functioning” (Bandura, 2001, p. 5). People also exhibit agency when they commit suicide to stop the pain, as depicted in *Under the Skin* (Deloget & Allegra, 2015, 38:57). “Even though language/communication often proves problematic for victims, and legal consequences may arise when victims do away with their anonymity, the tendency is to silence them completely and regardless” (Gregoriou & Ras, 2018a, p. 53). The courage to speak and the bravery shown in the documentary is unimaginable for the audience. The sense of agency is enhanced through the experience of how some migrants and refugees rebel and resist the traffickers, as shown at the opening of the documentary (Deloget & Allegra, 2015, 02:27). Survivors talk about their families and their reaction when ransom was demanded. Some relatives ended up paying for the release of the survivors, but others stopped picking up the phone because of the pain they felt hearing their loved ones being tortured. The viewers were told that in some situations, those held captive could get themselves into a better position if they knew Arabic by helping the perpetrators in torturing and raping the other hostages. “There is much that people do designedly to exercise some measure of control over their self-development and life circumstances” (Bandura, 2001, p. 6). This is also agency, as some of those held captive choose to start helping the traffickers to save themselves.

Showing the agency of victims challenges the general image of victims as “young, vulnerable, coerced, agentless, silenced, unrelatable, and offered merely for reflection” (Gregoriou & Ras, 2018a, p. 55). The agency of victims is also shown in the documentary *It Will be Chaos* (Luciano & Piscopo, 2018). Both Wael and Aregai have to make decisions in order to help their family and avoid criminal involvement. Their journeys were not safe. They tried to find ways to organise their journeys to their final destinations without being arrested or deported. They faced many complications on the way to, and in, Europe, but they managed to reach a safe place.

## **Conclusion**

The perspectives shown in the documentaries studied in this chapter are diverse. The frames used vary widely and there is not yet a common frame through which human trafficking, its victims and perpetrators are viewed. This, in turn, impacts on the definition of the problem and how it is dealt with in public policy. In order to bring about social and policy change, these perspectives need to be looked at together through one frame, or a number of frames that are bridged or extended to give a cohesive understanding of the problem. This is the problem with representing real-life situations, which, unfortunately, explains the lack of understanding of human trafficking among the general public.

In this study the following areas of representation were identified: how refugees are portrayed, how human trafficking and smuggling are portrayed, the (genderised) representation of victims/survivors, the representation of trauma as a result of human trafficking and the agency awarded to actors in the context of human trafficking. By analysing these in each documentary, it is possible to identify the different frames of the problem as presented.

All of the documentaries, to a different extent and from different perspectives, deal with the perception of human trafficking/smuggling. To a lesser degree they highlight such topics as agency and trauma. The portrayal of refugees and genderised

victimhood are dealt with the least. The documentary that deals with all these areas is *Under the Skin*. The documentary films *It Will be Chaos* and *Sound of Torture* show almost all the perspectives. *The Gatekeepers of Europe* and *The Hunt for the General*, due to their specific focus, cover only a limited notion of human trafficking/smuggling.

The word ‘chaos’, which is used in the title of one of the films, describes the dynamic situation in the documentaries well. However, as emerges from this analysis, there is not yet a unified frame for describing and understanding the problem of human trafficking. However, a few ‘chaotic’ elements emerge as common to all five documentaries:

- The transportation of refugees to Europe: the dangerous trip in poor conditions with the huge risks involved, as proved by the Lampedusa tragedy.
- The arrival of refugees in Europe: the lack of support and communication with the locals and political authorities.
- Political confrontation and disinterestedness: the use of the situation by politicians to gain political power instead of actually solving the problem.
- The image of migrants as ‘illegals’ instead of ‘refugees’: the treatment of refugees as criminals and as ‘others’ by the authorities, media and local population, instead of with understanding and respect.
- Lack of social support: the fact that many refugees end up in refugee camps with strong police protection and sub-standard conditions.
- Bureaucracy: the fact that it is highly problematic to get a residence permit or ID for a range of reasons, which pushes refugees towards illegality
- The negativity in African-European relations: the disinterest in solving the problems mutually and the lack of mutual interest in preventing human tragedy and death in the context of human trafficking
- The unavailability of post-traumatic rehabilitation: instead of getting treated, most refugees end up in disturbing mental

conditions experiencing complications due to depression and post-traumatic stress.

The representation of the problem plays an important role in agenda-setting. It shapes how people and policymakers react and deal with the issues. Therefore, the representation of the problem has serious and real-life consequences in terms of the policies that emerge in relation to migration and human trafficking. Unfortunately, a connected framing of the problem of human trafficking does not exist at present, as this analysis shows. Even among documentary film makers who are motivated to raise awareness of the problem of human trafficking, there are different ways in which the problem is described and understood. Due to the diversity of representation of the problem of human trafficking for ransom, it is difficult to put it on the policy making agenda in a consolidated way. A more solidified and cohesive framing of the problem is necessary in order for there to be room for agenda setting and to solicit more effective policy responses when the political momentum emerges. A better focus on the framing of the problem may broaden the problem frames. This may result in frame bridging or frame extension of the problem of human trafficking, which is otherwise seen through multiple frames. A unified framing of the problem of human trafficking may facilitate the emergence of more successful policies to address the issue.

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