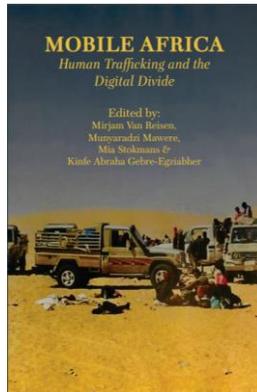


Tortured on Camera: The Use of ICTs in Trafficking for Ransom

Amber Van Esseveld

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

From the book Series:
Connected and Mobile: Migration and Human Trafficking in
Africa



Cite as: Van Esseveld, A. (2019). Tortured on camera: The use of ICTs in trafficking for ransom. In: Van Reisen, M., Mawere, M., Stokmans, M., & Gebre-Egziabher, K. A. (eds), *Mobile Africa: Human Trafficking and the Digital Divide*. Bamenda, Cameroon: Langaa Research & Publishing CIG, pp. 91–111. Book URL: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336956190_Mobile_Africa_Human_Trafficking_and_the_Digital_Divide

ISBN: 9789956551132

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Tortured on Camera: The Use of ICTs in Trafficking for Ransom

Amber Van Esseveld

Introduction

In recent times, migration and human trafficking have evolved, together with the use of digital technology, which has become an inherent part of the modus operandi of traffickers. In 2009, a new form of human trafficking emerged, called ‘Sinai trafficking’ (Van Reisen & Rijken, 2015). In this new form of trafficking, migrants and refugees¹ were kidnapped and kept in torture houses in the Sinai, where they were forced to make calls to their relatives while being tortured to extract ransom. The sound they made when tortured was

the mechanism of Sinai trafficking, because hearing this sound via the phone is what motivated relatives to pay the ransom – they wanted the torture to stop (Van Reisen & Rijken, 2015).

ICTs, such as mobile phones, are being used by human traffickers to facilitate a new form of human trafficking – trafficking for ransom – which is causing primary, secondary and collective trauma. The use of ICTs in this way is evolving, from the sound of torture transmitted through a mobile phone to video footage – all to motivate family and friends to pay the ransom. However, ICTs are also used to enhance the wellbeing of refugees and migrants, who use phones and social media to stay in touch with relatives, receive vital information about their journey and store photos and memories.

¹ The term ‘refugees’ is understood here as referring to persons who have had to flee from their home country (due to war, violence or prosecution, for example) and cannot return home safely (UNHCR, n.d.).

Information and communication technology (ICT) – mobile phones, mobile money transfers, and computers – are essential to the modus operandi of Sinai trafficking. Mobile phones are the traffickers' way of communicating with those who pay the ransom and with each other about the routes on which to take hostages. Mobile phones are also used by the victims as a lifeline, to contact family members and other avenues of support. The role of ICTs in human trafficking has continued to develop over the years, as well as in migration generally. Although Sinai trafficking reported ended in 2014, it has emerged in similar forms in other places as 'human trafficking for ransom' (Van Reisen *et al.*, 2018). These new forms of migration and human trafficking have been documented in various ways, including in traditional news reports on television, news websites and social media. They have also been recorded in documentaries, which offer a deeper and more personal way of presenting the issue than a two-minute news broadcast.

In this chapter, I analyse three documentaries: *Sound of Torture* (Shayo, Trabelsi & Cahlon, 2013), *Under the Skin* (Deloget & Allegra, 2015) and *It Will Be Chaos* (Luciana & Piscopo, 2018), focusing on how ICTs have influenced the new modus operandi of human trafficking that has emerged due to digitalisation, as well as their influence on personal processes such as trauma and healing. Usually, we think of the positive impact of technology. However, there are also unintended negative impacts, such as the facilitation of the activities of traffickers, who use ICTs to help them extort ransom (Van Reisen, 2017b, p. 10). As well as facilitating refugees journeys and supporting their wellbeing by helping them remaining in touch with family and friends, ICTs can also spread the impact of trauma, which expands from primary trauma (among the victims of trafficking and their families who hear the torture over the phone) to secondary trauma (someone who learns about what happened to his/her friend) and collective trauma (the entire community, even generations later) (Kidane & Van Reisen, 2017). ICTs can amplify the effects of trauma, which can reach much further because of ICTs such as mobile phones, which transcend both time and space. This impact is shown clearly in these documentaries.

Research questions

This chapter sheds light on the overall development of migration and human trafficking in the digital era, looking at three distinct periods, which are visualised in the documentaries *Sound of Torture* (2013), *Under the Skin* (2014) and *It Will Be Chaos* (2018). The main research question is: *How are refugees and their communities affected by the availability and use of ICTs, including in the context of traumatic events, both in terms of wellbeing and harm, and how has this evolved over time?* I will look at whether mobile phones contribute to overall wellbeing (e.g., by helping to maintain family connections) or have unintended negative effects. Three sub-questions follow the main research question:

- *In what ways are ICTs used by refugees to facilitate their journeys and enhance their wellbeing?*
- *How do ICTs enable the new modus operandi of human trafficking for ransom?*
- *How do ICTs help inflict and spread trauma (distinguished as primary, secondary and collective trauma), among refugees, their families and their communities?*

Research method

To answer these research questions, this chapter looks at three documentaries: *Sound of Torture*, *Under the Skin* and *It Will be Chaos*. The documentaries are analysed to determine how ICTs are used in migration and human trafficking and the development of this use over time, as well as the impact that ICTs have on refugees. The analysis is based on the visual images used in the documentaries, as well as the narratives/protagonists that are followed. In addition to these two aspects, the themes of the documentaries are also of importance, as these themes represent a particular development (in migration and human trafficking and ICTs) in a particular period of time.

As well as the analysis of these documentaries, literature is used to deepen our understanding of what the documentaries show. In addition, new digital communication material, such as videos shared

on Facebook by refugees (as explored in lectures at Tilburg University), is also used. Interviews with resource persons (Meron Estefanos, Selam Kidane, Rick Schoenmaeckers, Ali Fegan and Klara Smits), which were conducted in lectures at Tilburg University in October and November of 2018, are also used to understand the new forms of human trafficking, their modus operandi and how they have evolved. However, the interviews themselves are not directly referred to in this chapter, but rather form the background information that enabled the author to understand the documentaries. In the next section, the documentaries are introduced.

Documentaries

Sound of Torture

Following the emergence of Sinai trafficking in 2009, *Sound of Torture* (Shayo *et al.*, 2013) follows three main storylines that all have a connection to this practice. First, we meet the main protagonist, Meron Estefanos, a journalist-human rights activist from Sweden, originally from Eritrea. Meron hosts a radio programme in Sweden, Radio Erena, in which she has a weekly segment called *Voices of Eritrean Refugees*. In this segment, she has contact with Sinai trafficking hostages and their family members, witnessing their cries for help and trying to bring the issue to the attention of the authorities and the public.

Through Meron, the connection is made to the second storyline of a man called Amanuel from Eritrea. In the documentary, he is living in Tel Aviv by himself, as his pregnant wife was kidnapped while fleeing from Eritrea. She delivered their baby chained in captivity in the Sinai while being tortured. Amanuel is trying to collect the ransom money in order to free his family.

The last storyline follows Dessala, who is looking for his sister. After having freed her from Sinai traffickers, he lost track of her while she was crossing the Egyptian-Israeli border. Meron tries to help Dessala find his sister, as she herself also travels to these border areas and other places close to where the Sinai trafficking is happening. Meron also meets up with some survivors and relatives who she initially

contacted on her radio programme. This leads to many beautiful meetings, but also shows the long-lasting trauma of the survivors.

Under the Skin

In *Under the Skin* (Deloget & Allegra, 2015), we are again confronted with the phenomenon of Sinai trafficking, but this time the focus lies on the aftermath for the survivors. The documentary follows five men, Filmon, Daniel and Robel, who are living in Sweden and Germay, Halefom and Merih, who are living in Cairo. These men are the protagonists of the story. Each is a survivor of Sinai trafficking. We also meet Meron again, but this time in a side role.

The documentary shows the personal experiences of the men, as well as the effect of the trauma that Sinai trafficking has left behind, not only on their skin through the scars they bear, but also ‘under their skin’ through the effect of the trauma on their minds. Insomnia, depression and reactions to unknown sounds are some examples of the impact of the trauma that the victims of Sinai trafficking are left to deal with.

It Will Be Chaos

In *It Will Be Chaos* (Luciano & Piscopo, 2018), we follow two main storylines. First, we meet Aregai, a refugee from Eritrea who decided to flee indefinite military service. He survived the Lampedusa disaster in 2013, but lost relatives. The impact of the disaster is still very present in his life and we follow him on his journey trying to find a place in Italy. The second story is that of the Orfahli family from Syria, who were forced to leave their home due to war. We follow them on their journey to Germany, the country in which they hope to start a new life. During their journeys, both Aregai and the Orfahli family are constantly confronted with obstacles, which are difficult to overcome. The documentary takes a look at how Italy (the government and its inhabitants) reacts to the flow of refugees coming to ‘their’ country.

Time periods

In analysing these documentaries and from the interviews with resource persons, three different periods emerged in relation to the development of migration and human trafficking and the role of ICTs. The first period, 2009–2014, is connected to the documentaries *Sound of Torture* and *Under the Skin*, as they both show Sinai trafficking. This first period is very specific, isolated, contained and raw; there is a strong focus solely on Sinai trafficking. Ransoms were at their highest during this period, and there was little public awareness of this horrendous practice. This period is at the very start of the use of ICTs in migration and human trafficking.

The second period is 2014–2015, which is defined by the pervasive use of digital means to facilitate migration. This period is shown in the documentary *It Will Be Chaos*, which shows how digitalisation leads to the broad sharing of everything that is going on, which is not always a positive thing. The term ‘collective trauma’ is discussed, with a specific connection to the use of ICTs, which make it possible to share everything that is going on in real time, including traumatic and horrible incidents, which can lead to secondary and collective trauma.

There is also a new, third period, in which the phenomena seen in the first and second period are intensified. This period started in 2016 and is ongoing. The extortion for ransom is still happening, but the modus operandi has changed: from only hearing the torture happen, to direct visualisation (Elbagir, Razek, Sirgany, & Tawfeeq 2018). Relatives receive live videos of their son or daughter, for example, being tortured. In addition, there is also the constant development of new technology for smartphones, as well as increased access to this technology.

Theoretical framework

Linking ICTs to the refugees as users leads us to the theoretical framework for this chapter, which is provided by Linda Leung (2010) and her research on the use of technology by refugees during displacement. In her article, Leung describes how: “...technology is

key to sustaining emotional wellbeing and precarious connections with family members when displaced. In particular, the telephone is the most critical technology for refugees in terms of availability and familiarity” (Leung, 2010, p. 58.1). She also mentions how the participants in her research acknowledged communication as “...a driving need as important as basic shelter, food and water”, as well as usually the only way to receive financial assistance (Leung, 2010, pp. 58.5–58.6). ICTs are, thus, extremely important for the wellbeing of refugees, as they are a vital lifeline with many purposes. However, ICTs can also become an unintended initiator of negative effects, such as secondary and collective trauma.

When looking at ICTs and trauma, it appears that traumatic information is shared within the community, which is both intensifying the push-factors and creating information loops in which trauma is intensified (Kidane, S., lecture at Tilburg University, 25 October 2018). In her lecture, Kidane explained that most of the information that refugees receive about the events that happen in, for example, Sinai trafficking, is through other refugees. However, the refugees who are providing the information are also traumatised and have a high level of fear, transferring this to the receivers; sometimes very traumatic information is shared. This then causes secondary trauma, which can traumatise people who are indirectly exposed to the trauma of others, for example, through a video shared by refugees. Primary and secondary trauma are explained by Kidane and Van Reisen in the following:

Primary victims included those trafficked and their family and friends who witnessed their torture by phone. Secondary trauma is trauma that 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)

Thus, ICTs can intensify existing trauma, or create new primary trauma. Secondary trauma then emerges when, for example, someone learns about what happened to their friend or family member, but he/she is not directly exposed to the incident. Directly connected to

this theory of primary and secondary trauma, is ‘collective trauma’. “Collective trauma emerges when people who have a sense of belonging to one another perceive fearful and painful events together, which affects their collective consciousness and memory” (Van Reisen, 2017a, p. 7). It is further explained by Van Reisen *et al.*:

Collective trauma is the impact of an experience, which becomes a keystone in a group’s narrative, set of beliefs, and identity, both for the current generation and across generations. Collective trauma involves a socially constructed process with an impact on the past and future identity of the group and its individual members. The impact on the narrative and on the identity of the group can be present even when individual members do not have (or no longer have) signs of physical or psychological damage. Unlike individual trauma, which can be experienced by a small percentage of people, with most recovering within a given period of time, collective trauma does not refer to symptoms of traumatic stress but is an outcome that includes the response to the traumatic event as well as the way it is constructed into the beliefs, decisions, behaviours, and narratives of the collective. (Van Reisen et al., 2018)

In addition, collective trauma “impairs rational decision-making” (Van Reisen, 2017a, p. 7) and:

...may lead to structural and individual violence. People lose their ability to react to patterns of threats and opportunities leading to poor decision making at all levels [...] This can lead to cycles of fragmentation in society, exacerbating previous issues [...]. (Kidane & Van Reisen, 2017, p. 329)

This effect of the trauma on the decision-making of refugees can stay around for a long time after the initial trauma. The entire community is affected, which reduces the community’s ability to provide support to each other. Collective trauma can make everybody anxious, and traditional roles are lost or the people playing such roles are less effective (e.g., the role of a priest) (Kidane, S., lecture at Tilburg University, 25 October 2018) (Kidane & Van Reisen, 2017). Trauma nests itself in the heart of the community, pushing everybody out in a different direction.

Thus, trauma can influence the decision making of refugees. To explain this, the theory ‘feelings-as-information’ by Norbert Schwarz (2010) is used. Schwarz explains how we treat feelings as information in our mind and how this affects our decisions. If, for example, a teacher arrives in class after having a very bad night’s sleep and the students sit very quietly, the brain may interpret this as the students not being interested. In comparison, if the teacher feels good, the quietness of the students may be interpreted as the students being interested and focused, resulting in positive information.

This example shows how our mind treats feelings as information. The traumatic feelings/mindset that some refugees have is, therefore, very important in their decision-making process, as these traumatic feelings become information in their minds. Emotion has the upper hand instead of rationality. A question that drives their decision, as mentioned by Kidane (Kidane, S., lecture at Tilburg University, 25 October 2018), is: ‘What feels scarier?’ In the Lampedusa disaster, for example, a pregnant woman died together with her baby, who was born in the ocean. This seems strange: why would you risk both your own and your baby’s life? If we then look at the question ‘what feels scarier?’, the mother decided that staying in her home, or any place on her journey, was scarier than getting on the boat and risking her life to cross the Mediterranean Sea, illustrating the severity of the situation in her places of origin and transit. Rational thinking is, thus, overshadowed by the information derived from negative feelings and fear. The brain then only uses these emotions and feelings, which are strongly present as the motivation behind a decision. If these emotions and feelings are mainly traumatic ones, the decisions that are made by the refugee are driven by this trauma, which can cause them to make decisions that are extremely dangerous.

Thus, while ICTs can be vital to the wellbeing of refugees, they can also have negative effects, such as through the sharing of traumatic information. Trauma affects many aspects of our cognition, including decision making. Collective trauma affects the societal bonds that govern decision making. This can lead refugees to decide to migrate further, even though this may put their lives at risk: the traumatic

situation they are in is considered much scarier than boarding a crowded, unsafe boat and heading for the high seas, even when expecting a baby. Feelings become the information source for the brain and emotional decisions take the lead instead of rational ones.

Results

This section presents the results of the analysis of the three documentaries, for the three defined periods. These documentaries represent a visual timeline of the developments in the use of ICTs in migration and human trafficking. The importance of ICTs is highly visible in the documentaries, which show how they are used in practice, first-hand. ICTs are used differently in the three periods examined. In the first period, there is the presence of mobile phones and radio, with just sound as the means to communicate. The second period features phones and more direct contact due to the expansion of the journeys of the refugees. As their journeys expand to, for example, Europe, it becomes more important to stay in touch with vital contacts such as family members. In addition, the digitalisation of the world, continues and this makes contact much easier and much more direct than in the first period. The third period is connected to the smartphone, with much less direct contact.

Period 1: 2009–2014

In 2009, a new form of human trafficking for ransom emerged called ‘Sinai trafficking’ (Van Reisen & Rijken, 2015). This new modus operandi of human trafficking is clearly presented in *Sound of Torture* (Shayo *et al.*, 2013). The documentary commences with Meron Estefanos, who provides us with general information about this new form of human trafficking, but from an outsiders’ perspective. Then we follow Amanuel, whose wife has been kidnapped, as he is trying to gather the ransom money for her release, and Dessala, who is searching for his sister who has been released. These narrations are used to show the modus operandi of this form of trafficking in real life. During the documentary, the use of ICTs is constantly visible. Starting with Meron, who uses Skype to communicate with the hostages and with Amanuel and Dessala. Amanuel is also in contact with his wife through his mobile phone, both for the ransom calls as

well as for 'normal' calls from his wife. There are barely any scenes where ICTs are not present, which shows how important they are both to the modus operandi, as well as to the other actors connected to Sinai trafficking.

Under the Skin also deals with Sinai trafficking, but through the stories of some of the survivors: Filmon, Daniel, Robel, Gernay and Halefom. The documentary shows how deep the impact of these traumatic experiences is, and how the survivors will carry these experiences with them for the rest of their lives. ICTs are not as present in this documentary as they were in *Sound of Torture*, but there are still several important moments in which they are present. The first example involves Meron and Robel, who are talking to a hostage by phone on Meron's radio programme. This shows how the hostages, besides being forced to use their mobile phones to beg for ransom, can also use them to their benefit. A second example is when Gernay is talking about his experience and uses a lighter as a prop to demonstrate making a phone call. It is a very quick and short moment in the documentary, but very important: it reflects on both the modus operandi as well as the use of ICTs in Sinai trafficking. In addition, it also shows how the use of a mobile phone has become second nature to victims like Gernay, as he uses the lighter to illustrate a phone call without really thinking about it. Thus, ICTs are inseparable from Sinai trafficking, which would not exist without them. But ICTs are not only a tool for the torturers, there is a positive side to their use as well, as hostages can use them to contact people like Meron or hear motivating words from a survivor like Robel.

While both of these documentaries touch upon Sinai trafficking, they each show a different side: while it is happening (*Sounds of Torture*) and the aftermath (*Under the Skin*). However, they are both very specific and narrow in their focus, as they only deal with Sinai trafficking. Nonetheless, this does not detract from the fact that the documentaries address the use of new technologies in migration and human trafficking.

In this first period, starting in 2009 and ending in 2014 (Van Reisen *et al.*, 2018), ICTs are mostly used by the smugglers and traffickers. Van Reisen *et al.* (2018) identify several of the most important reasons why smugglers and traffickers use ICTs:

- To coordinate and carry out their work effectively (e.g., facilitate intelligence gathering, transportation and other logistics, and the collection of ransom)
- To keep their identity hidden
- To network with each other (smugglers and traffickers) to identify safe routes and secure times for unhindered operations, and so forth
- To coordinate the collection of ransom by victims (including to contact relatives of victims to demand payment as well as to facilitate the transfer of ransom to the traffickers)

In *Sound of Torture*, the emphasis is on the extensive use of ICTs by smugglers and traffickers, as we see the protagonists use their mobile phones and computers to collect the ransom, talk to their captured relative or search for news on a missing relative. However, ICTs are used by both ‘sides’ in Sinai trafficking: by the refugees and by the traffickers/smugglers. As the latter are in a more powerful position, they are better able to exploit these new ICTs, exacerbating the power imbalance (Van Reisen *et al.*, 2018). The documentaries also show how ICTs can contribute to collective trauma in refugee communities that have connections to Sinai trafficking. Firstly, not only the hostages themselves are traumatised, but also their relatives, as the hostages are forced to call a family member while being tortured. Entire communities are brought in touch with what is happening in the Sinai through these phone calls and, thus, are exposed to trauma. For example, Amanuel is calling his captured wife Hiriti. As can be seen in the still below, the phone calls with her are very hard for him and he asks his friend to take over the phone call.



Figure 4.1. Sound of Torture
Source: Shayo *et al.* (2013, 14:19)

Thus, the use of ICTs not only results in primary trauma for the relatives, but also in secondary and collective trauma, as families, friends and whole communities are indirectly exposed to the trauma of the hostage. Hence, while ICTs are the perfect means to transcend time and space, they can also intensify and spread trauma.

The use of ICTs by traffickers, as well as by desperate families trying to mobilise finances, and equally desperate activists trying to raise awareness using radio and social media, has exposed communities to traumatic events, which turn into collective trauma and which impact negatively on the community. (Van Reisen *et al.*, 2018)

This first period is characterised by the use of first generation mobile phones and radio and, therefore, the emphasis lies on sound. This emphasis can be found in the modus operandi of human traffickers and is reflected in the title of the documentary, 'Sound of Torture'. This title emphasises the importance of sound in this form of human trafficking. In addition, the use of the lighter by Germary to represent a phone shows how intertwined digital means like the mobile phones are in these human trafficking practices, so much so that their use is second nature to people.

Period 2: 2014–2015

As established, ICTs play an important role in human trafficking practices, such as Sinai trafficking, where mobile phones are used to collect ransom by calling relatives while torturing the hostages. However, ICTs also play an important role during migration and after trauma, both intensifying it and helping victims to heal. In the third documentary, *It Will be Chaos*, the use of ICTs during migration is clearly shown when the father Wael is calling a smuggler to get out of Turkey. He emphasises the importance of his mobile phone, as the lives of his family members depend on it: it is their only way out. The documentary shows how his phone acts as a vital lifeline for the family (Leung, 2010, p. 58.5). Aregai also uses his phone to contact smugglers and another ‘illegal helper’ who is going to help him get a fake ID. As the image below shows, this moment in the documentary combines both ICTs and social media, as he uses his phone to call the ID maker and then sends a photo to him through Facebook.



Figure 4.2. It Will be Chaos

Source: Luciana & Piscopo (2018, 01:13:59)

A second way in which ICTs play an important role during migrating is by providing contact with family members. This aspect is most clearly shown through the story of the Orfahli family, as they receive phone calls and messages from relatives while they are on their way

to Germany. Wael's brother and sister contact him to give advice about travelling on the boat, warning them, and also letting them know what will come next. Their family also messages them about the importance of the quality of the life vests that they will use on the boat, as this is crucial in order to survive at sea, as the image below shows. Leung's theory (2010) is again applicable here, as we see that their mobile phone allows them to stay connected with their family while being displaced, enhancing their emotional wellbeing.



Figure 4.3. It Will be Chaos

Source: Luciana & Piscopo (2018, 20:49)

ICTs also function as a 'digital photo album' for the refugees, as images and videos are all they have left of their past. Throughout the documentary, we see how the Orfahli family has mobile-made videos of their life before they fled Syria, showing their happiness and the apartment where they lived. Eventually, they receive pictures and images on their phone of their apartment as it is now, after it has been completely destroyed by the war. With Aregai we also see this memory-storing function of ICTs, when at the beginning of the documentary he shows pictures of his relatives who died in the Lampedusa disaster. Phones, thus, help to keep memories alive. They provide a way of going back home, e.g., to Syria, by watching photos, videos, listening to music, and so on. In the documentary, phones

also show the audience how the refugees' lives have changed, emphasising the fact that they are not fleeing with no reason, they are escaping life-threatening conflict and political violence.



Figure 4.4. It Will be Chaos

Source: Luciana & Piscopo (2018, 04:39 & 25:12)

The speed of secondary and collective trauma through ICTs is also represented, as we constantly see the connections that are made by the Orfahli family through phone calls and by sharing first-hand video footage of their journey with relatives. Going through these experiences creates primary trauma for the family, but sharing the video footage and phone calls with their relatives can also cause secondary trauma for those people. This can eventually lead to collective trauma within their community, both in their new country as well as in their country of origin. Another example of the different forms of trauma presented in the documentary is the fact that Aregai is a primary victim of the Lampedusa disaster, but so are the fisherman who saw the boat capsizing and helped save the refugees from the water. Secondary trauma is strongly visible in the Mayor of Lampedusa, as she is confronted with the refugees and their stories, becoming aware of the horrific things that have happened to them. She is also a primary victim, as she is confronted directly with death through the Lampedusa disaster and seeing all the coffins of the people who have died there. Besides the Mayor, the fishermen have also been confronted with primary trauma as they were rescuing the refugees from the sea. One of the fishermen is seen in the documentary, looking out to sea with a sad look in his eyes, as he mentions (translated from Dutch subtitles): “It was such a shocking experience. I just can’t seem to forget it” (Luciana & Piscopo, 2018, 11:27).

In this second period, ICTs are about the broad sharing of everything that is going on. This is not only done through phone calls, but also by video/photo sharing apps and social media. This development from the first period, in which awareness of the practice was still very isolated, follows the digitalisation of the entire world. Because of this fast developing digitalisation, collective trauma keeps growing and also changes from only particular communities being traumatised, to ‘outsiders’ being traumatised as well. You don’t need to be in the place where something happens, as news broadcasts also show footage, sometimes first-hand video recordings. In addition, there is the immense popularity of social media platforms such as Facebook. Through these platforms, images and videos are shared and can reach millions of people within several hours. If a person happens to stumble upon a traumatising video, he/she may become a victim of primary trauma. Within the refugee communities, many traumatising videos and images are constantly shared and re-shared, creating a loop of negative information. Therefore, ICTs are the perfect means to keep in contact with relatives while migrating, but also increase the spread and impact of traumatic information, intensifying the trauma and leading to more secondary and collective trauma.

Period 3: 2016-ongoing

Starting from 2016, a new ‘period’ of digitalisation in migration and human trafficking practices started, which is still going on today. Within this period, there has been an intensification of what was seen in periods 1 and 2. As previously mentioned, Sinai trafficking reportedly stopped in 2014 (Van Reisen *et al.*, 2018, p. 147). However, these practices have been transferred to Libya, where Libyan militants have started to use the same techniques to extort ransom. An exclusive report by CNN International (Elbagir, Razek, Platt & Jones, 2017) shows a video of a slave auction in Libya, where several men are being sold. There are also stories of the captured refugees being beaten and mistreated, as well as the hostages being forced to beg for ransom from their family by phone (Elbagir, Razek, Platt & Jones, 2017), which is similar to human trafficking for ransom in the Sinai. However, the modus operandi of this form of human trafficking in Libya has one significant difference: instead of calling relatives for

ransom money, video footage is now sent to them. The traffickers take videos on their phones while they are torturing the hostages and of the hostages begging their relative to send the ransom money. On the website of CNN International, videos were shared of hostages being whipped while begging their family for money (Elbagir, Razek, Sirgany & Tawfeeq, 2018). These direct images from their smartphones bridge the distance and make everybody part of the traumatic experience.

We can see the resemblance with period 1, in which the practice of Sinai trafficking was very isolated, as it is now in Libya. The big difference here is that even though the practice is still very isolated, the images are shared more broadly. This opens up the situation slightly more than the phone calls did. The availability of these videos can be spread on social media platforms, shared and picked up more easily. This third period, thus, shows both the isolation of the practice, as well as its development and the use of new technologies, resulting in the spreading of trauma. Unfortunately, no documentaries have been made yet on this phenomenon in Libya.

Conclusion

From the analysis of the documentaries and the literature, a distinction can be made between the three periods, in terms of the development of migration and human trafficking, as well as the development of the ICTs used in these practices. Period 1, from 2009–2014, was a very isolated and raw period, with Sinai trafficking emerging as a new human trafficking phenomenon. The documentaries *Sound of Torture* and *Under the Skin* give their audience two sides of the story, as we see how the relatives of the hostages are trying to free them or find them after their release, as well as the aftermath of the trauma from the perspective of some of the survivors. *Sound of Torture* gives us a look into the use of ICTs, mainly by the smugglers and traffickers, and shows how mobile phones in particular are the mechanism of Sinai trafficking. In addition, *Sound of Torture* shows how ICTs can be used to find a relative who has disappeared in the Sinai desert. In *Under the Skin*, the use of ICTs is

less present, but the documentary does show several new uses. One of the most interesting uses of ICTs shown in this documentary is for the support and motivation of hostages. Through the radio programme by Meron Estefanos, Radio Erena, survivors show how they can be of help to new victims through a phone call, as they give them tips, advice and motivation to resist and keep fighting.

The second period (2014–2015) shows how the use of ICTs covers other forms of migration, such as the migration of the Orfahli family from Syria. ICTs, such as the mobile phone, are extremely important in these situations, as they provide a connection not only with family members, but also to smugglers who can help them proceed with their journey to a safe place to restart their lives. Mobile phone can also store photos and videos of family members and their former way of life, thus becoming a digital photo album for refugees and the only connection to their past.

Periods 1 and 2 show the connection that ICTs have with collective trauma, as images, videos, information and many more things can be shared through ICTs, which is often traumatising for members of the refugee community. In this way, ICTs can become unintended initiators of negative effects. The information shared (photos, videos) forms a negative loop of information and makes community members connected to Sinai trafficking secondary victims, as they receive traumatising information. Eventually, an entire community can feel this effect, and collective trauma emerges. The theory of feelings as information by Schwarz (2010) is applicable here, as traumatised refugees tend to let their emotions and feelings be the driving force behind their decisions, resulting in dangerous endeavours.

The last period (2016–ongoing) has been only briefly discussed, as no documentaries have yet been made about the emergence of this new form of human trafficking in Libya. Human trafficking in Libya seems to follow the same practices as Sinai trafficking, but uses video footage of hostages being tortured instead of phone calls to collect ransom from relatives of the hostages. This period is a combination

of periods 1 and 2, as the practice is isolated, but the use of ICTs has developed, deepening and spreading the trauma.

In summary, ICTs, particularly mobile phones, have been used as the mechanism for a new form of human trafficking called Sinai trafficking or human trafficking for ransom, which emerged in 2009 (Van Reisen *et al.*, 2018). They continue to be used by the traffickers, but also by the hostages and refugees themselves – with both positive and negative effects. We can conclude that the support-seeking behaviour of refugees leads to new forms of human trafficking with an increasingly aggravating impact on family members, as the invasiveness of technology increases. Rather than supporting refugees, the technology seems to be inflicting a new form of trauma through the sharing of photos and video footage through apps and on social media. Primary, secondary and collective trauma are intensified and spread, deepening the vulnerability of the refugee communities, as also described by Kidane and Van Reisen (2017). However, besides initiating negative effects, ICTs can also be of tremendous importance to the wellbeing of displaced refugees, as their mobile phones act as a ‘vital lifeline’ and storehouse of memories of their former life (Leung, 2010, p. 58.5). Through their phones, connections with their family are made and financial support received. Mobile phones are, thus, also used by refugees to enhance wellbeing, which supports Leung’s theory (2010), sustaining emotional wellbeing and precarious connections with family members, thereby serving as a source of wellbeing for refugee communities.

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