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Trafficked women in the media:
discursive constructions of trafficked women in three media genres

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Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

I warrant that this authorisation does not, to the best of my belief, infringe the rights of any third party.

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Abstract

In this thesis I explore how women trafficked for sexual exploitation emerge as subjects of public pity in media discourse. I do this by analysing their depictions in three media genres: film, celebrity advocacy, and newspaper journalism. The broad goal of the study is to understand how proposals for emotional and moral obligation towards trafficked women are constructed in the mediated communication of human trafficking. More specifically, I explore the dichotomy between ideal and undeserving victimhood through an intersectional lens by analysing how the embodiment, agency, and vulnerability of trafficked women are constructed in the media. The analytics of mediation is employed as a methodological approach, combining multimodal and critical discourse analysis as tools for analysing data. My thesis reveals that representations of trafficked women are characterised by discursive ambivalence and that dominant trafficking discourses, which coalesce around depictions of naïve, innocent, young women exploited by evil traffickers carry the most visibility, which is reflected in laws, policies, and humanitarian and human rights appeals. But more importantly, rather than an absence of marginalised identities and narratives, this study shows that victim hierarchies legitimate only those voices which are already dominant in social and institutional discourse. In other words, victim hierarchies are problematic not only because they highlight some groups as particularly worthy of public pity, but because they create and perpetuate dominant discourses at the expense of contextualising and politicising marginalised subjectivities and experiences. Victim hierarchies, therefore, result in a discursive ambivalence within semiotic texts that do carry political potential but, as it is, fall short of giving full political agency to those trafficked women whose experiences and identities do not conform to notions of ideal victimhood.

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Contents

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1. Introduction

In 2005, a four-part mini-series was released that centred around the stories of three people who were trafficked for sexual exploitation. The characters included a pre-pubescent girl kidnapped from a street in the Philippines, a young woman tricked by traffickers pretending to run a modelling agency, and a young mother coerced by a man pretending to be her boyfriend – all of whom were rescued by the main character, a dedicated US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent played by Oscar-winner Mira Sorvino. The mini-series, titled *Human Trafficking*, is dramatic and violent, and suggests that women are vulnerable to ruthless global organised crime syndicates as they go about their daily lives. It also illustrates two elements central to this thesis: that trafficking for sexual exploitation is a phenomenon which happens around the world without the direct knowledge of the general population, and that media representations are a compelling way of revealing such crimes to media publics.

The mini-series featured two Oscar-winning actors, won Golden Globe awards, and garnered visibility for Sorvino, a long-time anti-trafficking campaigner and a former UN Goodwill Ambassador (UNODC, 2013). Like many other television series and films on the topic, *Human Trafficking* claimed a basis in real-life events and contributed to the public imaginary of human trafficking and its victims. The stories and identities of women trafficked for sex work (henceforth referred to here just as trafficked women) are dramatically depicted. The two young women are kidnapped, brutally beaten, sexually assaulted, and some of them are eventually rescued while one is killed. The story is both a typical example of the drama television genre, and a shocking, almost unbelievable rendition of events through which an image of a trafficked woman materialises. She is naïve, young and vulnerable due to her gender and economic circumstances, and she is unknowingly or unwillingly taken into an exploitative situation by members of an organised crime syndicate. While audiences are invited to relate to the heart-rending suffering that all three characters endure throughout the three episodes and to appreciate the ICE agent's bravery and dedication as she goes on a mission to rescue them, risking her life in the process, the women themselves make few choices and are instead acted upon by others – first their kidnappers, then their clients, and finally their rescuers.

In other words, they have little personal agency (Austin & Farrell, 2017; Szörényi & Eate, 2014; Wilson & O'Brien, 2016). As I demonstrate in the literature review below, this is one of the prevalent ways in which trafficked women are imagined, not just in films but in other media genres too.

Little research has so far inquired into how publics learn about human trafficking, but one study (Sharapov, 2014) conducted in the UK has indicated that people learn about trafficking from a combination of different sources, including television programmes (58.8%), documentaries (38.7%), newspaper articles (40%), radio programmes (20%), films (16%), and online sources (14%). Television news, press journalism, anti-trafficking campaigns, films and other media genres thus bring trafficked women into audiences' lives. Although not always in such simplistic terms as in the above-mentioned mini-series, these women are for the most part portrayed through a language and imagery of victimhood and vulnerability. This is evident even in the way trafficked women are depicted in materials produced by international, governmental and non-governmental (NGO) organisations. References to vulnerability and victimhood are prevalent both in how trafficked women are imagined (which I discuss in Section 1.2) and in the actions proposed to control and punish this crime. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), like many other organisations, advocates the so-called "3P model", whereby response to trafficking should include its prevention by addressing the needs of those who are "*vulnerable* to fall into the hands of migrant smugglers and human traffickers", the protection of victims through "procedures to guarantee the physical safety of *victims*, protect their privacy and make it safe for them to testify against their abusers" [my emphasis], and the prosecution of perpetrators (UNODC, 2018).

Moreover, a gendering of the language of victimhood and vulnerability is prominent in the ways in which international humanitarian and human rights organisations conceptualise sexual violence. In 2019, almost 20 years after its initial resolution, the UN Security Council unanimously recommitted itself to the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda (UN Security Council, 2019), and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) has stressed its dedication to addressing gender-based violence, especially against migrant women, in its Gender Equality Policy 2015-2019 (IOM, 2015), launching a project called Preventing Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Against Migrants and Strengthening Support to Victims

(PROTECT) (IOM, 2018). Indeed, sexual violence is an important issue in international policy and, as Ticktin (2011, p. 250) argues, is imagined both as routinely occurring and as exceptional. Such a double conception, according to Ticktin (2011), depoliticises this form of violence because it obscures the structural causes of women's oppression. This process can be observed in the way in which women are represented in media texts such as *Human Trafficking* and in various laws and policies.

As in most mediated communication that centres around vulnerability and victimhood, there is a set of assumptions about who the subjects are and what makes them vulnerable to victimisation. In this study I am interested in the *discursive* elements that construct trafficked *women*. These discourses can be observed in mediated representations because the media are not neutral conduits of information. They exist in social environments and therefore reflect and depend on wider social structures that produce orders of gender and other social arrangements. For instance, the social construction of men as dominant and of women as inherently vulnerable and subjugated to men is taken for granted and normalised in patriarchal cultures and therefore becomes normalised in humanitarian, human-rights, entertainment and other mediated discourse. In the same vein, the global mandate to respond to gender-based violence has been criticised for its universalist and pathologising language that strips this form of violence of its embeddedness in social structures (Hyndman, 1998; Ticktin, 2011). As Ticktin (2011, p. 254) argues, the gendering of violence against women as both universal and exceptional is premised on the "unquestioned universality" of suffering, "that is, the underlying assumption that we can recognise suffering wherever we see it, because there is a common denominator to being human, located in our bodies, particularly in our bodies in pain". With this in mind, understanding how media representations make trafficked women intelligible to their audiences as objects of knowledge is the central area of interest of this thesis.

In order to investigate this topic, I look at media representations because, in the globalised world, the media are a crucial component of everyday life with the power to construct, reflect and circulate messages and meanings to wide audiences. As such, I am interested in the symbolic power of media, that is, their ability to facilitate struggles over representation and identity. In light of the media's role as an "emergent form of social power in complex societies whose basic infrastructure

depends increasingly on the fast circulation of information and images" (Couldry & Curran, 2003, p. 4), in this study I specifically look into the role of the media in circulating information and images about human trafficking and the gendering of its subjects, and thus into their ability to shape imaginaries of vulnerability as a cause for social action. And, more narrowly, I am interested in the media's role as a vehicle for surmounting social distance in order to "create manageable social closeness" (Silverstone, 2003, p. 478) between audiences and those who are represented. In this I agree with Silverstone's (2003, p. 483) convincing rationale that "we need to go beyond connection if we are to pursue a grounded ethics" within the complex moral space of what he calls the "mediapolis", or the "space of appearance in which the world appears […] and through which we learn about those who are and who are not like us" (Silverstone, 2007, p. 31).

Through the media, then, people who were once strangers to their audiences enter the moral space of those media publics. Strangers who were once distant emerge through the media to show human vulnerability and as such make a demand for spectators' attention, emotion and benefaction. Whether and how this demand is met – how the body of the suffering other becomes meaningful to spectators – is one of the questions explored in the study of distant suffering, a sub-field of media ethics (Chouliaraki, 2015). The central assumption of such an exploration is that, as people go about their lives, they are routinely shown human vulnerability through mediated communication. The media utilise a particular, as Chouliaraki (2015, p. 710) puts it, "grammar of emotion" whereby the discourse of suffering ranges from indignation to tender-heartedness, and viewing these depictions morally orientates publics towards those others (Boltanski, 1999). Thus, apart from the mediated depictions of trafficked women as subjects of audiences' emotion, I am particularly interested in what assumptions are made about *women* in this process. In the remainder of this chapter I offer a review of literature on the portrayals of trafficked women in the three media genres which I analyse in this thesis: film, celebrity advocacy, and press journalism. I then present the contribution of the thesis and an outline of the chapters that follow.

1.2. Trafficked women in film, celebrity advocacy, and press journalism

The most commonly quoted definition of human trafficking is stated in the UN Protocol to Prevent and Suppress Trafficking in Human Beings, Especially Women and Children (UN Protocol to Prevent and Suppress Trafficking in Human Beings, 2000) commonly known as the "UN Trafficking Protocol" or the "Palermo Protocol". It has been ratified by the majority of states globally and implemented in varying ways nationally. According to the Palermo Protocol:

> "Trafficking in persons" shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. (United Nations, 2000)

Critics of the Palermo Protocol point to its moral bias in dividing women into innocent victims who need to be rescued and guilty victims who are undeserving of protection (Wijers, 2015). This is not the only criticism of the Palermo Protocol, but it is the one which corresponds to the interests of this study – namely, the notion that trafficked women are seen as either innocent victims or culpable agents through an opposition between "forced" and "free" migration and sex work (Mai, 2018, p. 3). This criticism stems from the ideological difference between two views of trafficking, namely the modern slavery neo-abolitionist views and pro-sex work views that argue for the decriminalisation of sex work (Kempadoo, 2015). Although these formulations are not the exclusive domain of either approach, in general, proponents of the abolitionist approach tend to prefer the terminology of "modern slavery", while the proponents of the pro-sex work approach tend to refer to "migrant sex work". In making the decision to take the definition of human trafficking from the UN Trafficking Protocol, I have chosen to examine the discourses that tend to construct trafficked women as forced into sex work; in other words, definitions that are in line with the abolitionist views of trafficking for sexual exploitation. This is because, as mentioned above, I am interested in those media discourses that occur routinely, with regularity and prevalence in the media.

Accordingly, I have selected to analyse the representations of trafficked women whose experiences are referred to as "sex trafficking". This is because one of the aims of this study is to capture those discourses which are prevalent in the popular imagination on trafficked women. In the literature review below, I note that the terminology of "sex trafficking" and "modern slavery" is the predominant way to refer to this form of trafficking, which has implications for the ways in which trafficked women are habitually framed in the media. In endeavouring to analyse the dominant discourses of trafficked women it is also necessary to note and probe the so-called victim hierarchy, whereby those women whose experiences are most in line with the definition given by the UN Trafficking Protocol are considered to be the ideal victims of trafficking, while other experiences and subjectivities are marginalised. I elaborate on these concepts in the sections below. Thus, overall, the definition of human trafficking and the terminology I have selected to analyse represent the prevailing media discourses with regard to the representations of trafficked women and the mundane proposals for emotion towards them. This is in line with the theoretical framework of a politics of pity in the representations of suffering, which sets out to describe the proposals for feeling that are present in mundane representations of distant others. This framework is rooted in studies of media ethics and the spectatorship of suffering where it is the routine discourses and representations that are of key interest.

It is, nonetheless, noteworthy that migration scholars and people working in the sex industry, including migrant sex workers, generally reject the use of the terms "sex trafficking" and "modern slavery" and consider these formulations to be stigmatising because they fail to adequately describe and account for their complex experiences of migration, exploitation, and sex work. The term sex trafficking was introduced by abolitionist feminists who represent the radical feminist movement which emerged in North America and Western Europe in the 1960s and equates all sex work with sexual slavery (Kempadoo, 2015, p. 11). In the same way as scholars critical of neo-abolitionist inflected advocacy and policies (for instance Kempadoo, 2015; Pickering & Ham, 2014; Segrave, Milivojevic, & Pickering, 2018; Suchland, 2013), I use the term sex trafficking throughout this thesis with the awareness that it is associated with the dominant media portrayals of trafficked women, but also that it

is a problematic notion that implies the stigmatisation and oppression of less visible scenarios and subjectivities.

Abolitionist solutions to trafficking have received more political support (Wijers, 2015), and the terminology of "modern slavery", "sexual slavery", and "sex trafficking" is prevalent in the media, as I explain below. Thus, in broad terms, the abolitionist stance is associated with an approach to eradicating sex trafficking through criminalisation and rescue, while the pro-sex work and migration approach is associated with the critique of migration and bordering and works to de-stigmatise and decriminalise sex work as a form of labour. The binary between the approaches is ideological, political, legal, and discursive and permeates academic formulations of trafficking for sexual exploitation and its solutions. Accordingly, it also permeates the media depictions of trafficked women. Given that the definition and terminology that relies on the discursive constructions of "sex trafficking" and "modern slavery" is the dominant way of representing trafficked women, these terms are here chosen for analysis. By way of an initial reflection on the data collected for this study, one of the implications of this choice is that the data collected is likely to reflect these dominant depictions of trafficked women while marginalised representations are likely to be largely absent from these discursive frames. In this literature review I briefly reflect on these important yet marginalised media texts, but my focus remains grounded in the prevailing trafficking discourses since these mainstream depictions are the central concern of this thesis.

To explore how trafficked women are constructed in the media, in this thesis I analyse their depictions in three media genres: film, celebrity advocacy, and newspaper journalism. In offering discursive visibility to trafficked women, these genres raise questions about their own framing of the above-mentioned trafficking debate and of the dominant discourses that they help to establish. Although sex trafficking happens to people of different genders, ages, races, sexualities, classes, geographical and socio-economic backgrounds, the sexual exploitation women is the predominant form of trafficking depicted in media representations. What is more, in the media, smuggling, sexual exploitation and migration for sex work tend to be subsumed under the term "sex trafficking" (Plambech, 2016). So, sex trafficking, as a media phenomenon, encompasses, but also obscures, many different identities and experiences. Precisely because of its complexity as a public phenomenon, this

review of literature outlines the central discursive tensions that critics have identified within media representations of trafficked women as subjects.

A review of recent literature reveals eight key formations of trafficked women as gendered subjects in media portrayals, all of which contain discursive tensions and struggles for meaning. The prevailing form of trafficking represented is related to sexual exploitation (a), and the dominant discourses that describe trafficked women are those of purity, innocence and youth (b). These dominant discourses are prevalent in many media genres and even genres such as fiction films tend to hint at their relationship to real-world events (c). These discourses are related to moral frames and moral panics surrounding the issue of sex trafficking (d), often by using language such as "sex slavery" or "modern slavery" (e). The rescue of women and the abolition of sex work are prominent narratives and solutions to be found in these dominant discourses (f), and these are supported by actors speaking on behalf of trafficked women, who are often mute and lack agentive presence (g). These rescue narratives, critics argue, are less related to trafficked women's needs and well-being than to law enforcement, migration, bordering and securitisation (h). It is these gendered, classed, and policy- and law-enforcement-related constructions that contextualise my critique of the way trafficked women emerge as subjects in public discourse. Let me elaborate on each.

In academic research, news coverage of human trafficking is criticised for routinely giving most attention to trafficking for sexual exploitation while neglecting other forms of the phenomenon (Farrell & Fahy, 2009; Marchionni, 2012; Pajnik, 2010; Sanford, Martínez, & Weitzer, 2016). Films likewise tend to focus on sex trafficking, with a particular emphasis on the trafficking of young girls (Baker, 2014), which would, strictly speaking, be considered trafficking of children for sexual explotation. For trafficked women, this massified formulation of various forms of exploitation into a single narrative of sex trafficking creates an unhelpful conflation whereby different forms of trafficking exploitation, along with different voices, are collectivised in a single narrative. The overall argument, when it comes to portrayals of trafficked women, holds that the media tend to perpetuate dominant trafficking discourses which in turn tend to construe trafficked women as sexually innocent and pure, in other words as "ideal victims" (Carrabine, 2014; Christie, 1986; Walklate, 2011) whose victimisation is framed as a cause for rescue that

justifies the control of women's movement and sexuality (Plambech, 2016; Szörényi & Eate, 2014). This is the case in all three genres analysed here.

Films, in line with the genre's general orientation to entertainment, have been critiqued for relying on dramatic narratives of innocent victims and evil perpetrators (Lindquist, 2013). These narratives, as critics argue, permeate all genres and create unhelpful, infantilising stereotypes of "Natashas" or the idea that trafficked women are naïve, innocent, young "girls" from Eastern Europe who are tricked, bought, sold, and coerced by evil traffickers (Farrell & Fahy, 2009; Johnston, Friedman, & Sobel, 2015; Ras & Gregoriou, 2019; Sanford et al., 2016; Soderlund, 2011; Vance, 2012; Zhang, 2009). Migration and trafficking scholars who advocate for sex workers' rights have critiqued such portrayals because they hide personal experiences and fail to show a variety of voices and subjectivities (Pajnik, 2010; Sobel, Friedman, & Johnston, 2019). Not all media portrayals of trafficked women adhere to these discourses: there are media portrayals which challenge and problematise the prevailing narratives by using counter-narratives and by showing that trafficked women (and men, and LGBTQ people) balance and maintain a variety of subjectivities (Mai, 2013, 2018; Matthews, 2015; Plambech, 2016; Serughetti, 2018). Some examples of media content which seeks to problematise dominant trafficking discourses and introduce counter-narratives into the media landscape include interventions by NGOs, scholars, and migrant sex workers. In particular, migration, trafficking, and sex work scholars and advocates have produced short and feature length films and campaigns to explore themes faced by migrants and other people in the sex industry who are identified, rescued, and rehabilitated, in the name of anti-trafficking efforts, and who often return to sex work after release (for an overview of counter-narratives see for instance Pai, Murthy, Seshu, & Shukla, 2018). These discourses problematise dominant trafficking narratives noted above by exploring the wide range of abusive conditions experienced by (migrant) women in the sex industry.

As an example, media representations which challenge dominant trafficking discourses include films like *Trafficking* (Plambech, 2010) and *Becky's Journey* (Plambech, 2014), by migration and sex work scholar, Sine Plambech. The films explore the reasons why women choose to undertake irregular migration and enter the sex industry, and how this relates to migration control, policing practices, and

global humanitarianism (Plambech, 2016), thus introducing nuance into the discourses found in dominant trafficking narratives. Similar themes are highlighted in a short silent parody film *Last Rescue in Siam* (Empower Foundation, 2012), which addresses the impact of "raid and rescue" anti-trafficking policies on Thai sex workers (NSWP, 2015). The film was written and developed by sex workers, and points to the negative effects of abolitionist policies which guide police, health care, and military tactics employed to curb trafficking in Thailand. Illuminating the affective dimensions of similar tactics in the European context, Mai has created numerous short ethno-fictions including *Normal* (Mai, 2012), *Samira* (Mai, 2013), and *Travel* (Mai, 2016) documenting the multi-layered life and work trajectories of migrant sex workers of different genders from African and European countries. The films emphasise the complex relations of agency and exploitation, gender autonomies and dependencies, and the reasons why some people who are identified as trafficked or given asylum choose to work in the sex industry (Mai,2018). Other examples of media depictions include blogs by sex workers reflecting on the harms of conflating sex work with trafficking, reflecting on gender, race, and power relations involved in sex work and how these relate to coercion and agency (for instance McNeill, 2014; Sex Trafficking in Alaska, n.d.). These media texts seek to problematise the simplistic and closed narratives present in prevailing trafficking discourses identified in this literature review by relying on open-ended narratives of migration and sex work which do not begin with kidnapping and do not end in rescue or successful rehabilitation, or prosecutions against traffickers. Instead, they reveal how inadequate policies and practices leave migrant sex workers – some of whom are identified as trafficked – in difficult and unresolved situations (Plambech, 2016, p. 184). In this way, such media representations challenge publics and policymakers to consider the present socio-political arrangements which prioritise views of trafficked women as vulnerable rather than agentive subjects and the relationships of these discourses to anti-migration policies and moral frames. But such visualities are not as numerous, nor have they reached the mainstream popularity of, for example, films like *Taken* (2009), which reproduces the innocent victim and evil perpetrator narrative and was a box office hit (Todres, 2015).

Returning to dominant media representations of trafficked women, critics have additionally argued that these create discursive hierarchies of victimhood where

women's innocence, virtue and powerlessness are the characteristics that constitute the ideal trafficking victim (Andrijasevic & Mai, 2016; Bernstein, 2007; Dagistanli & Milivojevic, 2013; Kempadoo, 2015; O'Brien, 2016; Soderlund, 2011). This media construction can be observed in anti-trafficking policies and laws which likewise reflect ideal victimhood and are crafted with these victims in mind, thereby excluding those women whose experiences fall outside this remit (and which are included in the above-mentioned counter-narratives), as analyses of both discourse and policy have indicated (Andrijasevic, 2007; Farrell & Fahy, 2009; Wijers, 2015). This matters because, as migration and policy scholars have observed, the public framing of human trafficking which is reflected in laws and policies sometimes results in a lack of ability on the part of law enforcement to address trafficking simply because the recourse available does not fit the lived experience (Agustín, 2007; Breuil, Siegel, van Reenen, Beijer, & Roos, 2011; Farrell & Fahy, 2009; Siegel, 2012). At other times these efforts result in trafficked people performing ideal victim narratives in order to be seen as less agentive and thereby gain access to legal status and support services (Mai, 2018; Serughetti, 2018). This disconnect between lived experiences and appropriate recourse, which reflects broader gendered, racialised, and classed assumptions about who is an ideal victim of trafficking, is precisely why a study such as the present one matters. In mapping the hierarchy of victimhood across genres to explore the struggle for meanings as discourses enter a power struggle across media texts, what is revealed is the nuance of the meaning-making process, which is neither linear nor straightforward. Rather, the construction of trafficked women's public image occurs on the level of multiple genres and texts, reflects the voices of many parties who rely on competing and contradictory discourses, and therefore represents a long-term, nuanced and complex discursive struggle over meanings that are disseminated to wide audiences. An analysis of these representations that deconstructs the meanings of varied voices reveals the complexity of this meaning-making process and tells us something about the gendered social assumptions and arrangements that inform these media texts.[1]

[1] For instance, one study has shown that awareness-raising in itself does not necessarily mean that publics are attuned to the type of awareness they should be practicing, that is, to the importance of recognising signs of trafficking, questioning the costs of exploitative labour to the climate, or preventing publics from becoming victims of trafficking (Sharapov, 2019). Thus, Sharapov suggests, probing the meanings of the type of awareness-raising that should be done would contribute to more meaningful anti-trafficking communication.

Another example of such a discursive struggle relates to terminology. Campaigners and policymakers commonly refer to trafficking for sexual exploitation as "sex trafficking", "modern slavery" or "modern-day slavery" in order to emphasise the violation of human rights and the exploitative nature of forced labour, and yet post-colonial and feminist scholars caution against this conflation of terminology.[2] According to this argument, discourses of 'modern slavery' in anti-trafficking campaigns result in portrayals that construct trafficked women as forcibly enslaved for sexual exploitation, as devoid of agency, and as unable to rescue themselves, while traffickers are depicted as unidentified evil men (Andrijasevic, 2007; Doezema, 2010; Snajdr, 2013). Equally, numerous news stories of "sex slaves" and the "scourge of trafficking" are widely circulated in news journalism as well as in films (Plambech, 2016) and novels (Bickford, 2018). On a discursive level, the language of sexual slavery draws parallels between human trafficking and the colonial past of many countries, and therefore carries with it both connotations of slavery as a serious human rights violation, but also negative stereotypes of racial difference and white saviours (Bernstein, 2007; Cojocaru, 2015; Doezema, 1999; O'Brien, 2018).

The most prominent and heated tension in media constructions of trafficked women, as I have already mentioned, is the one between abolitionist and pro-sex-work positions. Celebrity advocacy, for instance, has been critiqued for circulating well-meaning but nonetheless potentially harmful abolitionist approaches to anti-trafficking (Kempadoo, 2015, p. 12, 2016). Celebrities' involvement, this argument goes, simplifies the complexity of the issue and the long-term nature of possible solutions in favour of simplistic stories of sexual servitude (Haynes, 2014, p. 40).

[2] Although the country comparison between the US and the UK from which I draw texts for analysis is not the focus of this thesis, it is worth noting that the struggle over terminology and, relatedly, the laws and policies that address sex trafficking are fairly similar in the two countries. Anti-trafficking policies in the US have in the recent past been influenced by abolitionist attitudes towards sex trafficking, or by the notion that all sex work is a violation of human rights to which no one can consent, and therefore that it should be criminalised. Groups advocating this approach come from both feminist roots and Evangelical Christian campaigning groups, which have, according to Bernstein (2007), been influential in the US anti-trafficking policy debate. The main US policy governing human trafficking is the Trafficking Victims Protection Act 2000, which "combats trafficking in persons, especially into the sex trade, slavery, and involuntary servitude" (The Victims of Trafficking and Violence Prevention Act 2000 (TVPA), 2000). It was re-authorised in 2013 as an amendment to the Violence Against Women Act (Polaris Project, 2015). Such terminology is also present in the UK context, where the UK Modern Slavery Act 2015 is the main legislation in place for addressing human trafficking or, as noted in the Act, addressing "slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour" (Theresa May & Lord Bates, 2015).

Such has been the advocacy of, for instance, the previously mentioned American actor Mira Sorvino and fellow actor Ashton Kutcher, whose desire to develop advocacy projects that "do good" has been assessed as simplistic and lacking evidence and research (Steele & Shores, 2014). There are very few celebrities who have explicitly and publicly advocated for the pro-sex-work stance towards trafficking. They include British actor Rupert Everett, who has criticised the selective implementation of the Sexual Offences Act in London, UK, as a way to displace sex workers out of London's popular Soho district. He has called into question its purported mission to combat trafficking by rescuing sex workers from local properties at a time when new upscale building development was being planned in the area and property owners thus had much to gain financially from evicting the resident sex workers (Everett, 2014). In terms of film, there have been no systematic analyses across geography and time, but the studies that are available (which mostly focus on one single or no more than three films) indicate that films that reach mainstream visibility are mostly aligned with the movement to abolish sex work. Meanwhile, liberal feminist critics argue that the abolitionist view overlooks migrant sex workers (Mai, 2013), failing to acknowledge gender politics and the complexities of global migration in many parts of the world (Agustín, 2007; Weitzer, 2015).[3]

Related to the selective representation of trafficked women's identities and subjectivities is the absence of these women's voices in the media. In all three genres considered here, trafficked women are largely spoken for and acted upon rather than speaking or acting on their own behalf. From the policy-related discussions by a multitude of actors that dominate press coverage of sex trafficking, and the brave rescue missions embarked upon by fictional film characters attempting to rescue or aid the escape of trafficked women, to the passionate appeals made by celebrities on behalf of victims, trafficked women are largely relegated to positions of silent

[3] There are numerous NGOs involved in this debate which are associated with either abolitionist or pro-sex work solutions. In general, the abolitionist camp has been more successful on the level of policy; for instance, I have already mentioned that in both the US and the UK anti-trafficking laws and policies are more aligned with the neo-abolitionist framework. Among the most prominent anti-trafficking organisations are the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW) and the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW). GAATW has a pro-sex work stance, is an alliance of more than 80 organisations worldwide, and publishes an academic journal, the *Anti-Trafficking Review* (GAATW, 2019). CATW is an abolitionist organisation, working internationally, whose agenda is to aid trafficking victims and change sex work and trafficking laws to reflect its abolitionist stance (CATW, 2011).

victims (Stiles, 2018). The displacement of agency onto other actors (Gulati, 2011; Sobel et al., 2019) disembodies trafficked women because it replaces their presence for the sake of the presence of other actors (Sobel et al., 2019), as in films where other actors exercise agency by rescuing trafficked women and thus positioning them as objects of sympathy (Yea, 2015).

Similarly to other media genres where trafficked women are ventriloquised by celebrities or imagined on film, their embodied absence from news coverage is, critics argue, accompanied by the presence of other parties who speak for and about women and demonstrate political agency on their behalf. The parties who tend to replace the voices of trafficked women in newspaper coverage include members of law enforcement, government officials, and NGO and civil-society representatives, who discuss a variety of events, initiatives, statistics, policy developments, and law enforcement tactics to curb trafficking and raise awareness of the issue (Gulati, 2011; O'Brien, Carpenter, & Hayes, 2013; Sanford et al., 2016; Sobel et al., 2019). Thematically, the majority of newspaper coverage on sex trafficking is prompted by crime and policy discussions (Gulati, 2011; Johnston et al., 2015; Pajnik, 2010; Sanford et al., 2016; Sobel et al., 2019; Soderlund, 2011). Migration scholars who are critical of this omission of trafficked women from the discussion argue that affording political voices to parties other than trafficked women reflects and reproduces geopolitical frameworks of policing, border control, criminalisation of sex work, police surveillance, and nationalisation (Farrell & Fahy, 2009; Gulati, 2011; Sanford et al., 2016). These crime- and security-oriented narratives, critics argue, do not address the root causes of trafficking and thus shift attention away from political questions pertaining to the dominant social order which creates and perpetuates gender, class, racial, economic and other inequalities (Stiles, 2018). Thus, apart from the problem of crime being the main prompt for discussing trafficking for sexual exploitation, the trouble with the voiceless-ness of trafficked women is that those who speak in their stead represent their own political and ideological viewpoints and agendas, and not necessarily those of the women themselves (for a critique of speaking on behalf of trafficked women see Stiles, 2018).

These discourses, the argument goes, create moral panics, or fears that a problem such as trafficking may threaten the social order and therefore warrants

public action (Farrell & Fahy, 2009, p. 617; Weitzer, 2007). As a result, critics have pointed out that these dominant forms of imaginary and the policies that reflect them perpetuate worst-case scenarios in human trafficking, while marginalising identities and experiences that depart from these (Andrijasevic, 2014; Breuil et al., 2011; Mai, 2018). On a discursive level, critics have pointed out the relationship between moral panics and the aforementioned discourses of naivety, vulnerability, securitisation, and bordering. News reports, for instance, often rely on statistical evidence detailing global estimates of numbers of trafficked people and of profits from the crime (Segrave, Milivojevic, & Pickering, 2018), but the reliability of these numbers is widely contested and is challenged by scholars who argue that they are extrapolations from small samples with limited data, and that they inadvertently stoke sensationalist panics (Broome & Quirk, 2015; Weitzer, 2015). In other words, trafficking statistics, which have grown from initial estimates in the 1990s of some 27 million to the most recent numbers of 40.3 million people in the world who are victims of modern slavery (Global slavery index, 2018), have been criticised for stressing the idea that there are vast masses of trafficked people in the world. Even if these numbers are accurate, the way in which they are framed works on a symbolic level to disembody trafficked people and to cluster a multitude of migrants, smuggled and exploited populations and trafficked people into a single group, which then intersects with the interests of border securitisation concerns (FitzGerald, 2012).

1.3. Trafficked women as gendered subjects

Some forms of representation which I have so far outlined point to the specifically gendered aspects of women's portrayals in the media. Indeed, studies of the ways in which trafficked women are presented as gendered and racialised subjects abound, and they often point out that some of the discourses mentioned previously (women's infantilisation, vulnerability and purity) rely on representations that reproduce meanings associated with patriarchal gender orders.

Critics of films about trafficking generally agree that dominant discourses concerning trafficked women tend, as already indicated, to involve notions of innocence, vulnerability, victimhood, voiceless-ness and objectification (Arthurs, 2012; Matthews, 2015; Russell, 2013, 2017; Szörényi & Eate, 2014; Torchin, 2010;

Yea, 2015). Recent critiques of the depiction of trafficked women in film reveal women's portrayal as innocent and infantilised victims of lustful men (Kelly, 2014; Matthews, 2015; Szörényi & Eate, 2014; Yea, 2015) and as paralysed in the face of violence and exploitation they encounter. In such narratives, women are often depicted as being aided or rescued by men who embark on dangerous missions to save them (Szörényi & Eate, 2014; Yea, 2015), or as dying as a result of violence or suicide (see analyses by Arthurs, 2012; Matthews, 2015). Either way, women's depicted innocence, youth and passivity negate their autonomy, voice and agency. Those who have analysed celebrity anti-trafficking campaigning have similarly argued that it constellates victim-rescuer narratives which simplify human trafficking (Haynes, 2014; Steele & Shores, 2014), and pointed out celebrities' lack of knowledge and accountability given the wide scope of their social influence and access to policymaking, which has led to their being invited to make policy recommendations on addressing trafficking (Hart & Tindall, 2009). Representations in newspaper articles, in the meantime, mostly cite and rely on official sources while neglecting the voices of trafficked women (Gulati, 2011; Johnston et al., 2015; Marchionni, 2012); they legitimate dominant trafficking discourses and over-represent trafficking for sexual exploitation, while giving less attention to other forms of trafficking such as labour exploitation, agricultural labour, forced begging, or child soldiers (Austin & Farrell, 2017; Sanford et al., 2016; Wilson & O'Brien, 2016). Indeed, when compared with other terms such as "human trafficking", "sex trafficking" is the most common form of trafficking discussed in newspaper coverage (Johnston et al., 2015; Sobel, 2014; Szörényi & Eate, 2014) which is the reason it is chosen for analysis in this thesis, since it represents the prevalent way in which trafficked women are construed in media representations. It is, as I have mentioned, a problematic term which places both trafficking victims and sex workers into the category of passive victims thereby precluding the acknowledgment of women's agency in (migrant) sex work and the recognition of sex work as labour (Chapman-Schmidt, 2019). Some of these critiques have been levelled from feminist perspectives, challenging the representation of women as vulnerable because the depiction of such subjugated positions contributes to and maintains patriarchal power structures. They have also called attention to voyeuristic representations of trafficked women and suggestive headlines that refer to "sex slavery" (Berman, 2006; Soderlund, 2011). Critical migration scholars have documented that the use of

language which equates sex work with sex trafficking in policies (both in the US and the UK) and in media representations deprives sex workers of the language to represent themselves and assert their agency. As Chapman-Schmidt (2019, p. 182) argues, this kind of language renders sex workers subaltern – they cannot speak about their experiences because the only language available is that which is oppressive towards them. Other critics, too, have demonstrated how these formulations stigmatise sex workers by obliging them to speak of their experiences using language that is oppressive towards their subjectivities and experiences (see for instance Doezema, 2010; Weitzer, 2017).

Issues of women's personal agency are thus entangled with various forms of oppression and vulnerability. In media depictions, trafficked women's agentive and independent moves, for instance, often result in victimisation (Kelly, 2014; Szörényi & Eate, 2014). In a number of films, and in many anti-trafficking campaigns (for an analysis of campaigns see Andrijasevic, 2007), it is women's autonomy and ambition that is depicted as resulting in trafficking victimisation. Leaving the domestic space, whether this is one's country or one's home, in pursuit of work is seen as compromising their feminine purity and leading to negative outcomes (Kelly, 2014). So, whether being silenced by the agency and bravery of their rescuers, referred to as "girls", or learning that staying at home instead of venturing outside the traditional family structure is safer (Andrijasevic, 2007; Kelly, 2014; Szörényi & Eate, 2014), trafficked women are made to seem as if they are in need of being managed and cared for by others who are more experienced and knowledgeable about the world. Such passive subject positions are problematic because films are part of a larger corpus of meaning, constructed in the media (Desyllas, 2007, p. 58), that obscures victim agency and leaves out the wider socio-political and cultural inequalities that intersect in the figures of trafficked women. This is a topic taken up by feminist film scholars who critique the privileging of rescue narratives and invite scrutiny of uncritical calls for the compassionate care for voiceless victims (Arthurs, 2012; Yea, 2015, p. 47). What is even more problematic in such discursive constructions, as Szörényi and Eate (2014) argue on the basis of Butler's theorisation, is that the "grievability" of trafficked women is present, but absent is the precariousness that leads to their vulnerability and the structural inequalities that lead to their migration and exploitation.

The kinds of depictions that presuppose women's vulnerability and lack of agency in migration, sex work, and human trafficking dominate media and policymaking efforts, but they do not constitute the only form of representation of women trafficked for sexual exploitation. Like critiques that can be found in classical feminist film studies, where counter-narratives are used to challenge dominant forms of femininity and the male gaze on film, there is a corpus of cultural interventions led by critical migration scholars and sex workers who aim to introduce counter-narratives of agency and migrant sex work into public discourse. These campaigns, videos, and other materials are produced largely by NGOs, activists, and scholars who argue for the decriminalisation of sex work and its separation from the notion of trafficking. Such media content is invaluable in providing voice and visibility to people whose subjectivities and experiences are obscured by dominant trafficking narratives which focus away from agency as a socio-culturally dependent and context-specific form of action that differently applies to people in varying circumstances (for this formulation of agency see Mai, 2018, p. xiv). In this way, such narratives provide important spaces for opening the possibilities of meaning about trafficked women and politicising their actions in ways that are not stigmatising towards trafficked women who would otherwise fall lower on the victim hierarchy, which I unpack further in Chapter 3. These narratives, however, are largely marginalised and as a result do not constitute dominant depictions of trafficked women. Moreover, in spite of being present in policymaking discussions, these complex scenarios and experiences are, for the most part, not incorporated into anti-trafficking programs and policies (see policy critiques by Brennan & Plambech, 2018; Roberts, 2018).

Going back to dominant trafficking narratives, which are the focus of this thesis since they can be considered mundane and which are therefore addressed by the framework of pity, scholars offering feminist analyses of the portrayals of trafficking in the media have pointed out that dominant meanings reinforce and reinstate traditional gender norms. These depictions ignore the plight of those people who do not fit into the experiential category of the imagined trafficking victim, such as migrant (sex) workers, LGBTQ people, or those who are racially different than the white women dominating these representations (Mai, 2013, 2018; Todres, 2015). Similarly, scholars who have looked at issues of race in media representations of

trafficking note that simplistic depictions draw symbolic boundaries and literal borders between civilised rescuers and uncivilised sufferers (see for instance Kempadoo, 2015; Wijers, 2015). Such simplifications, Yrjölä (2012, p. 358) observes, de-politicise "human orders, subjectivities, and their hierarchies", resulting in a reduction of discourses to only those addressing a small number of women who fit the description of an ideal victim. Feminist scholars find this very notion of women as victims to be deeply problematic because it draws on infantilising discourses that associate women with vulnerability and innocence, and because it relies on images of broken, bound, sexualised and objectified female bodies (Andrijasevic, 2007, 2014; Andrijasevic & Mai, 2016; Blanchette, Silva, & Bento, 2013) and thereby constrains the field of discourse within which woman can identify with what they see in the media. By relying on voyeuristic views of women, such representations reduce complex narratives to trafficking stereotypes (Arthurs, 2012), eliciting moral panics about migration and the morality of sex work (Bernstein, 2012; Pickering & Ham, 2014). In this way, advocacy projects can symbolically constrain both the identities and the bodies of trafficked women: by relying on depictions of women as inherently weak and vulnerable, these discourses elide the broader socio-economic factors that contribute to women's oppressive life circumstances. As Vance (2012, p. 201) has argued, these narratives exclude wider socio-political elements at play in trafficking, such as forms of sexual and non-sexual labour, coercion and violence, deception, abusive work conditions, national and international migration, global wealth inequalities, and gendered oppression. These forms of representation also demonstrate that trafficking is intertwined with broader social orders which then play out at the level of the image.

One such issue that is relevant for this thesis is the difference between the terms "sex work" and "prostitution". In this thesis I refer to women engaged in sexual labour as sex workers in order to acknowledge their agency in undertaking this form of labour. Namely, within feminist debates (and particularly within the rift between radical and more liberal feminists that began in the late 1960s), prostitution is associated with the subjugation of women to the power relations in which their bodies are associated with passive exploitation, while the terminology of sex work is associated with sex workers' rights discourse which acknowledges both sex work as labour and the complexity of agency and choice involved in this form of labour

(Sanders, O'Neill, & Pitcher, 2009, p. 9). Sex work, therefore, serves to emphasise the circumstances under which women make choices and it problematises issues around the imbalance of power that exists between those who buy and those who sell sexual services (O'Connell Davidson, 1998).

This distinction also helps to emphasise the difference between what is considered sex work and "sex trafficking", since not all sex work is necessarily exploitative nor does all sex work constitute trafficking for sexual exploitation. The distinction between sex work and sex trafficking is therefore necessary because it opens the possibility to consider that this form of labour can indeed be recognised as labour. This is a position held by migration scholars as well as sex workers' rights organisations and opposed by abolitionist activists who consider all sex work to be exploitative and who therefore equate it with trafficking (for critical accounts of this distinction see Chapman-Schmidt, 2019; Jackson, 2016; Weitzer, 2017). The distinction between sex work and trafficking, and the gender assumptions which underlie these claims, are an important part of the politics of representation of trafficked women in the media. The position which seeks to equate the two, as I have mentioned, is more prominent in media constructions of trafficked women and in laws and policies addressing trafficking and sex work in the US and UK, and this media prevalence is why it is taken up as subject of analysis in this thesis.

1.4. Gaps in existing literature and the contribution of this thesis

In light of these critiques of the discourses characterising the media representations of sex trafficking, trafficking and migration scholars have called for more nuanced studies that pay attention to, comment on, and document the lived experiences of trafficking. As I have shown, some literature has already been dedicated to all of these aspects, and this study will embark on a similar path, but with some limitations. Namely, I do not look to document the experiences of trafficked women themselves. This is because, although it would have been useful to include the perspectives of trafficked individuals, I was dissuaded from such an endeavour on ethical grounds because of the potential harm such a project might inflict on already sensitive or traumatised people, where I – as a PhD student – could not guarantee them proper mental health care should this occur. I also thought that this project

might be too short-term, low-budget and small-scale for such an endeavour to be meaningful. So, although this is a perspective that I would like to see in the future, I did not view this thesis as the place for such an attempt.

Based on the rich and varied literature that examines how the ideal victim discourses relate to the complex subjectivities embodied by trafficked women, in this study I look to media discourse in order to analyse this relationship. More specifically, my study is based on academic literature which suggests that dominant media discourses of trafficked women largely do not point to the specifically gendered aspects of trafficked women's experiences of exploitation and negotiations of agency. Thus, the main contribution of this thesis is its analysis of what proposals for emotional and moral orientation are made about trafficked women in three media genres. Moreover, in exploring the potential of the theories of vulnerability as a critique of dominant trafficking narratives, I draw on the political potential of those media representations that fail to conform to ideal victim discourses. The contribution of a study such as the present one is therefore its ability to examine dominant trafficking media discourses and, in doing so, to comment on the political potential of media representations. By 'political potential', I mean the ability of media representations of women as ambivalent subjects to facilitate the recognition of women as subjects of gendered power relations and inequalities. As I indicate above, media depictions of trafficked women exist alongside multiple socio-political issues and are relayed by a multiplicity of voices which represent potentially clashing or differently oriented agendas, some of which preclude and resolve this political potential in a specific direction.

The most important of these issues, and one that underlies the majority of media texts that construct trafficked women in public imagination, are feminist debates around the issue of whether sex work should be criminalised or decriminalised, which I have referred to earlier in this chapter. The presence and impact of this political, ideological, and representational binary that dictates the dominant terminology ("sex trafficking", "modern slavery") and representations of trafficked women (the depictions noted in the literature review) is noticeable and well-documented. Thus, the debate between the criminalisation and decriminalisation of sex work is political inasmuch as the choices of what kinds of constructions dominate media text on trafficked women are politically motivated and

used as direct tools of advocacy and policymaking. This particular politics, although underlying critical migration studies, policies, definitions, terminology, ideology, and media representations, is scarcely present in prevailing constructions of trafficked women in media texts. This is evident in the literature review as well as in the texts analysed in this study. Indeed, the theoretical framework of the study corresponds to an exploration of representation in which such a binary has already been settled and where some depictions have achieved dominant status while others remain on the margins. These politicised choices underlie the mundane representations of trafficked women, but it is the possibilities of emotion with regard to the depictions of trafficked women in three media genres, and indeed the possibilities of meaning that remain once this binary is occluded and already resolved in media texts, that is the focus of analysis in this study. Analysing these representations through the lens of a politics of pity, in other words, demonstrates that a political debate and discursive struggle is predetermined in these representations. The imaginary that these media representations propose has resolved this struggle for meaning in a particular direction (as will become evident in the analysis chapters, in the direction of abolition of sex work), which is precisely why a politics of pity is an analytical lens that uncovers how the terms of debate are already settled as political signifiers, precluding a debate between criminalisation and decriminalisation of sex work within prevailing media depictions of trafficked women. In short, I would suggest that, by problematising media depictions of trafficked women and mapping their appearance across genres, it is possible to see the nuances of the ways in which intersectional categories produce a variety of images of trafficked women, and to see the spaces where feminist and other movements can emerge or be recognised, and the spaces where the political potential of these representations might be fulfilled.

This kind of analysis therefore engages with the observation that prevailing media representations of trafficked women rarely capitalise on feminist notions of agency in oppressive circumstances (Madhok, 2013), which propose that agency, if seen as a "socioculturally situated capacity for action" (Mai, 2018, p. xiv), can be a source of recognition and can be found in small acts of negotiation and resistance (Butler, 2001a; Madhok, 2013a). This critique is found in feminist studies that take issue with individualistic conceptions of choice and agency and propose that these

terms be applied to coercive and oppressive circumstances where agency is found in smaller actions that, although limited in scope, nonetheless represent agentive moves (Madhok, 2013). Additionally, as this critique would have it, vulnerability can be key to developing a duty of care based on mutual recognition where a broader range of trafficking narratives can be seen as legitimate. A driving force in this process, I would argue, is ambivalence – that is, neither a positive nor a negative conception of elements of representation, but the idea that these elude definition and full knowability (Bauman, 1990). In engaging with these theoretical notions, this thesis contributes to a discussion of how the female body and agency is mobilised in film, celebrity advocacy, and press journalism. By using a Foucauldian-inflected feminist lens that centres around subjectivity, I examine how gender, class and race intersect in different characters and what outcomes they lead to, in order to comment on how women are variously constructed in media representations. I do this to understand how female agency is framed and to discuss how these possibilities of meaning can be expanded and mobilised in order to bring nuance to dominant trafficking scenarios and, more importantly, bring legitimacy to those victims whose experiences are positioned as less deserving in the proposals for emotional and moral engagement.

1.5. Trafficked women as subjects of pity in mediated anti-trafficking discourse

Based on the above, in this study I am interested in how trafficked women are constructed in the media as subjects of pity, or how their gendered identities are presented to audiences.

Following from this research interest, my research questions were:

1. Main question: How are trafficked women constructed in mediated anti-trafficking discourse?

Supplementary questions:

2. What forms of embodiment and agency are employed and challenged?
3. What are the implications of these discourses for trafficked women as subjects of societal inequalities and oppressions?
4. How is pity articulated in mediated anti-trafficking discourses?

In Chapter 2, I outline the theoretical framework that underpins the study, namely the framework of a politics of pity, or Boltanski's notion that suffering is socially constructed. This framework has been utilised in various studies of the media, including media and communications studies (Chouliaraki, 2004, 2013; Squire, 2015), as well as in studies that address trafficked women as subjects (see for instance Arthurs, 2012). As such, a path has been paved for the study of trafficked women as both *mediated* and *gendered* subjects. What has not previously been conducted, however, is a study that looks, as I do here, at the representational tropes across different media genres. The value of this approach, I would suggest, lies in its ability to analyse the meanings which characterise the ways in which trafficked women are symbolically constructed in media discourse. Through analysing how trafficked women appear in three media genres, it becomes evident that the resulting meanings are not only a matter of genre-specific affordances and possibilities of meaning, but also tell us something meaningful about how wider socio-political assumptions concerning gender and vulnerability give form to these women and, based on these socio-political assumptions, create hierarchies of victimhood that place some women as more and some as less worthy of public emotion and pity.

In Chapter 3, I introduce the method used to analyse this meaning-making process, which occurs on the semiotic level of the text as an amalgamation of language and image. I utilise the analytics of mediation, an eclectic approach which Chouliaraki (2006b, 2006a) has used to discuss the viewership of human suffering and vulnerability. As part of this approach, I use critical discourse analysis and visual analysis as analytical tools to operationalise the analysis itself. In Chapter 3 I also introduce the three media genres and their logics. These are: film, celebrity advocacy, and press journalism. Each genre analysis focuses on one example from the US and one from the UK. This is because both are developed Western democracies and influential leaders in the "fight against trafficking" as well as in world politics and policymaking. The UK is (at the time of writing still) a member of the European Union (EU), while the US is a globally influential media producer, especially when it comes to film and to celebrity culture (as represented in the entertainment and humanitarian sectors).

In the following three chapters, I present the analysis of each media genre. Chapter 4 analyses the representations of trafficked women in film. The two films

considered are *Trafficked* (2017) and *Doing Money* (2018), and this genre reveals how a hierarchy of victimhood emerges through the oppositions of ideal and ambivalent victimhood. This is accomplished through two pairs of discourses: those of purity and innocence on the one hand, and of courage and resilience on the other. So, while "good" victims are constructed as possessing these characteristics, ambivalent victims are shown as comparatively lacking in some combination of these. What these films show is an adherence to the binary of ideal and undeserving victimhood as a condition for public care, and thus an adherence to heteronormative femininity and traditional gender norms which locate women as weak and as belonging in the domestic realm.

In Chapter 5, I analyse how trafficked women appear as subjects of celebrity advocacy and take as examples two actors, Emma Thompson and Jada Pinkett Smith. The analysis shows that these celebrities destabilise the hierarchy of victimhood in a more explicit way than in films, which reproduce the ideal victim discourse. They do this through personal reflection on trafficked women's experiences, but this questioning exists in constant tension with their public advocacy projects. Although these rely on dominant trafficking discourses, the celebrities' personal reflections expand the hierarchy of victimhood that is held firmly as a binary within the film genre. The tropes that Thompson primarily relies on are *a focus on trafficked women's vulnerability*, *the generalisation of suffering,* and a *reconfiguration of sexual objectification of trafficked women through Thompson's feminist persona.* Pinkett Smith's advocacy is characterised by tropes of *performed motherhood*, the *sexualisation of the celebrity body,* and *invitations to empowerment*. As such, they rely on postfeminist sensibility to question the hierarchy of victimhood that generally relies on patriarchal norms. In doing this, the celebrities hint at the inability of dominant trafficking discourses to contain the multiplicity of trafficked women's subjectivities and experiences, but nonetheless fail to politicise trafficked women as subjects of gendered inequalities.

Chapter 6 is the final empirical chapter, where I analyse how trafficked women appear in press journalism. I analyse 25 news articles from seven sources in the US and the UK. This genre illustrates an expansion of the hierarchy of victimhood through a multiplicity of different representations and a heightened ambivalence with regard to women's position in the hierarchy of victimhood. Press

discourse thus represents a genre where a multiplicity of voices co-exist and co-construct discourses that describe trafficked women, so it is not surprising that this genre in particular would offer the highest variety of identities and experiences. The main tropes, which overlap to construct the depiction of trafficked women, are: *deceased trafficked women, controlled trafficked women, injured trafficked women, trafficked women as strangers, trafficked women as victims*, and *trafficked women as survivors*. However, although this genre brings trafficked women from the margin into the argument, the voices which fall closer to undeserving victimhood are still framed as marginalised, while ideal victims are the ones who fit the recourse offered to trafficking victims. It is therefore, like the other genres, a missed opportunity to politicise trafficked women as subjects.

In Chapter 7, I summarise the rationale and choices made in the thesis and give a brief outline of the key findings of the previous three chapters. Namely, to explore how trafficked women are constructed in mediated anti-trafficking discourse, I use the categories of embodiment and agency to analyse how pity is articulated in media texts. I examine three media genres and this analysis yields three distinct ways of constructing trafficked women as subjects of pity in media texts. In film, the hierarchy of victimhood whereby some victims are seen as more deserving of compassion is reproduced by a heavy reliance on ideal victim discourses. In celebrity advocacy this hierarchy is destabilised through celebrities' reflections on the notion that women's subjectivities do not match dominant trafficking discourses, thus leaving the victimhood question open. In the genre of press journalism, this hierarchy is expanded because these media texts articulate more explicitly the ways in which women's subjectivities fail to conform to ideal victim discourses. None of the genres, however, capitalise on the possibility of interrupting the hierarchy of victimhood to politicise trafficked women as subjects. After this, I reflect on vulnerability and ambivalence as potentially productive registers that present possibilities for recognition and feminist collectivity through media discourse. Specifically, I propose that reconfiguring vulnerability through ambivalence is a potential way to bring attention to the gendered aspects of women's representation in the media. It is through a view of women as ambivalent victims, I suggest, that an opportunity presents itself to mobilise the political aspect of vulnerability and thereby point to the need for a disruption of the social orders that contribute to

gendered inequalities. By reflecting on this manner of politicising the intersecting oppressions that contribute to trafficked women's victimisation, I add to the growing literature in (feminist) studies of migration and sex work (Mai, 2018; Serughetti, 2018; Squire, 2015; Ticktin, 2011) that seek to unpack the relationship between (the representations of) women's complex subjectivities and the negotiations of agency and vulnerability. I conclude the thesis by reflecting on the outcomes of the study and putting forward some possible avenues for future research. In the next chapter I explain the theoretical and conceptual framework for the thesis.

Chapter Two: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

2.1. Introduction

In this chapter I describe how I bring together three perspectives to form a theoretical framework for examining how trafficked women emerge in three media genres as subjects of public pity. This framework combines: a) the idea that trafficked women's suffering is socially constructed into a politics of pity which makes this suffering meaningful to publics through discourse; b) an understanding of the media as an institutional and a symbolic space with the power to frame, reflect and circulate meanings; and c) the use of Foucauldian-influenced feminist theory that focuses on subjectivity as a way to approach women as subjects of intersecting oppressions. This combined perspective provides a lens through which I analyse trafficked women's representations in media texts. Along with introducing the overall theoretical framework, I also define here the key conceptual vocabulary used throughout the thesis.

2.2. The space of appearance as an unequal political space: Locating the politics of pity

Within literature on distant suffering and media ethics, Hannah Arendt's conception of the space of appearance as a political space that carries the potential for visibility is a common starting point for discussions of public morality (Arendt, 1958, p. 50). Publicness, in Arendt's terms, exists within the space of appearance and within the presupposition that everything seen and heard in public can potentially be perceived by everyone, which therefore "assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves" (Arendt, 1958, p. 50). The space of appearance is, for Arendt, a realm of the spectacle where images and language are symbolically arranged to produce meanings; it is a space both of self-actualisation and of commonality between people (and accordingly, as I will explain in Chapter 3 below, a semiotic space of meaning-making through discourse). The space of appearance is therefore a space that facilitates the process by which the spectacle of trafficked women's suffering becomes meaningful to audiences. In so doing, this space not only allows people to become part of a public (on publicness see Brighenti, 2010, p. 12), but facilitates the process of "world-making" or presenting the world to the world (Chouliaraki, 2006b, pp. 199–201).

In the space of appearance, within the relationship between seeing and acting, meanings about suffering are organised politically, around the relationship of performing and watching, within specific regimes of pity. Chouliaraki proposes that pity "is not the natural sentiment of human empathy, but rather, an historically specific and politically constituted principle for relating spectator and sufferer, with the former safely removed from the unfortunate condition of the other" (Chouliaraki, 2004, p. 190). Thus, the space of appearance not only renders trafficked women's identities and experiences meaningful to publics, thereby bringing about generalisability; it also brings about a sense of responsibility for the condition of the trafficked woman as a distant sufferer. This responsibility is based on the notion that pity needs to be politicised because solidarity does not arise naturally (Bauman, 2000, p. 87). In other words, the relationship between watching the spectacle of suffering from a safe distance and acting upon it is not direct but socially constructed (Boltanski, 1999, p. 3). Two aspects of pity are important here: Arendt's space of appearance as a public space where trafficked women appear before spectators, and Boltanski's notion of pity as a way to mobilise and affect public sensibilities and orientate them towards trafficked women as subjects of care. Both have to do with the political dimension of pity.

First, an essential political trait of the space of appearance is plurality: it enables individuals to speak and act, and thus "reveal actively their unique personal identities" (Arendt, 1958, p. 179). In normative terms, it also enables each person to live "as a distinct and unique being among equals" (Arendt, 1958, p. 178). This conception of the idealised public space of appearance where all are equal and the self is actualised resonates with the normative idea of the media as a vehicle for communication which can in theory be accessed by all. It is particularly useful in literature on humanitarian ethics where critics have analysed the significance of showing others' suffering as well as speaking and acting on behalf of distant strangers, and thus highlighting their misfortune to mobilise compassionate action (Fassin, 2012; Squire, 2015; Ticktin, 2011, 2014). This is important in the context of sex trafficking because not only is trafficking a phenomenon whose visibility in public life is highly dependent on the media, but, as I discuss in the literature review, the ways in which trafficked women's identities and experiences are discursively

constructed in the space of appearance impact the forms of responsibility, if any, that these depictions offer to publics.

Second, Boltanski observes that pity is socially constructed – a trait that stems from its ability to overcome distance and speak not to particular situations but to generalisable conditions. Working through media discourse, pity has the ability to orientate publics to an array of emotions towards trafficked women. It is therefore a term that describes the emotional and moral engagement of the spectator, not to pity specifically but to a variety of sentiments. Moreover, in this process, pity is unequally distributed across socially constructed categories (Squire, 2015, pp. 99–100) such as gender, race, and class which are combined in various ways in the depictions of trafficked women. As I explain below, I unpack this process through an intersectional lens to capture the variation in the distribution of pity in the context of trafficked women as subjects.

For Boltanski (1999, p. 19), the main forms of enacting a politics of pity are speaking (giving voice and visibility) and paying (through humanitarianism, activism and other forms of social action). In so doing, Boltanski argues, proposals of pity create generalisability through group belonging thus avoiding empty gestures. So Boltanski operationalises Arendt's space of appearance by introducing pity as a way of relating to sufferers that provides a trajectory towards political action. This proposal resonates with other studies in the field of humanitarianism and human rights where scholars have operationalised the politics of pity to explore the constructions of moral responsibility of those who have visibility and voice, and how they share their platform in the space of appearance with distant others (for instance Agier, 2010; Chouliaraki, 2008; Redfield, 2005; Silverstone, 2007).

In this study, I am interested in how trafficked women are represented in three media genres. This is because I want to understand the process by which discourses about what it means to be a trafficked woman constellate around various trafficking narratives, and how this makes women's suffering meaningful to media publics. The framework of pity, I argue, is a useful theoretical starting point because it allows me to explore how trafficked women are constructed in media texts and what proposals for emotional and moral engagement are made. In the remainder of this chapter I break down pity into its constituent parts and explicate its usefulness

and its limitations, before moving on to the next section where I explain how I use media and feminist critique to address the research questions.

2.2.1. Politics and pity: Defining the terms

A politics of pity, Boltanski (1999) proposes, describes suffering as socially constructed and pity as a feeling evoked by watching the suffering of others. It is an action-oriented disposition that has a bearing on viewers' emotions towards sufferers, benefactors and perpetrators. Boltanski's treatise on the politics of pity is an extension of Arendt's (1958) claim that watching the spectacle of suffering is an act of looking which produces passion and compassion in those who are able to help but who do not share in others' suffering. Within this conception, a spectacle is a voice of humanity that invites the pity of potential benefactors, based on emotion rather than reason (Arendt, 1958, p. 95). But while the spectacle of suffering describes the process of viewing suffering, a politics of pity, as proposed by Boltanski (1999, p. 106), describes the moral necessity of moving beyond the spectacle of suffering towards a feeling of moral indignation as an imperative to act. For the sake of precision, I have broken down the notion of a politics of pity into its constitutive parts in order to demonstrate how these relate to my analysis.

The *politics* in a politics of pity points to the different configurations of emotion for conveying suffering, which rise above the local and particular to "form a general picture" of suffering and construct embodied subjects in media discourse as worthy of public care (Boltanski, 1999, p. 114). It is this performative role of media which carries the potential to "mobilize solidarities" that constitutes its politics (Cottle, 2006, p. 421). This orientation around the political opens avenues for exploring how trafficked women are visually and linguistically constructed as gendered subjects. In studies of distant suffering this foregrounding of emotions is useful for exploring how suffering becomes meaningful and recognisable in public (see for instance Aradau, 2004; Chouliaraki, 2013; Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017; Pantti, 2013; Tait, 2011). All these elements are embedded, I argue, in a media environment where not all trafficked women are constructed as equally deserving of public care. It is, as I demonstrate in the analysis, the various proposals of meaning related to gender difference and vulnerability that produce audiences' distance from the ideal trafficking victim and, in turn, render her suffering more or less worthy of

public pity according to a victim hierarchy, which I turn to later in the chapter. In this study I am interested in parsing the visual and linguistic discourses that comprise the mechanism through which a very particular trafficked woman emerges as a deserving victim, while other identities become marginalised and serve to legitimate the worthiness of the ideal trafficked woman. This matters, not only because the ways in which trafficked women are portrayed has an impact on the possibilities of meaning and engagement that publics are offered, but because giving a certain group almost exclusive visibility renders other groups less worthy of visibility.

The meaning of *pity* in a politics of pity relates to a response of publics to viewing the suffering of others that is based on sentimentality rather than on reason. As such, it is not a set response to determinate configurations of discourse, but points to the possibilities of emotion that result from particular configurations of discourse on trafficking (Boltanski, 1999, p. 103). Like empathy and identification, which are possible feelings evoked by viewing the suffering of others, pity is unequal. What makes pity a normatively desirable position of solidarity is its embeddedness in politics; its orientation towards acting on the suffering of others is what matters. So, while other positions may permit an analysis based on an approach to women as unequally deserving subjects of suffering with unequal degrees of visibility in public discourse, the ways in which pity in particular has been theorised in the context of distant suffering and the media make it conducive to a discourse analytical approach which seeks to probe the internal struggle between and within media texts. Scholars have used this approach to explore how pity configures suffering in relation to race (Balaji, 2011), migrant subjectivities and politics of bordering (Squire, 2015), humanitarianism and gender (Ticktin, 2011), as well as media representations of trafficked women (Arthurs, 2012). This is salient because discourses here work on the implicit assumption that trafficked women's gender is what makes them vulnerable subjects, but they do not necessarily politicise this vulnerability.

Pity is a discursive mechanism essential to the process by which the media serve as moral education to spectators on how to relate to suffering and what to do about it (Chouliaraki, 2006b, p. 3). The media do this through *performativity*, that is, as Butler (1993, p. 2) explains in the context of gender, as "a reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names", or in other words the seemingly contradictory yet simultaneous process by which people both

choose their gender and are determined by its norms (Butler, 2016, p. 17). The performativity of pity, Chouliaraki (2010, p. 110) proposes, lies in its power to constitute the collectivity of publics, giving visual and narrative shape to public action, and thereby acting "as 'moral education': as a series of subtle proposals as to how [audiences] should feel and act towards suffering, which are introduced into [their] everyday life by mundane acts of mediation". Therefore, in line with the notion of performativity, these are not directives which assume that audiences are empty moral vessels awaiting instructions, but subtle moralising messages that shape the moral dispositions of publics over time and are shaped, in turn, by audiences' own subjectivities. In this way the logic of pity, in the ways in which it is unequally distributed among different subjects, thereby giving them different access to political voice, operates within the logic of performativity, which "works within precarity and against its differential allocation" and is therefore itself an exercise "that propels the precarious into political life" (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 101). In this way, pity is aligned with a Foucauldian inflected feminist approach that focuses on how discourses provide "normative models of conduct" and thus govern the representations of femininity (Gill, 2007a, p. 62). And, although only one of the media genres analysed here – celebrity advocacy – is directly focused on action, while the other two genres serve to orientate viewers' feelings of pity towards particular trafficking victims while marginalising others, it follows that these genres are also oriented towards action, if only towards speaking as action.

As Boltanski (1999, pp. 79–80) explains, a politics of pity, as a spectatorship of distant suffering within a political frame, revolves around two topics which point towards action: tender-heartedness, a sympathetic emotion which recognises the humanity of the sufferer and "points towards beneficent action"; and indignation, an emotion underpinned by justice which points towards a persecutor through denunciation (Boltanski, 1999, p. 48). In the context of trafficked women, these topics correspond to tender-hearted orientations towards trafficked women and indignation towards structures of inequality, injustice and exploitation. Both feelings are forms of pity that, far from being deterministic, are demonstrative of how particular genres address publics and make proposals for orientation towards different actors (Boltanski, 1999, p. 79).

Since the early 2000s, this combined interest in distant suffering and the emotions and moralities that are proposed by the media about distant suffering of others has given rise to growing literature in the field of media studies. Such studies focus on viewing distant suffering as a basis for moral responsibility (Orgad, 2012; Pantti, Wahl-Jorgensen, & Cottle, 2012; Redfield, 2005; Tait, 2011; Tester, 1995; Zelizer, 2010), locating media witnessing as a key process for moral investment into the lives of strangers (Frosh, 2006). Similarly to the critiques offered by migration and trafficking scholars who take issue with the ideal victim paradigm discussed in Chapter 1 (see also Andrijasevic, 2007; Andrijasevic & Mai, 2016; Arthurs, 2012; Mai, 2013, 2016), studies of distant suffering likewise critique the emphasis on showing the apolitical suffering of innocent victims and problematise the prominence of vulnerability and passivity of suffering (Ticktin, 2011, 2016; Walklate, 2011). These formations of a "minimal humanity" (Malkki, 1996, p. 390) or "bare life" (Agamben, 1998) legitimate the suffering of others and render them ideal victims, but they do this at a cost. Namely, the argument goes, they are predicated on bordering practices that protect national sovereignty, as well as notions of common humanity that exist "beyond the specificities of political and social life" (Ticktin, 2006, p. 39).

Such studies indicate that indignation and denunciation are already existing theoretical narratives in feminism and media studies. Therefore, as in some of these studies, the framework of pity allows me to use critiques of ideal victims as a starting point for understanding how discourses are organised to create a hierarchy of victimhood and what intersectional power relations underpin this construction. The work of this thesis is therefore to illuminate the power relations within which pity construes trafficked women as subjects of care in mediated discourse. In this way, and in line with studies of distant suffering and morality in the media, I extend the framework of a politics of pity, since Boltanski's account does not include a specifically feminist or media-centred outlook.

2.2.2. The media as a site of meaning-making: Limitations of a politics of pity as a theoretical framework for this study

This is where Boltanski's use of indignation and tender-heartedness as two topics of pity reaches the limits of its usefulness to this study. On the one hand, it is vitally

important in conceptualising public space, public orientation to action, and the normative resolution of emotions associated with pity. On the other hand, it does not provide the tools for analysing gender, race, and class – the categories which it identifies as significant when it comes to orientations to emotion. The conception of collectivity through vulnerability, that is a problematisation of the notion that vulnerable women are necessarily without agency and can only be thought of in those terms (Butler, Gambetti, & Sabsay, 2016a), introduces a degree of nuance into the constructed identities of trafficked women, which is a dimension beyond what a politics of pity as a theoretical framework can offer. I elaborate here on the limitations of pity, and later explain, in Section 2.4 on *Pity, media, and gender: The personal is political but visibility is hierarchical*, the usefulness of a feminist approach that centres around women's subjectivity. These are compatible approaches since Boltanski (1999, p. 80) asserts that indignation is a form of pity oriented towards structures of domination and exploitation – thus hinting at intersectional identity categories and a critique of social structures of oppression – while tender-heartedness is based on manifestations of interior emotions that actors externalise for publics to see – thus constructing trafficked women predominantly as ideal victims. The generalisability of suffering as a form of pity is useful because it overcomes distance by speaking not to particular situations but to structures and emotions. It unifies pity and thus avoids the dispersion of emotions, driving them instead in general directions, in this case towards indignation and tender-heartedness. But while analysing how generalisability is constructed in media discourse has its obvious benefits in a world where distant suffering is conveyed to publics through various media, this approach also has limitations.

In seeking generalisability, pity overcomes distance through speech and action on behalf of others, and these are the most important traits of a politics of pity. This framework thus allows me to analyse how speech and action bring together groups and collectivities in media representations, thereby bringing trafficked women into the framework of care and identifying the wider relations of power and privilege that underlie their misfortune. However, importantly, politics of pity does not provide the tools for unpacking precisely how these power relations are differently constellated in trafficked women and how these different identity categories produce normative forms of femininity and a hierarchy of victimhood

among trafficked women as suffering subjects. A Foucauldian-inspired approach to gender and a focus on subjectivity provides the tools to explore the intersecting oppressions of gender, race, and class that underpin the media representations of trafficked women. Mapping these tropes of representation makes it possible to see how potentially ambiguous and contradictory media discourses come together to create differences and hierarchies among distinct categories of trafficked women. In this study I therefore look at how the generalisability of pity is operationalised in order to demonstrate that pity can be a multifaceted framework that applies differently to different groups of trafficked women. A feminist lens that focuses on subjectivity and the tensions and power relations in media representations helps me to introduce this nuance into the analysis and in so doing, to extend Boltanski's framework. More specifically, seeing gender as discourse allows me to analyse it as a site of contestation and conflict. I therefore look at manifestations of pity in media representations of trafficked women in order to problematise "essential categories and assumed relations" produced in discourse (Gill, 2007a, p. 13).

In analysing trafficked women through this particular framework of pity and gender I accept that in this form of communication trafficked women broadly fit into the category of sufferer. To examine suffering as a social construct associated with pity, I look at the level of the semiotic text, and on this level I examine how trafficked women are embodied and what forms of agency they demonstrate. Boltanski (1999, p. 82) proposes that tender-heartedness as an emotion is an "externalisation of the interior" which manifests its presence in the exterior by means of the body. The body, in other words, is a vehicle that brings the sufferer closer to publics. In speaking about the exposure of injury in order to demonstrate vulnerability, Butler makes a similar argument that the vulnerable body is a potential site for challenging oppression and gaining a voice, especially when it comes to public assembly (Butler, 2011, 2016), so both Boltanski and Butler identify the need for a formation of collectivities to demonstrate the need for action. It is within this relationship of the individual and the collective that the potential for solidarity, pity and action lies. But it is also within this relationship that the marginalisation and oppression of groups and individuals occurs, precisely because not all narratives and identities are constructed as equally deserving of pity. What follows from this is that the aspect of a politics of pity which orientates viewers to action is unequally applied

to different groups, and that this is related to how trafficked women's vulnerability is distributed, which is dependent on the constellation of identity categories that trafficked women embody and the meanings of these categories.

While theorising a politics of pity Boltanski touches upon, but largely does not look in the direction of, different identity categories which intersect in groups of people and contribute to their subjectivities and positions in society as do feminist scholars (for instance Butler, 2016; Butler, Gambetti, & Sabsay, 2016b; Crenshaw, 1991; Gill, 2007). Nor does he look in the direction of media studies in order to elaborate on how pity is socially constructed as do critical media scholars (Aradau, 2004; Chouliaraki, 2004, 2008b; Silverstone, 2003, 2007; Squire, 2015). In the following sections I first explain how the politics of pity can be applied to media genres, a path to which has been paved by critical scholars studying media ethics and humanitarian communication, and then I bring together this approach with Foucauldian-inspired feminist media studies in order to explain the analytical categories that help me to expand the topics of pity in this direction.

2.3. Politics of pity and media discourse

In a mediated and gendered context where trafficked women emerge as subjects in the public imagination, international policymaking, charitable and law-enforcement organisations inevitably rely on the media to disseminate meanings and to orientate audiences towards sex trafficking. This includes entertainment, humanitarian and journalistic genres, backed by their corresponding industries, as well as international organisations and policymakers. For instance, among others, international organisations such as the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) have created anti-trafficking campaigns and toolkits to inform publics, policymakers and governments about recognising and addressing sex trafficking (IOM UN Migration, 2019; UNODC, 2017). In addition, the UNODC offers plenty of information about how and why trafficked people become exploited. In so doing, they make assertions about vulnerability, victimhood and gender that are widely mediated and referenced in humanitarian and human-rights communication and in popular media (UNODC, 2017).

At the same time, much critical debate on sex trafficking centres around women's victimhood and agency, as I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, including attempts to demonstrate the problems with gender assumptions (Andrijasevic, 2007; Arthurs, 2012; Doezema, 1999) and the terminology of modern slavery (O'Connell Davidson, 2016). These migration and trafficking scholars explore the subjectivities and representations of trafficked women in various genres, but largely do not look in the direction of pity as a mechanism for eliciting emotion in audiences as this relates to vulnerability in media discourse (for exceptions see Aradau, 2004; Arthurs, 2012). As a result, these studies do not take advantage of the critiques of anti-trafficking efforts in order to map the assumptions that underpin the prevailing trafficking discourses which, in turn, serve as moral education. This type of analysis is present in critical media scholarship on gender and humanitarian communication (for instance Arthurs, 2012; Chouliaraki, 2013; Orgad, 2012; Squire, 2015), which I draw on and apply to sex trafficking. This section is dedicated to the role of the media in constructing and reflecting audiences' social imaginaries that work as repositories for normative meanings for media publics to draw on.

As I have argued in Chapter 1, my approach draws upon the social constructionist tradition that defines the media as institutionalised practices of symbolic power that lead to, what Bourdieu (1991, p. 166) calls a "consensus on meaning of the social world". As such, the media consolidate meanings about our social world and construct, reflect and perpetuate a specific social order. The power of the media, as Couldry (2000b, p. 57) puts it, lies in their ability to naturalise meanings and to frame, order and name our social reality, preceding dominant discourses by validating certain voices and silencing others. By doing this, the media frame and orient public imagination around specific representations while marginalising others.

This is not, as Orgad (2012, p. 4) reminds us, a deterministic process where media representations condition audiences or cultivate a particular imaginary of the world for audiences to unquestioningly embrace. It is an "unfixed process that is fashioned in and through interaction and contestation among views, narratives, images, statements and voices – contestations in which their audiences take an active part" (Orgad, 2012, p. 4). While audience research is outside the remit of this thesis, in studying the representations of trafficked women in three media genres, I look at

how the processes of contestation, interaction between texts, and struggle for meaning takes place, at which voices are silenced in favour of those that are amplified, and at what this tells us about the ways in which dominant meanings in media discourse come to prominence.

Writing in the context of media ethics, Silverstone argues that the media are certainly not the only one, but do constitute a significant location for the construction of a public moral order and an orientation towards those who are outside this order. As he puts it:

> Insofar as they provide the symbolic connection and disconnection that we have to the other, the other who is the distant other, distant geographically, historically, sociologically, then the media are becoming the crucial environments in which a morality appropriate to the increasingly interrelated but still horrendously divided and conflictful world might be found, and indeed expected. (Silverstone, 2007, p. 6)

Although the texts which circulate through the media and reflect and constitute our social reality are not the only ways in which our social reality is constituted, they are nonetheless immensely important objects in a globalised world and need to be taken seriously as meaningful social objects. And, more than this, they not only constitute and reflect our social reality, but also – as Silverstone here argues and as the studies mentioned above take up – provide a moral education for their audiences. These social objects, which exist somewhere between the centre and the margins of the mediated social world, are constituted, among other ways, through language and images – in other words, through discourse. Unpacking these media representations by identifying the discursive tensions and power relations that underpin dominant trafficking narratives and exploring the broader political structures of oppression and violence could work to "expand the frame of visibility" (Ticktin, 2016, p. 267) of trafficked women in the media.

So, in the study of discourses that construe trafficked women as particular subjects, pity opens up an analytical space that moves beyond a binary understanding of victimhood and agency. This combination of a politicised approach to depicting suffering with an orientation to action is what renders a politics of pity a normative approach to studying media discourse. It also links the moral imagination of viewers to the mediation of victimhood and agency. As Chouliaraki explains, pity acts

discursively to produce meanings, so a politics of pity amounts to a "mobilisation of semiotic resources which constitute suffering and the spectator's involvement in it" (2004, p. 190). In this study, drawing on other critics, I propose that victimhood and agency can be seen as a dialectic, and that pity can help me to explore how trafficked women are depicted beyond the binary of victimhood and agency and what regimes of pity, that is, what possibilities for emotion, publics are oriented towards. To probe this binary, I suggest a look at vulnerability as a way to direct the study towards gender and thus probe the binary itself in order to unpack the discourses that constitute the figures of trafficked women and create hierarchies of victimhood.

In her analysis of television footage of the September 11 terror attack, Chouliaraki has explored how politics of pity operates in media discourse. In this paper she has analysed "how pity becomes 'eloquent' in modalities of emotion and dispositions to action, through the semiotic resources of television" (Chouliaraki, 2004, pp. 194–195). In other words, she reveals the possibilities of meaning of tender-heartedness and indignation. Other scholars have similarly explored how pity operates in media discourse (Aradau, 2004; Squire, 2015), probing the tensions between inequality and solidarity to reveal the ambiguities that emerge from the media's potential to politicise the plight of distant others (Squire, 2015, pp. 98–99). Since the early 2000s, trafficking and migration scholars have pursued similar lines of analysis, looking to media representations of trafficked women as victims and gendered subjects to examine the possibilities of meaning in media texts (see for instance Andrijasevic, 2007; Krsmanovic, 2016; Plambech, 2016). The particular attention to representations of trafficked women as gendered and also as racialised subjects is possibly sparked by the overrepresentation of trafficking for sexual exploitation in the media and an emphasis on women as ideal victims, as I have indicated in Chapter 1. The scholars who have examined media and policy discourse generally agree that such constructions constrain the possibilities of women's agency because they focus only on ideal victims of trafficking (on media representations see Andrijasevic, 2007, 2014; De Shalit, Heynen, & van Der Meulen, 2014; Kempadoo, 2015, 2016; on policy see Doezema, 2010; Hua & Nigorizawa, 2010; Russell, 2014; Segrave, Milivojevic, & Pickering, 2018; Wijers, 2015). These scholars thus critique both women's media representations as innocent, ideal victims, and the narratives (and policies that rely on these narratives) which fail to account for structural

inequalities in patriarchal systems of power because they fail to account for the tensions between victimhood and agency.

Two forms of politics can be distinguished here: a politics of representation regarding trafficking for sexual exploitation that has to do with the debate on whether sex work should be criminalised or decriminalised, and a politics of pity which precludes such a debate by settling the ways in which trafficked women appear in public through the predominant use of particular (in this case, as noted in the literature review, neo-abolitionist) discourses. In this thesis, my theoretical framework is geared towards examining the latter politics, while the former is noted as a critique of dominant media discourses. The politics of pity is the politics that describes how pity operates to mobilise particular emotions on behalf of trafficked women and what this means for women as suffering subjects. Nonetheless, let me elaborate on the former type of politics, which underlies the predominant forms of representation of trafficked women in the media. This refers to the well-established feminist debate on whether sex work should be criminalised or decriminalised.

Namely, underlying media depictions of trafficked women are largely neo-abolitionist interventions which include the genres of films, celebrity advocacy, and press journalism. The media texts and celebrities which I examine in this thesis fall largely into this category, which means that the forms of advocacy and commentary they put forward are embedded within a politics of the abolition of sex work and often promote the Swedish model as a policy to address sex work. This is a policy that sees sex work as violence against women and assumes that all sex workers wish to exit this industry, therefore criminalising the purchase of sexual services but not their sale (Lepp & Gerasimov, 2019, p. 3). In other words, these are social and cultural interventions that promote a politics which relies on a form of morality that perceives all sex work as sex trafficking and thus obscures a debate on the political potential of media texts to mobilise different views of trafficked women. What interests me in this thesis, and what my theoretical framework allows me to examine, are the possibilities of meaning that are proposed by the media texts under analysis and the kinds of gendered assumptions they rely upon. This is why, although the politics of representation that underlies media texts created by neo-abolitionist proponents and advocacy groups imbues the prevailing discourses themselves, the form of politics that I analyse here is the politics of pity or in other words, the

function of images as proposals for emotional engagement with trafficked women as subjects of suffering.

It is thus dominant victim constructions that I engage with here, but instead of starting from the binary of ideal victimhood or undeserving agency, I start from an open conception of who trafficked women are, but keeping in mind that they are gendered subjects generally portrayed as vulnerable to sex trafficking. I group the dominant representations, and, similarly to other studies that take up agency and ideal victimhood (Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017, p. 1166; Squire, 2015; Ticktin, 2011, p. 251), treat the depictions of trafficked women as open-ended practices of meaning-making and the media as a site where these identities are constituted. In this way, a politics of pity becomes a theory of the mediation of suffering that can serve to introduce nuance into the analysis of trafficked women's experiences and identities. Because I am interested in women as gendered subjects and because gender plays an important role in these women's experiences and in their oppression, feminist theory helps me to contextualise the analysis.

2.4. Pity, media and gender: The personal is political, but visibility is hierarchical

Since the 1970s, feminist critics have been exploring media and cultural imagery of women as a key site of critical engagement with issues of inequality, social oppression, and domination (Gill, 2007a, p. 7; Richardson & Wearing, 2014, p. 25). Stressing the significance of the role of media in the study of gender, Gill proposes that "most feminism in the West now happens in the media, and for the majority of people their experiences of feminism is an entirely mediated one" (Gill, 2007a, p. 40). Bearing in mind the limitations of a politics of pity as a framework for addressing the research questions I have posed about trafficked women in three media genres, post-structuralist feminist theory and an intersectional lens present a productive way to proceed. This framework supplies the analytical and theoretical tools needed to introduce gender, race and class into the analysis of media texts and to unpack the competing and contradictory proposals for meaning within the texts. The analytical and theoretical benefits of this particular approach are its ability to explain the observations made by trafficking and migration scholars about the prevalence of the ideal victim discourses and the resulting hierarchies of victimhood

and marginalisation of those trafficked women whose experiences do not fall within these dominant narratives. In practical terms, it provides a way to characterise and sort analytical categories in a way that goes beyond the binary of victimhood and agency as the only categories available for identifying who trafficked women are. Problematising prevailing trafficking narratives, in turn, brings attention to multiple narratives of vulnerability and agency and to different constellations of oppression. After reaching the limits of a politics of pity, I here explain how a gender-oriented, intersectional approach helps to direct my analysis, how the category of vulnerability helps to problematise the ideal victim discourse, and how a framework that takes into account gender, race and class works to expand regimes of pity.

As an analytical framework, a politics of pity does not offer a way of analysing different patterns of social oppression that converge in trafficked women as subjects of suffering. A Foucauldian-inspired approach to feminist media studies with an intersectional view towards trafficked women addresses this aspect of my research inquiry. That is, I accept the notion that gender is a discursive construct, as expressed in post-structuralist thought, as well as the related notion that gender is not the only dimension of identity constructed in discourse, and therefore that race and class are among the other categories which contribute to the constitution of social subjects (Crenshaw, 1991; Gill, 2007; Zoonen, 1994). The idea of gender as a social construct has been explored from different standpoints (including psychoanalysis), but in line with post-structuralist feminist media theorists, the notion I accept here is based on Rubin's critique of social relations. Like many other feminist critics, she considers gender to be shaped by ideology and sees it as socially constructed through cultural and historical processes where it is acquired by people through socialisation (Zoonen, 1994, p. 32). In this argument, women's oppression in society is a result of "sex/gender systems" whereby femininity and masculinity are ascribed to their corresponding biological sexes (female and male) which are thought to be consistent features of human identity. Rubin considers "this part of social life [to be] the locus of the oppression of women" (as well as of sexual minorities) (Rubin, 1975, p. 159). The result of this oppositional conception of gender is, in de Lauretis' influential argument, that it elides "the differences *within* women" (emphasis in original) (de Lauretis, 1989). Indeed, Rubin's theory was influential for the subsequent elucidation of a post-structuralist critique of gender as discourse seeing as she called

attention to the ways in which women are not only "oppressed *as* women," but are also "oppressed by having to *be* women" (emphasis in original) (Rubin, 1975, p. 204). This insight, according to Doane (1982), stresses the performative aspect of femininity, which enables a distance from media texts and opens the space for a critical analysis of gender (see also Richardson & Wearing, 2014, p. 24).

This is where the insights of postmodernism and post-structuralism, as epistemological models that challenge essentialist and universalist understandings come into play, because they are premised on a view of the social as (discursively) constructed. Foucault's thinking (alongside the thinking of other postmodern and post-structuralist theorists, both terms which he rejected with regard to his own work) was influential in identifying discourse as a site of conflict and contestation where ambiguous and contradictory possibilities of meaning exist in constant tension (Zoonen, 1994, p. 33). Many of his critiques of power and ideology remain influential for feminist media studies, but it is outside of the remit of this study to explore these in detail. Still, it is worth noting that one of the most significant insights for feminist media studies, as it relates to this thesis, is Foucault's analysis of the power-knowledge relationship. Knowledge, in this sense, is related to power inasmuch as it regulates the multiplicity of discursive elements which can transmit and produce power, but also undermine and expose its operation (Foucault, 1990, pp. 100–101). In this sense, the process of meaning-making is a truth effect, or a claim to power and truth, which also indicates that discourses are not fixed or stable, but that these techniques of power play out in the ways in which discourses are constantly reorganised and reutilised (Foucault, 1980, pp. 99–101, 1990). A contribution of this notion to feminist media studies is the insight that subjectivity, far from being unitary, is fragmented and contradictory and that there is a constant struggle and negotiation occurring over the meanings of media texts (Gill, 2007a, p. 12; Richardson & Wearing, 2014, p. 27). Moreover, since resistance is interior to power, this struggle for meaning which is inherent to any power relation is fraught with possibilities for "a plurality of resistances" (Foucault, 1990, p. 96). This highlights the conditional freedom of the spectator of media texts inasmuch as texts make a variety of fragmented proposals for subjectivity, that is personal interiority, for trafficked women, including opportunities for resistance.

The insights of a Foucauldian approach – that gender is constituted in discourse and that media texts are sites of contestation of meaning – are central for the feminist analysis of media texts, but the insights of this approach also bring about the notion that feminist concerns coexist with wider social oppressions. In other words, gender is not the only identity category that constructs trafficked women in media discourse. An epistemology that takes up the task of determining how inclusions and exclusions that occur in light of the co-existence of multiple identity categories operate within media texts is intersectionality. As an epistemology, intersectionality was used by feminist scholars for decades under similar definitions and different terminology, and it was Crenshaw (1991) who coined the term. Since the early 2000s, intersectionality has been widely used as an analytic approach and critical praxis (Collins, 2015, pp. 6–7; Noble & Tynes, 2016, p. 3), and has profoundly shaped feminist media studies. As Crenshaw explains in the context of women of colour, intersectionality is a way of explaining how gender, race, class and other identity categories create difference within groups and thereby produce "intersecting patterns" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1243) of marginalisation. In other words, gender, race, class as well as other identity dimensions such as age and sexuality "intersect in shaping structural, political, and representational aspects of violence against women" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1244). This framework allows me to examine media representations of a group of women whose experiences of sex trafficking provide the context of their appearance in public space, but whose gender (and race, class and potentially other categories) have an impact on how worthy of public pity they are, in media discourse, constructed as being. These differences, in other words, situate them differently on a victimhood hierarchy and, as Collins (2000, p. 18) argues in her discussion of black feminist scholarship, it is the intersectional paradigm that provides the tools to examine how various forms of oppression work together.

This Foucauldian-inspired approach that focuses on subjectivity and intersecting forms of oppression allows me to emphasise that trafficked women emerge as particular subjects in media texts. The dominant discourses of trafficked women, as I demonstrate in Chapter 1, are those of ideal victims. This image is constructed through an emphasis on various forms of trafficked women's vulnerability and it produces hierarchies of victimhood where only particular

configurations of discourse produce ideal victims. Indeed, ideal victims are those who do not show agency and instead are only associated with discourses of victimhood and vulnerability. This conceptual framework allows me to go beyond the discourses of ideal victimhood, and to unpack the complex interaction of discourses that construct trafficked women in media texts. To that end, I now turn to a brief overview of vulnerability and ambivalence, as terms used in both feminist (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Orgad, 2012) and media studies (Bauman, 1990; Silverstone, 2007), that allow me to look at how trafficked women's vulnerability becomes eloquent through their bodies and actions in media discourse.

As I indicate in Chapter 1, recent media representations of trafficked women generally frame them as sufferers and therefore evoke emotional responses in audiences which lean in the direction of sympathetic care. There is, in other words, a set of social conditions (not biological ones) that renders women and other socially disadvantaged groups vulnerable, and media representations selectively draw on these conditions in order to explain why they are deserving of public care. This constitutes the relationship between vulnerability and pity and is the reason I refer to trafficked women as sufferers, that is distant others who are removed from the safety of the spectator[4]. As I also indicate in the review of literature, media depictions of trafficked women as vulnerable subjects rest on the visual and linguistic tropes of innocence, youth and purity, with an emphasis on sexual coercion, lack of individual voice, and references to "sex slavery" and "modern slavery". These tropes, in turn, are rooted in a politics of gender and race where femininity is associated with weakness and virtue, and where historical associations with colonial slavery (alongside the sexual othering of black bodies) are drawn upon in order to emphasise the severity of exploitation. Notably, therefore, these discourses are laden with social and political orders and meanings "which rely on figures of victimhood that assume that those who are vulnerable are therefore without agency or can be summarized by

[4] As with pity, although trafficked women are generally constructed as sufferers, this does not mean that they are constructed as such in all media representations. My use of the term "sufferers" to refer to trafficked women is based upon previous studies of media representations of trafficked women which indicate that they are largely constructed as vulnerable and as ideal victims (Baker, 2014; Matthews, 2015; O'Brien, 2016), a significant part of which is related to their gender and sexuality (Andrijasevic & Mai, 2016; de Villiers, 2016; Sanford, Martínez, & Weitzer, 2016; Saunders, 2005). These studies also indicate that, because sex trafficking is a crime, knowledge about it is not generally accessible to publics other than through media depictions (Johnston, Friedman, & Sobel, 2015), hence they can be characterised as subjects of distant suffering.

categories that figure them as essentially without agency" (Butler et al., 2016a, p. 2). But while these constitute the dominant representations of trafficked women, critical migration and trafficking scholars have pointed to the simultaneous marginalisation of forms of vulnerability that do not conform to the ideal victim discourse including vulnerabilities associated with agentive moves such as migration and sex work (Andrijasevic & Mai, 2016; Marchionni, 2012; Stiles, 2018). Thus, two elements become salient in analysing trafficked women as subjects of pity: first, how vulnerability becomes gendered in the genres I explore, and second, how trafficked women emerge as subjects of pity through the textual (linguistic and visual) strategies of agency.

Vulnerability has received much critical attention in feminist theory as well as in moral and political theory as a study of those people who are more than usually vulnerable, thus not as a purely ontological condition inherent in all human bodies (for the ontological position see Butler, 2004; for an overview of feminist study of vulnerability see Mackenzie, Rogers, & Dodds, 2014). The most useful for this thesis are feminist explorations of vulnerability as politically produced, unequally distributed, and as a site of the operation of power, which situates vulnerability in a relationship with resistance and thereby leaves open the possibility of agency (see for instance Butler et al., 2016b). Vulnerability, according to this line of inquiry, is produced in social and political domains rather than constituted in women's bodies, but the body is the site where the relationship between vulnerability and agency is both constellated and challenged (Butler, 2016; Tzelepis, 2016). Embodied vulnerability thus draws attention to the site – the body – where marginalisation and violence take place, and where political agency emerges as a possibility (Switzer, Bent, & Endsley, 2016). Thus, vulnerability has been a focal point of post-structuralist feminist scholars and legal theory scholars (Oliviero, 2016), who have worked to introduce nuance into the binary of vulnerability and agency through an intersectional context, and have done this by questioning assumptions about the inherent vulnerability of women and other socially disadvantaged groups, and problematising the notion of agency as free choice thereby problematising the opposition between vulnerability and agency (Butler et al., 2016b; Mackenzie et al., 2014b; Madhok & Rai, 2012). Additionally, although they acknowledge that vulnerability remains always in danger of evoking protectionist and paternalistic

forms of power and violence, these scholars nonetheless assert the importance of the political potential of vulnerability (Butler et al., 2016b; Mackenzie et al., 2014b; Oliviero, 2016).

Whether by bringing attention to what is being excluded through antagonism towards what is being resisted (Sabsay, 2016), through the performativity of bodies in alliance (Butler, 2011, 2016), the performativity on the body itself (Tzelepis, 2016), or in other ways that concentrate on this condition, vulnerability is seen as a political domain that facilitates an analysis of how violence is expressed on the body and how agency emerges within conditions of vulnerability. This focus on how vulnerability is expressed through the body and agency allows me to analyse the tensions and contradictions in the discursive manifestations of trafficked women in the media and therefore to look beyond the binary relationship between ideal victimhood and agency as it is assumed in dominant representations of trafficked women. Without questioning the corporeal nature of the body's material reality (since I here explore trafficked women as they are represented in media texts), I rely on Butler for a conception of the body (Butler, 2016, p. 21). Remaining within the remit of performativity, her conceptualisation (which also applies to public assembly) can be adapted to describe the body in relation to vulnerability in media texts. In this view, the body is seen as related to social structures, which foregrounds its dependence on social conditions. Thus "embodiment is both performative and relational" because it includes within it the structural and discursive relations of power which play out at the level of the text. In this vein, the embodiment of vulnerability facilitates a look beyond the binary between victimhood (which implies passive subjects) and agency (which implies active subjects). Equally, agency here is not just "free choice". It is, as Madhok argues, present in small acts such as "critical reflections, motivations, desires, and aspects of ethical activity" (Madhok, 2013a). In other words I accept a view of agency as a "socio-culturally situated capacity for action" (Mai, 2018, p. xiv), or as located within ethical and political conditions that impact the meanings that these actions acquire (Mahmood, 2005, p. 9). This is a view consistent with Boltanski's observation that structure and agency are fluid concepts that are neither positive nor negative, but instead serve as analytical categories that allow for a nuanced interpretation of how power operates in discourse, in this case in media texts (Boltanski, Honneth, & Celikates, 2014).

The tension between vulnerability and agency is a key discursive domain within which trafficked women's worthiness as victims is constellated and consequently, it has been explored in many studies on the topic of trafficking (Ligaga, 2019; O'Brien, Carpenter, et al., 2013; Serughetti, 2018; Sharma, 2005; Wilson & O'Brien, 2016). These authors explore how, on the one hand, vulnerability to sex trafficking is mobilised to construct ideal victimhood, while obscuring other forms of vulnerability such as poverty, violence, labour exploitation, and immigration and border regimes, and in turn, construing smuggling and migratory activity as agency associated with "bad" victimhood. On the other hand, they note that the recognition of this kind of vulnerability functions coercively, as women are subjected to deportation and other containment practices (Cojocaru, 2016; Desyllas, 2007; Hua & Nigorizawa, 2010; Kempadoo, 2016). Migration and trafficking scholars working in the area of smuggling and migrant sex work have thus noted vulnerability's productive possibilities and I follow in their footsteps here. Therefore, by unpacking the complex set of discourses embedded in bodily and agentive experience of migration and sexual exploitation, both feminist scholars and critical migration scholars (Mai, 2018; Sanchez, 2017; Zhang, Sanchez, & Achilli, 2018) demonstrate that vulnerability is connected to a gendered and structural logic consolidated at the level of the semiotic text – in the case of this thesis, in the genres of film, advocacy and journalism.

While vulnerability provides a way to identify the possibilities of meaning that arise from women's embodiment and agency as they are represented in media texts, ambivalence helps to describe the productive possibilities of this space. In problematising the relationship between victimhood and agency, using intersectional critiques of social structures and neoliberalism, feminist and migration scholars have arrived at the notion of *ambivalence* as a productive affective register. Ambivalence has been theorised in social psychology and sociology as an experience of "opposing affective orientations toward the same person, object, or symbol" and it therefore represents an unstable constellation of feelings and affects experienced by social actors (Smelser, 1998, p. 5).[5] According to trafficking and migration scholars,

[5] Ambivalence as a concept dates back to the early twentieth century. It has its roots in psychoanalysis, psychology, and sociology and, for the purposes of this study, was usefully conceptualised by social psychologist Neil Smelser (1998) and sociologist Robert Merton (1976) (albeit in slightly differing ways) to describe the simultaneous embrace and rejection of objects or

ambivalence accounts for the different gender identities and subjectivities embodied simultaneously by women who are represented as having been trafficked (Andrijasevic, 2014; Breuil et al., 2011; Jacobsen & Stenvoll, 2010; Leser & Pates, 2019; Mai, 2013, 2014; Plambech, 2014, 2017; Yea, 2012). It therefore describes the unresolved tensions which exist in the representations of trafficked women referred to earlier.

On a discursive level, ambivalence describes the complexity that exists between vulnerability and agency, which is in line with the conceptions of vulnerability as a productive register (Mackenzie, 2014). According to Bauman (1990), it is a hermeneutical problem characterised by a resistance of signifiers to resolving meanings and thereby enabling knowledge and action. Ambivalence, this argument goes, replaces order with suspicion and forces the viewer to risk "behavioural paralysis which follows the failure of classificatory ability" (Bauman, 1990, p. 146). Feminist scholars have likewise noted the productive abilities of ambivalence due precisely to the productive uncertainty it introduces into discourse (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Oliviero, 2016). At the risk of misrecognition and danger, ambivalence carries the potential to disturb dominant meanings and thereby introduce into daily life nuance and complexity, or what Bauman calls "grey areas", which ultimately have the potential to shift boundaries (1990, p. 147). Thus, for the purposes of this study, ambivalence accounts for the tensions within the representations of trafficked women which, as shown in the review of literature, cannot be encompassed by dominant trafficking discourses. In other words, ambivalence becomes a productive register to describe the fragmented and contradictory discourses that underpin the media constructions of trafficked women, especially those who are constructed as not belonging to the ideal victim category.

norms due to social structures which dictate social norms and thereby cause feelings of ambivalence in those people who, at various points in their lives and for a range of reasons, come to hold contradictory feelings. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1990) considered it a product of modernity's boundary work, in which ambivalence describes a presence of strangers that resists classification. It has been taken up by media (Silverstone, 2007), gender (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Oliviero, 2016; Orgad, 2012), and migration scholars (Kivisto & Vecchia-Mikkola, 2013; Tazreiter, 2019) to describe precisely this feeling of inability to conform to social norms because these norms contain conflicting expectations of actors, causing feelings of uncertainty. Equally, it can refer to the work of representation where actors are described in terms of ambivalence, which is neither good nor bad, but can be productive because it exposes the contradictory nature of these representations.

In the chapters that follow, I analyse three media genres that, similarly to the studies outlined above, analytically engage the tension between vulnerability and agency as a productive discursive domain that contributes to trafficked women's construction as worthy of emotional and moral engagement. Since I am interested in how this process occurs across a variety of media texts I analyse three media genres which represent distinct but overlapping institutional logics: film, celebrity advocacy, and newspaper journalism. As I explain in the next chapter, to explore these genres, I carried out an analysis of media texts using the analytics of mediation, which combines multimodality and CDA as approaches. This methodological framework corresponds to my interest in analysing how gender and other intersectional categories are produced, resisted and countered in discourse through representations and social practices within multimodal media texts. Using this approach I was able to identify the kinds of moral and emotional meanings that were activated in media texts with regard to trafficked women as suffering subjects. The analytics of mediation as an approach to data also allowed me to locate the place of ambivalence as a productive register within media texts.

Chapter Three: Analytics of Mediation: A Multimodal Approach to Analysing Media Representations of Trafficked Women

3.1. Introduction

In this study I analyse representations of trafficked women as subjects of pity in three media genres. I examine how trafficked women are constructed as subjects in media texts and how these discourses orientate audiences' sensibilities towards them. Since I needed an approach that would be attuned to the meaning-making function of media texts, discourse analysis was the clear method of choice. The *analytics of mediation*, a textual analysis conceptualised by Chouliaraki (2006b, 2008a, 2013), provided the necessary approach. The analytics of mediation employs multimodal analysis and critical discourse analysis (CDA) to address power as Foucault's "double economy of freedom and subjectification" – that is, the agency of the media text to represent identities, relationships and public orientations towards others (Chouliaraki, 2008a). Specifically, the analytics of mediation is attuned to the "semiotic mode of the image" as a site of meaning-making, in combination with an analysis of power relations played out at the level of the text through the key functions of language – that is, the ideational and the representational functions (Chouliaraki, 2008a). This type of analysis equipped me with the tools to analyse the semiotic mode of media texts – that is film, celebrity advocacy and newspaper journalism as separate modes with their own internal logics – as well as how the visual and linguistic choices in these texts represent reality, and how they orientate viewers towards the world (Iedema, 2001, p. 191). Before specifying these categories, I first specify below the role of language, discourse and CDA, after which I explain my approach to language and image as semiotic modes. After this, I explain my choice of the analytics of mediation by exploring the usefulness of multimodality and CDA as approaches to data, and the use of embodiment and agency, which are the theory-derived categories of analysis discussed in Chapter 2. Then I turn to an outline of the genres under analysis, as well as the processes of data selection and of data collection.

Language is a bounded system of meaning that serves to name the social world. In the early 20th century, Ferdinand de Saussure, an influential figure in the epistemology of language, conceptualised it as a semiotic system, arguing that "language is a system of signs expressing ideas" and thus a "social institution"

(Saussure, 1986, p. 15). From this notion of language as a system of meaning, Saussure developed semiotics as a "science which studies the role of signs in social life" – a field that is now broad and varied – within which I here focus on discourse (Saussure, 1986, p. 15). The social use of language, built on the notion that language is not a neutral way of describing the social world, is known as discourse (Gill, 2000, p 172). It is built on pre-existing linguistic resources, which include "terms, narrative forms, metaphors and commonplaces from which a particular account can be assembled" (Potter et al., 1990, quoted by Gill, 2000, p. 174), and it both reflects social reality through language and image, and constitutes it by creating possibilities for action and views of the world (Gill, 2000, p. 174). Discourse therefore positions people as social subjects, inasmuch as it assumes the view that knowledge is socially constructed (Matheson, 2005, p. 4).

This view of discourse as constitutive of social reality is in line with postmodernist social theories, and more precisely with post-structuralist theories where subject and social world are theorised from the standpoint of discourse, which is a theoretical backing I adopt in this thesis (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 89). Most notably, it is based on Foucault's theory of power-knowledge, whereby "our sense of self is made through the operation of discourse", and it is discourse that, through the exercise of power, "disciplines subjects into certain ways of thinking and acting" (Rose, 2007, p. 143). In Foucauldian analysis, the view of "discourse as a social construction of reality, a form of knowledge" is central to the analysis of language as a system of meaning that shapes social reality (Fairclough, 1995, p.18).

Within this post-structuralist remit, discourse analysis is the analysis of language as a meaning-making mechanism that constitutes social reality and is situated within a particular social context and particular relations of power (Hall, 1997, p. 220). Critical discourse analysis as a method draws on the critical theories of late modernity, where language occupies a central role in the study of social life. CDA originated in the 1970s as the study of discourse and text with a recognition that language is a crucial element in the structures of power relations in society. This "attention to texts, their production and interpretation and their relation to societal impulses and structures" was first known as critical linguistics (Wodak, 2001, p. 5). After some development, in the 1990s the term critical discourse analysis came to describe the varied set of theories that describe this distinct theory of language.

Although CDA is a complex set of approaches without a unified theory, all CDA approaches share the same basic principles, some of which correspond closely to my interests in this thesis. These principles include the notion that, in the social world, specific meanings and values are attached to individuals, institutions, and social groups, and that these are meaningfully and systematically expressed in language. CDA also presupposes that texts are meaningful units of language in communication, and that readers and viewers are not simply passive recipients of information but actively engage in a relationship with the text (Wodak, 2001, p. 6). These basic principles describe the appropriateness of CDA as an analytical approach to my data, because they correspond to my interest in trafficked women as social subjects constituted in media texts within three media genres (contextualised through a feminist focus on subjectivity and a view to the intersection of identity categories), as well as to the agency of discourse within media texts and its ability to orientate audiences' sensibilities towards trafficked women as subjects (contextualised through a politics of pity as a social construction of public emotion towards distant others).

Because it is aimed at deconstructing conventions stabilised by dominant structures and naturalised by effects of power and ideology that exist behind the production of meaning (Wodak, 2001, p. 3), CDA is particularly well suited to combination with feminist theory. More generally, it is the political and social emancipatory goals both of CDA and of feminism that make them compatible – they are both politically attuned approaches organised around the analysis of social practices and language structures (Lazar, 2005, p. 4). In this context, CDA can be used to examine how gender and other intersectional categories are discursively produced, resisted and countered through representations and social practices (Lazar, 2007, p. 149). All in all, feminist CDA provides a way to analyse discourse as a double economy of meaning because, as Lazar (2007, 150) notes:

> The interest of feminist CDA lies in how gender ideology and gendered relations of power get (re)produced, negotiated, and contested in representations of social practices, in social relationships between people, and in people's social and personal identities in texts and talk.

Most significantly therefore, CDA and feminist studies share a commitment to the "postmodernist decentering of essential identities" and a feminist concern with the

political, even though the relationship itself is not without some tensions (for an overview of the compatibility and tensions between CDA and feminism, see Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 91). And because they look in the direction of gender and difference as struggles over identity, feminist approaches are well suited to critical discourse analysis. Namely, they share an analytical and normative interest firstly in situating gender in institutional contexts and examining how gender as a category creates hierarchical differences between people, and secondly in contributing to these social struggles by identifying the potential of these categories to create dialogue (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 96). Such a discourse-based approach can account for difference because it allows for an analysis of power relations that exist within and outside texts but that play out on the level of media texts, thus accounting for the social constructions of gender, race and class (G. Rose, 2001).

As an approach to the study of social life, CDA does not subscribe exclusively to any theory but does focus on late modernity "as a field of critical research which is also a field of contention between theories" (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 75). As Fairclough (1992, p. 269) describes, "the priority for critical discourse analysis in contemporary society is understanding how changing practices of language use (discourse) connect with (e.g., partly constitute) wider processes of social and cultural change". Within the varied set of approaches that constitutes CDA, I use – as noted earlier – the approach conceptualised by Chouliaraki as the *analytics of mediation*. This particular approach is useful for my study because it is attuned to media texts and because of its focus on what Chouliaraki calls difference within and outside the semiotic (Chouliaraki, 2006b, 2008a).

In terms of *media texts*, in this study I am interested in both the linguistic and the visual modes, both of which are attended to by the analytics of mediation as an approach created particularly to suit this multimodal purpose. The reason I am interested in media discourse is because language and images, both of which are semiotic resources and elements of discourse, are the main forms of communication through which large audiences come into contact with trafficked women, and are therefore key sites where – through a power struggle between competing meanings – they are constituted in public imagination. My choice to study media discourse, then,

describes the site (media genres) and the method (discourse analysis of language and images) of analysis.

In terms of difference outside and within the semiotic, this corresponds to the approaches to analysis employed in the analytics of mediation, which includes both *multimodality* and *CDA*. In general (though not exclusively), the difference within the semiotic helps me to analyse how trafficked women are embodied as subjects, while the difference outside the semiotic helps me to analyse both agency as it is exercised by various actors in media texts and the agency of the media text to orientate publics towards trafficked women. The contours of both approaches are sketched above and in what follows I describe how I operationalise these approaches for the analytical needs of my thesis, that is how these approaches correspond to the categories of analysis discussed in Chapter 2: embodiment and agency. This is because, as indicated above, the analytics of mediation (and its constituent approaches: multimodality and CDA) is a context-sensitive, theory-driven approach to analysis that provides tools for analysis and at the same time flexibility for the researcher to adapt the approach to her own research questions. Since my research questions centre around trafficked women as subjects of public pity, the categories of embodiment and agency are the key sites where the struggles for meaning take place.

In terms of *multimodality*, or difference within the semiotic, the categories of embodiment and agency are compatible with the analytics of mediation because multimodality "focuses on the way in which media technologies bring image and language together in hybrid texts" (Chouliaraki, 2008a). In this thesis I am interested in both language and image as different organised systems of meaning production, and in their different organisational structures as resources that can produce, remake and transform meanings (Kress, 2010, pp. 1–17). As Kress and van Leeuwen put it, language and image are "independently organised and structured messages", or connected but independent cultural resources used in conjunction to produce meanings in an online environment (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 17). The notion of the image here harks back to visual culture studies where visual images are discursive objects that construct identities and social subjects (Bal, 2005, p. 155). These media texts exist within the confines of genres and combine language and image in the social production of meaning. To clarify, genres (in the discursive sense, which is the way in which I refer to film, celebrity advocacy and newspaper

journalism) describe particular forms of activity, characterised by particular thematic content, style and compositional structure (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 49). This view of genre was proposed by Bakhtin (1986) and applied by Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) with regard to the study of discourse, and I also accept it here. Genres, then, constrain the ways in which discourses can be combined within a genre[6], and thus limit the scope of possibilities of meaning associated with any one media text.

Thus, the data to be analysed (which is described later in this chapter), is multimodal not only because it contains images and language, but inasmuch as these modes are mediated in an environment which has its own implications for what cultural, historical and social opportunities for use it offers to those who wish to communicate (Jewitt, 2013). This variety of modes, combined with the affordances of the online environment, makes the data multimodal, since multimodality is a "field of application" (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2010, p. 181) that concerns itself with interpreting varied forms of meaning-making and investigating the interaction between means of communication (Jewitt, 2013). As such, multimodality also serves to analyse the process of symbolic power, since it is concerned with the social and cultural processes of meaning-making (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2010). This social semiotic approach to multimodality allowed me to analyse media texts that exist within a field of possible meanings and symbolic relations imposed by the genres of film, celebrity advocacy and newspaper journalism. In the context of a politics of pity, the multimodality of data is the study of semiotic processes by which regimes of representation – in this case genres of pity – are created as coherent meanings, hiding the struggle for power that leads to coherence (Chouliaraki, 2006b, p. 74). Multimodal analysis thus allowed me to look at the embodiment and agency of trafficked women and to explore how discourses used to describe them unsettle and reshape genres, which is a process of particular concern in this study because, as I attempt to demonstrate, each of the three media genres opens different affordances for the construction of trafficked women as subjects (on multimodality and genre,

[6] This ability of genre to constrain discourses is a complex process, described by Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999, pp. 37–52) through Kristeva's (1986) notion of *intertextuality*, that is the "general property of discourse capable of being manifest in many forms", as well as through *interdiscursivity*, that is the combination within a single genre of discourses associated with different genres (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 49).

see Jewitt, 2001, p. 135). Each of the empirical chapters presents the analysis of one genre, and each genre contains a number of tropes that characterise the ways in which trafficked women appear in media texts. A trope here represents a means to describe the overlapping and contextualised "concrete manifestations of [properties] in [individuals]" or objects (Moltmann, 2009, p. 52), which emerged from data analysis.

In terms of *CDA*, or difference outside the semiotic, the categories of embodiment and agency are compatible with the analytics of mediation because they also help to describe what proposals for feeling media texts offer to audiences. That is, this approach attends to the *representations* and *orientations* that are functions of language and images as semiotic modes. This function can be called the agency of discourse to orientate viewers' sensibilities towards trafficked women and, as I already suggested on the basis of late modern theory of discourse, discourses frame the social field of sensibilities, offering spectators a finite array of identities and emotions (Boltanski, 1999, pp. 57–76). For example, Boltanski notes the ability of discourse to change the subject position of a spectator of suffering from pity to indignation to denunciation to accusation, depending on how the sufferer is positioned in relation to the persecutor. Different discursive practices can thus propose to spectators feelings as varied as denunciation, sentiment or pleasure depending on how the spectacle of suffering is framed (Boltanski, 1999, pp. 70–76). This approach thus helped me to explore how media texts facilitate struggle and contestations of voices and meanings, a process that occurs on the level of semiosis – through language and images – in this case language and images that educate publics about who trafficked women are as subjects of violence. It also allowed me to explore how media texts orientate public sensibilities towards trafficked women because, as Georgiou observes, the media do not represent a pre-existing reality, but are constitutive elements of meaning production about self and other (Georgiou, 2012, p. 791). This means that the identities of trafficked women constructed in the media are forms of imaginary that dominate media texts, not that these texts are exhaustive depictions of all possible scenarios and identities that trafficked women embody, or that these depictions are represented equally.

3.2. Operationalising the analytics of mediation: Categories and questions for analysis

As mentioned above, CDA is not unified but a context-specific and historically sensitive approach to analysing social power relations. Accordingly, rather than imposing its own categories and definitions, CDA allows for the research questions and media technologies under analysis to dictate how the categories of representation and orientation will be operationalised in an analysis (Chouliaraki, 2008a). These differences, outside and within the semiotic, or attention to the semiotic, ideational and representational functions of language, allowed me to pose particular questions to guide the analysis of data. These questions were geared to embodiment and agency as categories of analysis that correspond to multimodal- and CDA-driven approaches. They were asked in order to probe embodiment (questions of gender, race and class) and agency (what agency is assigned to different characters).

Specifically, this means that neither CDA nor multimodality are employed fully and exclusively as separate methods and then amalgamated into one, but that elements of each come together to comprise a self-contained, eclectic, theory-driven method that is the analytics of mediation. This method calls for analytical tools that stem from the theoretical overview of the study in combination with categories of analysis that emerge from the theory and critical literature used in the study. These provide the scope of the study (the framework of pity and gender), the analytical tools used to analyse data (embodiment and agency), and the questions that guide this analysis (provided at the end of this section). On the one hand, as a method inextricable from theory, it was the politics of pity and the specific lens of gender that provided the essential guidance for operationalising the method. The questions for analysis, outlined below, look to media depictions of trafficked women as mechanisms for eliciting emotion in publics. More specifically, based on critiques of anti-trafficking campaigns which unpack the discourses that dominate depictions of trafficked women in the media, the framework of pity asks what kinds of moral education these discourses propose to audiences. The key insight from CDA is therefore its focus on identifying the power relations that underpin prevailing discourses that construct trafficked women as sufferers in the context of gender and the broader political structures of oppression that impact the visibility of these women in the media. Meanwhile, the key insight from multimodal analysis is the

focus on visuality, that is, the process of meaning-making by which subjects are variously constructed in media texts (as conceived in Chouliaraki and Stolic, 2017, p. 1166). As Mirzoeff (2006, p. 76) states, visuality refers to the "politics of representation" where a semiotic struggle over who is represented and how takes place. This analytical scope can be observed in previous studies of humanitarian communication and distant suffering in the media (see for instance Arthurs, 2012; Chouliaraki, 2013; Squire, 2015). Further, the analysis pertains specifically to women as subjects of anti-trafficking efforts where criticism has largely centred around women's victimhood and agency and thus on how women's agency is constrained due to a reliance on the hierarchy of victimhood in their media representations (see for instance critiques by Andrijasevic, 2007; Aradau, 2004; Arthurs, 2012; De Shalit, Heynen & van Der Meulen, 2014; Doezema, 2009; Kempadoo, 2015; O'Connell Davidson, 2016).

On the other hand, in addition to this theory-derived narrowing of the focus of analysis, the analytical categories of *embodiment* and *agency* further specify the scope of analysis and the questions that guide it. These categories are derived from the literature review. According to critics (as detailed in section *1.2 Trafficked women in the media*), depictions of trafficked women in the media are characterised by a focus on elements of women's bodies (illustrations of youth and purity, focus on violence on women's bodies, their rescue and removal from brothels, replacement of women with other actors) and their agency (discourses of innocence and naivety, moral frames regarding sex work and assumptions of desire to exit the sex industry, and lack of trafficked women's voices in media), These two categories for analysis thus emerged as the most relevant ones to explore because they address the key aspects of the research question: when trafficked women emerge in media discourse, how is it that they are portrayed? Thus, how they are embodied and how their agentive presence is constructed are the two key elements of this inquiry. In terms of theory, both of these categories are related to vulnerability as expressed in feminist literature (as I elaborate in section 2.2.1), so the analysis is related to an exploration of how violence is expressed on the body and how agency emerges under these conditions, which is also why vulnerability becomes a key analytical insight of the thesis and a subject in the Findings chapter (section 7.2.4). This theorisation and rationale for the analytics of mediation, as well as the technique of analysing data

using guiding questions, corresponds to what Chouliaraki has theorised and done as analytics of mediation in her own work (2006, p. 70–96).

Considering this method of analysis is accompanied by a case study approach to data selection, according to Flyvbjerg (2006, p. 235), the validity of method can be substantiated by reflecting on the results of the analysis in the context of the research theory and literature. According to Flyvbjerg, the material of the case under analysis often necessitates explanation through multiple theories or requires the researcher to report that their preconceived views and assumptions about the study have compelled them to revise their essential points. This kind of validity is possible to establish in this study, since not only does it require the use of multiple theories via an expansion of a politics of pity in the direction of gender in order to analyse the material in the first place, but the analysis also yielded the category of ambivalence to explain the results in addition to the notion of vulnerability which was present from the beginning with regard to trafficked women as distant sufferers and subjects of oppression.

Additionally, the guiding analytical questions make it possible to determine whether and how the representations of trafficked women are positioned in relation to the ideal victim discourse that I have, in Chapter 2, identified as the prevailing way of constructing trafficked women in the media. I refer to this ability of media discourse to categorise victims in relation to the ideal victim as the hierarchy of victimhood. This refers to the higher status in crime discourse that victims who are seen as weak, vulnerable, innocent, or deserving of public care and compassion enjoy compared to others (Carrabine, 2014, p. 157; Christie, 1986; Gregoriou, 2012; Walklate, 2011, p. 189). Historically, the social, cultural, and political power of this image translated into some victims being seen as deserving and therefore being assigned higher victim status (Walklate, 2011). The prevalence of this discourse has been well documented by feminist scholars who have noted the detrimental effect of this stereotype in relation to victims of sexual and domestic violence who tend to be categorised as either “innocent” or “blameworthy” (Zedner, 1991). In the media, descriptions where women are on the one hand seen as victims of horrific violence and on the other as responsible or guilty for the violence, are pervasive and have had a role in sustaining the victim hierarchy as well as the ambivalent place of women as victims of violence (Carrabine, 2014, p. 157; Gill, 2000, pp. 136–145). Analysing

embodiment and agency in relation to the victim hierarchy, then, contextualises the intersectional feminist analysis of trafficked women as subjects of care. Taking into consideration the tools of analysis provided by the analytics of mediation, in the study I thus seek to unpack the possibilities of meaning about trafficked women present in the visual configurations that emerge from the analysis (as seen in Chouliaraki and Stolic, 2017, pp. 1165-1167).

The following questions for analysis are adapted from Kaplan's (1988, pp. 60-72) discussion of the struggle for women's embodied discourse and sexuality in film, from Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006, pp. 175–214) visual analysis of discourse, and from Chouliaraki's (2006a, pp. 84–89) questions concerning the space/time dimension of discourse and agency in the ways in which media texts orientate viewers towards subjects of suffering.

Questions to address agency:

- How do spectators get to know the trafficked women? Through image, speech, narration?
- Who speaks and acts, and what do they say?
- What kinds of gendered displays are depicted? Are women objectified, sexualised, agentive (acting on own behalf), passive or active?
- What are the social circumstances the trafficked women come from and (how) does this affect their depictions?
- How are poverty, career advance, social status, the self, success depicted in relation to trafficked women?
- Who is positioned as responsible for alleviating the suffering of trafficked women? How is this (personal) responsibility invoked? What forms of emotional engagement do the representations of women propose to audiences?
- If the woman has agency, what are the consequences of her choices, independence, desire, exploration, resistance?
- Are female sexuality and agency controlled? By whom? Are there psychological or physical constraints on women's bodies and actions?

Questions to address embodiment:

- How are the bodies of trafficked women depicted?

- How are trafficked women embodied? Are their characters developed in depth? Do their actions and identities coalesce into a coherent whole?
- How are the characters of trafficked woman depicted? Are they idealised in character or body? Flawed? Infantilised?
- What is the race of the trafficked women, and how does their race portrayal shape their subjectivities?
- What cultural, political, and social space are trafficked women shown in? How does this relate to intersectional categories that describe them?
- What is the historical context of the story? What is the women's socio-economic, cultural, family, relationship to their home countries?
- What propositional assumptions are made about the life circumstances that led women to trafficking?

Importantly, these questions were posed in order to begin my analysis, but they were guiding questions only, and as the analysis progressed the questions changed, gaining and losing relevance depending on the topics that emerged as analytically salient.

3.3. The choice of countries, their human trafficking policies, and the relevance of analysing three media genres

The examples of media texts for analysis were chosen from the United States and the United Kingdom, as countries that share similar media landscapes[7] and where sex trafficking has been a subject on the agenda of both media outlets and policymakers in recent years. But, more importantly, when it comes to representations of trafficked women in the media, many of the same discourses dominate media depictions in both geographical areas. First, both countries are signatories to the Palermo Protocol, although they have adopted different approaches to sex work, which is largely illegal in the US save for a few counties in the state of Nevada, while the UK subscribes to

[7] The UK and the US are considered to be developed Western democracies and the media landscapes of the two countries are generally dominated by a partisan mass-circulation press combined with a system of public service broadcasting. They also share a similar position in terms of press freedom. On the World Press Freedom Index 2018, the UK ranked 40 while the US ranked 45 out of 180 countries (Reporters Without Borders, 2019). In terms of information and entertainment media, television remains an important medium in both countries, and the national broadcast networks remain strong, but are steadily being challenged by new media (Firmstone, 2019; Hallin, 2019).

a model where selling sex is not illegal. However, the purchase of sexual services was criminalised in Northern Ireland whereas buying sex from someone 'subjected to force' is a punishable offence in England and Wales, and sex workers sharing a place of work for safety is illegal since that is considered to be a brothel (Chapman-Schmidt, 2019). In both countries, new legislation that addresses human trafficking has come into force in the last five years. In the UK the Modern Slavery Act 2015 consolidates offences related to "trafficking and slavery" into a single piece of legislation (Theresa May & Lord Bates, 2015). It utilises the language of "modern slavery", which is a term I have discussed earlier as imbued in abolitionist rhetoric and which lacks conceptual clarity and consistency of meaning (Broad & Turnbull, 2019, p. 128). One example of this is that, in the Act, trafficking is labelled as slavery and forced labour is conflated with trafficking. This language reveals the moral frames that are rooted in the history of the notion of "modern slavery" that sought to protect pure white girls from exploitation (Broad & Turnbull, 2019, p. 128). The Modern Slavery Act was meant to prevent exploitation but the mechanism has been criticised for failing to provide the basic support system that would facilitate people's attempts to recover from trauma and build a "life after trafficking" due to its heavy anti-migration focus and the avoidance of providing ways in which trafficked people might gain a chance to stay in the UK (Roberts, 2018, p. 165). In the US the FOSTA-SESTA bills came into force in 2017 and 2018 with the purpose of making websites criminally liable for hosting content potentially linked to human trafficking (Wagner, 2018). These events have been followed by a variety of media activity on trafficking, including the film *Doing Money* (2018), analysed in Chapter 4, which recounts the experience of – and was made in collaboration with – Anna, a survivor of human trafficking who also gave testimony in relation to the Modern Slavery Act. Similarly, in the US the passage of FOSTA-SESTA into law prompted media coverage and academic research on the impact of this bill on sex workers and the ways in which it excludes vulnerable people from protections derived from facilitating sex work online, as well as debates about online privacy and media corporations' responsibility regarding content moderation (Chapman-Schmidt, 2019). Combined with the visibility and continued presence of the topic of the European migration "crisis" in UK media, which started in 2015, in the past decade trafficking for sexual exploitation has retained the interest of not only policymakers but also the media. The two countries are therefore similar enough to be placed in the

same category of analysis, but represent different geographical examples. The data I have analysed in this study, which reflects the dominant discourses that are used to construct trafficked women in the media, also corresponds closely to the language and underlying assumptions of these policies. These include the language of modern slavery, a focus on anti-migration policies, and the notion that sex work cannot constitute a choice but is considered to be trafficking.

Second, the constructions of trafficked women in the media are similar in these two countries. As demonstrated in the review of literature on trafficked women in Chapter 1, recent analyses of media representations of trafficked women in the UK and the US indicate that the depictions of trafficked women in the media of the two countries share many of the same discourses when it comes to constructing trafficked women as subjects. These include the "ideal victim" portrayals that focus on women's youth and innocence as sources of vulnerability, the moral frames relating to sex work, the language of "modern slavery" and "sex slavery", and the rescue and abolitionist narratives put forward as solutions to trafficking (for studies of UK media see, for instance Andrijasevic & Mai, 2016; Gregoriou, 2018; Gulati, 2011; O'Brien, 2016, 2018, 2019; for studies of US media see, for instance Austin & Farrell, 2017; Farrell & Fahy, 2009; Johnston, Friedman, & Sobel, 2015; Sanford, Martínez, & Weitzer, 2016; Szörényi & Eate, 2014). The two countries thus share many commonalities in terms of media constructions of trafficked women. As Fassin (2012, p. xi) notes, cases that rely on comparable moral categories and judgments, analogous communities and exclusions, and the same consequences in terms of a lack of voice, are a compatible match for analysis because they facilitate an understanding of the larger issues at stake in the politics of pity. Although the two nations, as examples of distinct cultures, cannot be collapsed into one, in his discussion of cultural flows Couldry has observed that global flows of media products and discourses work to homogenise meanings to such a degree that differences in cultures become intelligible across space (Couldry, 2000a, p. 97). The notion of cultural flows in a globalised world thus implies that, despite their distinctions and differences, it is possible to think across different cultures through news, entertainment, fiction and other media genres precisely because they help us to dramatise and communicate their very differences, thus making them intelligible (Couldry, 2000a, p. 98). This is, of course, not a universally applicable notion, but

between the UK and the US, as examples of cultures which have similar media landscapes and share many dominant trafficking discourses, analysing media representations across the two countries becomes possible precisely because of the many common discourses that they use to construct trafficked women as subjects of public care.

Additionally, conducting an analysis of different genres within an English-speaking Western media environment serves to map the contours of the representations of trafficked women in the media by analysing how they appear across different genres. The value of such an approach lies, according to Benson, in its ability to show patterns in the power relations between different genre-specific contexts within the field of mediated communication (Benson, 1999, p. 482). In line with my overall research strategy and questions, in this thesis I do not make claims to generalisability or a detailed structural mapping of the mediated representations of trafficked women, but instead conduct a discourse analysis of media constructions in order to deconstruct the underlying tensions and power relations in a small sample of media texts. Understanding trafficked women as subjects and a focus on their media representation has been the subject of much media interest over the past decades and, as indicated above, scholarly studies are abundant, including those that analyse a number of films or campaigns (see for instance Andrijasevic, 2007; de Villiers, 2016; O'Brien, Carpenter, & Hayes, 2013; Stiles, 2018). In these studies the authors use various approaches to analyse discourses of trafficked women as gendered subjects and offer critiques of these representations in relation to ideal victimhood, victim hierarchies, and policies. Although they deal with topics similar to that of the present thesis, in this study I take an open approach to media texts and look at the representations of trafficked woman in the media as shaped by combinations of various discourses which, at the level of text, display coherence as well as tensions (for similar approaches in the context of migration and suffering see Squire, 2015; Ticktin, 2011). I also take a view of these representations as inevitably influenced by power relations between discourses, noting that discourses tend to cohere around particular representations of trafficked women and to perpetuate these constructions, but also that they can be destabilised and expanded by marginalising certain discourses.

My study thus offers an analysis of the underlying tensions in media texts that make proposals for meaning and orientation towards publics, thereby unpacking the process of how trafficked women emerge as subjects of pity in media texts. In methodological terms, comparing media genres is a way of examining the intertextuality and interdiscursivity within the genres under analysis. As already mentioned, a genre is a regime of meaning or a "bounded field of meaning relationships that obey a certain regularity in the ways in which they can be combined and circulated", and consequently genres create regularity and boundedness in "the possibilities they offer to constitute legitimate forms of knowledge about the world and of self for the spectator of [a particular genre]" (Chouliaraki, 2006a, p. 63). Every genre is characterised by particular ways of construing trafficked women and can thence be meaningfully interpreted by considering these regularly occurring meanings. The media genres analysed here thus involve "different ways of acting and interacting linguistically" with particular relations, with types of exchanges that focus on eliciting action, and with a particular mood (Fairclough, 2003, p.17). Analysing different genres thus opens up the opportunity to see how discourses operate intertextually, that is how they manifest in different forms, and interdiscursively, and how they combine with the discourses of other genres (for an elaboration of intertextuality and interdiscursivity see Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, pp. 37–52). Since analysing representations and orientations towards trafficked women is the goal of this study, the value of analysing three genres lies in the ability to demonstrate whether and how different media genres make use of similar discourses, and challenge or negotiate meanings with regard to trafficked women as subjects.

3.4. Media genres under analysis, data, and data collection

The methodology for this study is the analytics of mediation, which is a kind of critical discourse analysis, and this is an approach that does not specify a particular way of collecting data. Instead, when data selection and collection procedures for critical discourse analysis are outlined, they are borrowed from other approaches (Meyer, 2001). To this end, since CDA is a context-dependent approach based on post-structuralist theory, a case-study approach to data selection proved to be compatible, since it is, according to Stake, a constructivist approach to reality that

stresses the importance of interpretation and the process of meaning-making in constructing social reality (Stake, 1995, pp. 99–102). Although the definitions of a case study are quite flexible, and depend on a study's individual methods and objects of analysis, a case study generally entails a context-dependent study of persons, events or other systems in their complexity and richness (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Stake, 1995; Thomas, 2011).

Rather than generalisation then, the goal in the choice of cases (context and data-richness) aligns with the aims of critical discourse analysis as an approach geared towards the interpretation of meaning-making processes in media texts (Meyer, 2001). In other words, the selection of cases in case studies is not based on collecting a representative or generalisable sample, but on fulfilling the other criteria – that is, according to Stake, on their ability to maximise what we can learn from them (Stake, 1995, pp. 4–9). As Flyvbjerg and Sampson (2001, p. 70) assert, cases generate knowledge that is practical, concrete, and context-dependent and which exists in a sphere of particular circumstances. One data selection strategy for a case study is choosing paradigmatic cases instead of aiming for replicability. As noted by Flyvbjerg (2006, p. 232), after Kuhn (1987), paradigmatic cases are exemplars that highlight the general characteristics of the matter under analysis. An example of this, according to Flyvbjerg, is Foucault's choice of European prisons and the panopticon as case studies. Although there is no standard for choosing paradigmatic cases, validity claims can be made when a case study is placed "in dialogue with other validity claims in the discourse to which the study is a contribution" (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 233). In this thesis such a validity claim can be established by comparing the results of the present study with the literature review and the critiques provided in critical migration literature which I refer to throughout the thesis. The overall claims made in the analysis of this thesis do not generally deviate from these critiques and wider discourses observed in literature, hence the choice of cases can be said to be paradigmatic. Other cases could have been chosen for this study, but as the case study literature has pointed out, the essential element of choice of case study is its ability to act as a paradigmatic case rather than a representative one. Instead of generalisability, the main contribution of this study is in understanding how gender arrangements and power relations play out at the level of media texts to construct a particular trafficked woman as deserving of public care.

Therefore, although the representations of trafficked women as subjects of public pity could be gleaned from any number of media texts and genres (even, in theory, from randomly chosen ones), those I selected have a degree of complexity that renders them paradigmatic cases. This status thus allows me to analyse the embodiment and agency of trafficked women and the proposals for feeling in the texts which, as I have discussed in the literature review, dominate media representations of trafficked women. As evident from academic literature, trafficking is often conflated with other forms of sexual exploitation and the exploitation of women is often discussed, even in laws and policies, in the same vein as the sexual exploitation and trafficking of children. Thus, cases were selected which focused solely or at least primarily on *trafficked women*, so that I could analyse how they emerged as subjects of pity in media discourse. A final contribution of the case-study method to this thesis was that it helps to define the subject and object of analysis (for an overview of the object and subject of analysis in case studies, see Thomas, 2011, pp. 514–515). In the case of this thesis, the subjects of analysis are the representations of trafficked women in three media genres, while the objects of the study are the discourses that constitute trafficked women in media texts as subjects of pity.

In order to ensure that I collected data on the subjects delineated as central to the study – trafficked women – I operationalised the terms that, according to literature discussed in Chapter 1, are most used in media representations with regard to women trafficked for sexual exploitation: "sex trafficking", "sex slavery" and "modern slavery". Additionally, in order to ensure that I had cases likely to maximise what could be learned from them, I collected media texts that contained descriptions or visualisations of trafficked women's bodies and/or identities. In accordance with these criteria, I chose film, celebrity advocacy, and newspaper journalism as the media genres for analysis, and within these I chose examples from the UK and the US. In the remainder of this section I define the logics of the three genres chosen for analysis, and describe the process of selecting data for deeper analysis and the procedure for data collection.

3.4.1. Data selection and data collection

In critical discourse analysis, and by extension in the analytics of mediation as a theoretically specific approach to analysis within the remit of CDA, there is no specific procedure for choosing particular media texts for analysis, although examples tend to represent typical forms of representation selected for the richness they are able to provide for the analysis. The data analysed in this thesis comes from three media genres: film, celebrity advocacy, and newspaper journalism. Within each genre I analyse the embodiment and agency of trafficked women, and each genre consists of an example from US- and UK-based media.

The two films were selected because the discourses related to how trafficked women are embodied and how their agency is construed fall within the dominant depictions of trafficked women. They are therefore paradigmatic cases of how trafficked women are depicted in media texts, and moreover they fulfil the richness requirement, outlined in the case study approach to data collection as important for maximising what can be learned from them (Stake, 1995). Namely, *Trafficked* features women of different races as victims and focuses exclusively on adult women trafficked for sexual exploitation. Moreover, the film received legitimacy through its actors (Ashley Judd, an anti-trafficking campaigner) as well as because its premiere was hosted by the UNODC, which is a key organisation in global anti-trafficking efforts (UNODC, 2017). *Doing Money* fulfils the richness requirement because it is based on real-life events that led to the Modern Slavery Act 2015, and because it attempts to address some of the main questions surrounding trafficking exploitation, such as psychological abuse and coercion. The films were released in 2017 and 2018 respectively, and therefore fit into a similar timeframe as newspaper articles (sampled from 2018). The two celebrities were chosen because they likewise fit the richness criteria in the breadth of the kinds of appeals they have produced, as I explain in detail in Chapter 4. The timeframe for data collection was widened to a little over a decade (between 2007-2018) because of the relatively long-term nature of celebrity advocacy compared to other genres. Corresponding to the selection criteria for films, Emma Thompson and Jada Pinkett Smith are well-known celebrities in the Western entertainment industry and were selected because their advocacy projects were geared towards adult women trafficked for sexual exploitation. Although Pinkett Smith sometimes discusses children, the outputs of

her advocacy focus on adult women, while in terms of data richness both celebrities have participated in numerous anti-trafficking efforts through a variety of channels and forms including videos, interviews, a song, and an art exhibition.

As I have specified in the literature review in section *1.2 Trafficked women in film, celebrity advocacy, and press journalism*, the terms I have used in the data collection process include the most widely used terms that relate to this form of exploitation, which include "sex trafficking" and "modern slavery". This choice has certain implications inasmuch as it limits the remit of this study. Namely, in choosing to analyse the depictions of trafficked women that utilise this terminology, I am analysing those depictions which are the most prevalent in the media, but also those that are largely in line with abolitionist outlooks and policies with regard to sex work and human trafficking since it is these discourses that have been documented as dominant in media texts. In this way, the scope of the data collected in this study is circumscribed and so are the conclusions I can draw from the study. In other words, this study captures what forms of feeling are proposed to audiences about trafficked women in depictions that reflect abolitionist political and ideological outlooks, which are prevalent in the media. What this analysis does not capture are proposals for pity that emerge in representations by sex workers themselves and those media producers who are in line with critical trafficking studies which represent positions that argue for the decriminalisation of sex work. This study also does not address how audiences receive media texts on trafficked women.

This form of data selection corresponds to the theoretical framework of a politics of pity where media discourses are the subjects of analysis rather than the public perceptions of the media texts under analysis. Specifically, since I have chosen to analyse dominant depictions of trafficked women, it is indeed to be expected that the data supports the ideal victim image. However, the theoretical framework of this study, that is, the politics of pity, asserts that mundane media representations of suffering are discursive mechanisms that provide a moral education for audiences on how to feel about suffering and how to act in response to it (Chouliaraki, 2006b, p. 3). Education, thus, does not refer to the pedagogical (institutional or informal) function of media discourse but to a subtle discursive practice situated in the notion of the performativity of media whereby media texts provide moralising messages that shape audiences' dispositions and are shaped by

audiences' subjectivities (for performativity in the context of gender see Butler, 1993; 2016). The data was therefore selected based on the case study method which calls for the selection of paradigmatic cases, and this function is, in turn, fulfilled by the selected films', celebrities', and journalistic materials' evident embeddedness in dominant trafficking discourses, as confirmed by the literature review. This means that, even though this data does not represent all the ways in which trafficked women are portrayed in media texts, notably the cases do not represent media texts that argue for the decriminalisation of sex work, it does conform to the selection criteria that this study seeks to examine.

The databases used for sampling newspaper articles were Factiva and Nexis. Because the goal of this study is to analyse the prevailing discourses used to construct trafficked women as subjects of public care, I used the terms most commonly associated with women trafficked for sexual exploitation. Based on my literature review which indicates that "sex trafficking" and "modern slavery" are the most commonly used terms in describing women trafficked for prostitution, I used the following search terms and combinations: sex trafficking AND victim; sex trafficking AND survivor; modern slavery AND victim; modern slavery AND survivor; sex slavery AND victim; sex slavery AND survivor. The sampling date range was 1 January – 31 December 2018, and the newspapers included in the analysis are daily newspapers with high circulation in the US and the UK at the time of sampling. In the US these are broadsheet newspapers, while the most popular newspaper in the UK is the tabloid *The Sun*, which, at the time of analysis and still at the time of writing, had by far the highest circulation of all UK newspapers and was therefore included as an example of a highly visible media outlet (ABC, 2018). The newspapers included were: *The Guardian*, *The Times*, *The Telegraph*, *The Sun* (UK); and *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *USA Today* (US)[8].

[8] In a study of the representations of trafficked women in newspaper journalism from 2012 where 50 of the world's major newspapers were sampled for stories on trafficking for sexual exploitation, the UK and the US were identified as the leaders in content, and some of the newspapers sampled here (*The Guardian*, *The Times*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*) were identified as the press leaders in stories about trafficking for sexual exploitation (see study by Marchionni, 2012).
The Guardian is a UK-based centre-left newspaper in terms of media bias, and it tends to have liberal political values. It is funded by donations and through an advertising model, and it is owned by the Guardian Media Group Plc which is controlled by a trust to ensure its editorial independence (Media bias fact check, 2019c; Pew Research Center, 2014a). *The Times* is a UK-based broadly centre (sometimes characterised as centre-right) newspaper. It is owned by News UK, which is, in turn owned by a private corporation, News Corp UK (Media bias fact check, 2019e; Pew Research Center,

In lieu of the terms "sex trafficking" and "modern slavery", the search term "human trafficking" was used to compile a comparative sample of data from the Factiva database. In combination with the accompanying "victim" and "survivor" combinations, and while keeping all other criteria equal, "human trafficking" was used to collect a data sample in order to observe whether and how the results would differ if this, more politically neutral, term was utilised. Like the articles that the above data collection search yielded, I excluded all articles that did not fit the main criteria (describing women's bodies and/or actions, focusing on adult women, etc.), which demonstrated some overlap between the original search and the alternative search, while the alternative search additionally included articles that did not pertain to trafficking for sexual exploitation but instead included topics such as labour exploitation and the European migration 'crisis'. Another observation is that, especially in the UK context, the terms "human trafficking and modern slavery" often co-appeared, presumably because the main human trafficking policy is named the Modern Slavery Act (see for instance the results of the alternative search by McGoogan, 2018, Taylor, 2018). Moreover, as in the original search, the data collected using the "human trafficking" search term largely included sources that advocate the neo-abolitionist perspective on trafficking for sexual exploitation alongside a small number of articles which acknowledges the decriminalisation position (see for instance the results of the alternative search including Hymas, 2018; Jackman, 2018; Levin, 2018; McGoogan, 2018). This corresponds to the idea that the neo-abolitionist perspective is the dominant trafficking discourse in the media, as evidenced in the literature review. The search term "human trafficking" overall yielded fewer results with some overlap of articles between this term and the above terms, but it seems that the search terms used in the original search yielded more

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2014a). *The Daily Telegraph (*also known as *The Telegraph),* is a UK-based right-biased newspaper. It is owned by the Telegraph Media Group, which has private owners. It relies on subscriptions and advertising as a business model (Media bias fact check, 2019a). *The Sun* is a UK-based strongly right biased tabloid. It is owned by News UK, which, like the *The Times*, is owned by News Corp UK (Media bias fact check, 2019d). *The New York Times* is a US-based centre-left newspaper in terms of media bias, and it tends to have moderate liberal bias in reporting. It is owned by The New York Times Company and controlled by one family through shares. The paper is funded by subscription fees and through an advertising model (Media bias fact check, 2019b; Pew Research Center, 2014b). *The Washington Post* is a US-based centre-left biased newspaper, and it has slight to moderate liberal bias in reporting. Since 2013, it has been owned by Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos (Media bias fact check, 2019g; Pew Research Center, 2014c). *USA Today* is US-based newspaper with a centre-left bias, and it tends to have moderate liberal bias in reporting. It is owned by one of the largest media publishers in the US, the Gannett company, and is funded through a combination of a subscription and advertising model (Media bias fact check, 2019f; Pew Research Center, 2014d).

stories that fit the main aims of this thesis, that is, analysing the dominant discourses used to construct trafficked women as subjects of public care.

The initial search yielded hundreds of articles, but this was brought down to the more manageable number of 25 by only selecting for analysis articles that described trafficked women's bodies and/or identities in relation to sex trafficking, and of these only including ones that best illustrated what I found to be "typical" representations of trafficked women. Selecting typical articles refers to including in the analysis only those articles that were, after preliminary analysis of all the sampled content, determined to represent the most commonly appearing discourses when it comes to women's embodiment and agency. As such, the case of press journalism which comprises of 25 articles can be considered paradigmatic since it "highlight the general characteristics" (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 232) of trafficked women's appearance in newspaper articles sampled. When collecting data, I chose only articles where trafficked women had a voice of their own and therefore spoke on their own behalf, or where their experiences were described with reference to their bodies and where particular women's experiences of sex trafficking were referenced. This was not present in all the articles in the initial sample, which included many brief articles which included the key sampling terms, but no reference to trafficked women as embodied or (non-)agentive. Articles which were excluded were those that contained merely descriptions of new laws and policies, discussions of trafficking for sexual exploitation by other actors without reference to trafficked women, as well as those articles which provided brief accounts of trafficked women that used discourses that were already identified in the main 25 articles chosen for analysis. Thus, rather than analysing stories about trafficking as a political or social issue where trafficked women in particular do not feature other than as generalised victims, I chose articles from which I could analyse their bodies and agency. This helped me to address the research questions which pertain to how trafficked women are constructed in media texts as subjects of public care. The same selection criteria were employed for images: only those images were chosen for analysis that included the bodies of trafficked women, and only some of these are mentioned in the analysis itself, as a way to illustrate a point. This does not mean that other images were incompatible with the conclusions of the analysis, but merely that some of them were particularly suited to illustrating a particular point. While this choice allows me to

address my research questions, it also precludes me from commenting on the prevailing constructions of trafficked women in newspaper journalism. In other words, although this sample of data can be considered a paradigmatic case, it is not a representative case that exhausts the discourses that construct trafficked women, but this is not a claim of discourse analysis nor the goal of a case study. Instead, I am able to analyse how trafficked women appear in these media texts when their embodied and/or agentive experiences are represented, rather than when they are mentioned as a number or statistic or referred to only as a victim without a deeper engagement in her appearance in public space.

3.4.2. Film

"Movies", as bell hooks (2009, p. 2) aptly puts it, "remain the perfect vehicle for the introduction of certain ritual rites of passage that come to stand for the quintessential experience of border crossing for everyone who wants to take a look at difference and the different without having to experientially engage 'the other'". In other words, films play a role in shaping public imagination about what it means to embody a particular gender, class and race, or a combination of these identities. Hollywood is a place of commodity culture *par excellence* and is where, historically, women have been constructed as objects of the male gaze, a spectacle and "signifiers of the sexual" (Mulvey, 1975, 2015). As Mulvey puts it, cinema "functions as a social and symbolic terrain in which to decipher the fluctuations in the meaning of femininity across differing ideologies and economic contexts" (Mulvey, 2015, p. 20). Statistics on the prevalence of sex trafficking and statements claiming they are based on or inspired by true events are often included in films about trafficking, while documentaries use grainy undercover footage to show criminal behaviour and assert their connection to reality (Snajdr, 2013, pp. 237–238). They rely on emotive narratives to create affective proximity through visual intimacy between spectators and victims, and they are, as Plambech (2016) reminds us, performative media products that contain interpretations of events, which both opens opportunities to tell complex stories but also closes them down due to the needs of a film's narrative arc. The purpose of films about trafficking, as Yea (2015, p. 45) argues, is to develop affective publics and to mobilise solidarity and particular interventions on trafficking, and some films, like *Lilja 4-Ever* and *Holly*, have even been used by

NGOs for educational purposes, thus asserting an implicit connection with reality (Arthurs, 2012, p. 34; Plambech, 2016; Small, 2012, p. 416; Yea, 2015).

Critics of films about trafficking for sexual exploitation have argued that trafficked women are generally depicted in films as vulnerable and sexualised, and are represented as catalysts for the action of others, but often have limited or no agency of their own. They are, in this way, innocent and infantilised victims of lustful men and paralysed in the face of the horror and exploitation they face (Kelly, 2014; Matthews, 2015; Szörényi & Eate, 2014; Yea, 2015). In such narratives women are either rescued by men who embark on dangerous missions to save them (Szörényi & Eate, 2014; Yea, 2015), or aided by others in their escape. Another outcome is the death of trafficked women as a result of violence or suicide (see analyses by Arthurs, 2012; Matthews, 2015). Either way, when films about trafficking have been subjects of analysis, critics have argued that women's innocence, youth or passivity obscured their autonomy, voice and agency and they have critiqued the over-reliance on ideal trafficking victim narratives. Films are thus important modes of communicating who trafficked women are and of orientating public sensibilities towards these women as subjects of care, not only through how they construct trafficked women, but because of their implicit claim to represent the reality of trafficked women as subjects and of trafficking as a social phenomenon. The two films I analyse are particularly rich data sources and examples of mainstream neo-abolitionist view of trafficking because, through feature-length stories, they represent trafficked women from the time they are kidnapped to the time they are rescued. Through the films I explore how trafficked women are named as subjects, how their identities are constructed through a distribution of discursive elements, and how a hierarchy of victimhood, in which some woman are constructed as ideal victims while others represent ambivalent victimhood, is constructed as well as, perhaps reinforced, negotiated, and challenged.

In this chapter I have presented the methodological approach to the analysis of trafficked women in media texts. Based on an understanding of language as a bounded system of meaning, I take a post-structuralist view of discourse as constitutive of social reality. The media texts that I analyse here can therefore be seen as meaningful units of language and communication, and I employ critical discourse analysis as an analytical approach. CDA is well suited to combination with

feminist analysis due to their shared interest in the political. Within the broad remit of CDA, the analytics of mediation is specifically chosen both because it is attuned to media texts and because it allows for a multimodal approach to data in combination with CDA. This theory-driven approach, in turn, facilitates the development of embodiment and agency as categories for the analysis of trafficked women with a view to understanding these representations in relation to victim hierarchies. The countries chosen for analysis are the United Kingdom and the United States, since similar dominant discourses characterise the media depictions of trafficked women in these countries. I analyse three media genres, taking an open approach to media texts in order to analyse how representations of trafficked women are shaped by various discourses. To select the data for analysis I borrow a technique from the case study approach, selecting data based on richness, or the media text's ability to maximise the amount of information that can be gleaned from it. The genres of film, celebrity advocacy, and newspaper journalism are selected for analysis based on their individual importance as symbolic resources for constructing trafficked women in the public imaginary. Finally, I outline the techniques that were used for collecting the data.

In the next three chapters I present the analysis of the three media genres mentioned earlier through selected extracts of the media texts that were sampled as part of the analysis process, using the analytics of mediation as a framework. The analytical categories employed are embodiment and agency, and these are approached through the questions outlined in section 3.2. Specifically, the analytical categories employed are: a) embodiment and agency, which, as outlined in section 2.4, address the performative aspect of the body in relation to vulnerability in media texts, and the operation of power in media texts as it relates to trafficked women; b) the media proposals for moral and emotional engagement with trafficked women, or the emotions and forms of moral responsibility that the media discursively articulates with regard to trafficked women as subjects of suffering; and c) the proposals of media for placement of trafficked women on a hierarchy of victimhood in relation to ideal victim discourses as present in media representations of trafficked women. Using this analytical framework, I explore how the media discourse of trafficked women in three media genres variously construct them as subjects of public pity, and how they reproduce, negotiate, or challenge the dominant trafficking discourses. I

analyse two films (Chapter 4), two celebrities who engage in anti-trafficking activism (Chapter 5), and 25 newspaper articles (Chapter 6). The next chapter contains the analysis of two films, which tend to reproduce the hierarchy of victimhood by relying on discourses of innocence, purity, resilience, and bravery to construct the ideal victim, while positioning characters who do not fit into this description as ambivalent subjects of pity.

3.4.3. Celebrity advocacy

In this thesis I adopt King's definition of a celebrity as a person whose identity consists of personal and public sides, or of an ability to engage in impersonation by portraying a character as part of her profession while simultaneously embracing elements "consonant with […] her own identity" (King, 1985a, p. 30). Chouliaraki describes this tension between impersonation and the "authentic manifestation of [celebrity's] moral interiority" as personification, a tension which enables the celebrity to galvanise public support for advocacy projects by embodying simultaneously her public persona and her private self (Chouliaraki, 2012, p. 12). As a way of bringing trafficked women into co-presence, celebrity is a powerful resource because its cultural capital can provide a space for those "formerly invisible and unheard others to achieve visibility and claim a voice" (Orgad, 2012, p. 162). In order to accomplish this, celebrity facilitates a "reallocation and redistribution of symbolic […] resources" (Orgad, 2012, p. 162) to trafficked women, opening up a "space of performance that produces exemplary dispositions of emotion and action on distant others for publics to identify with" (Chouliaraki, 2013, p. 81). It is thus the performativity of celebrity advocacy that brings trafficked women into co-presence and into public view, and the moral education that the celebrity provides makes meaningful proposals for orientation towards them.

Although a celebrity's activism on behalf of a group such as trafficked women can be a valuable asset, critics of celebrity advocacy express scepticism, questioning their motivations as potentially self-serving symbolic gestures that serve to round out a celebrity's persona rather than significantly advancing a particular cause (Hart & Tindall, 2009; Littler, 2008; Mostafanezhad, 2013; Rojek, 2013). Studies of celebrity anti-trafficking activism also indicate that, in spite of their ability

to stress the importance of public action through charity and through encouraging policy and law enforcement intervention (Papadouka, Evangelopoulos, & Ignatow, 2016), celebrity activists often fail to engage in the political, and instead construct particular benefactor identities, perpetuating the "historical subjectivities that are underpinned by colonial reproductions of race, class and gender" (Yrjölä, 2012, p. 310), as well as capitalist logics perpetuating wealth inequalities and contributing to individuals' precarity and vulnerability (Littler, 2008; Rojek, 2013). It is this tension between the extraordinary visibility of the celebrity and her ability to transfer celebrity capital to vulnerable or suffering populations through well-meaning advocacy projects, and the potential increase in a celebrity's cultural capital as a result of advocacy itself, that contextualises the critique of anti-trafficking celebrity activism. It is also what makes celebrity an important site for the construction of trafficked women as subjects in the mediated public sphere. Emma Thompson and Jada Pinkett Smith were selected as cases of celebrity advocacy because of the multiplicity and variety of their projects, but also because the ways in which they personify the anti-trafficking cause illustrate the tensions inherent in the construction of ideal victimhood and victim hierarchies. Through an analysis of their projects, it is possible to explore their roles as feminist advocates oriented towards issues of social structures and of gender and racial inequalities, so these celebrities can be considered to be paradigmatic cases for analysis in this study. Their embodiment of trafficked women also demonstrates how the sexual objectification of women features in wider culture, is reflected in the representations of trafficked women and, in the context of their discussions of who trafficked women are, demonstrates how these celebrities destabilise the hierarchy of victimhood which is present in its intact form in films.

Emma Thompson and Jada Pinkett Smith were selected as case studies because their advocacy concerns primarily *adult women* trafficked for *sexual exploitation*, as opposed to both women and children and different kinds of labour exploitation. The latter are often either clustered together in celebrity advocacy, or advocates claim to focus on the trafficking of women and children but, in reality, mostly discuss efforts to prevent child sexual exploitation and trafficking. This framing is telling with regard to the infantilisation of women and their association with vulnerability, as well as the inappropriateness of applying the same measures to the prevention of exploitation of children and of adults. However, because the

subjects of my interest are adult women, I chose celebrities who focus predominantly (Pinkett Smith) or exclusively (Thompson) on adult trafficked women. Mira Sorvino, another American actor who has been an anti-trafficking activist for over a decade, was considered, but I chose Pinkett Smith because she is a black woman and her race offered a fruitful intersectional consideration for the analysis. Race was considered an important factor in the selection of Pinkett Smith over Sorvino since, apart from gender, race is the second most important intersectional element that is the subject of analysis in this study. Considering these requirements for case study selection, Thompson and Pinkett Smith were chosen not only because they fulfilled the selection criteria but because they were indeed the only celebrities who fit the criteria, that is, their advocacy focuses on adult women and they have engaged in this form advocacy with some consistency over the course of a few years. The texts considered include a television interview, a video blog, and a music video for Pinkett Smith, public profiles of both celebrities, newspaper and magazine interviews with both celebrities, an art exhibition, and a public service announcement made by Thompson. These audio-visual texts were found to contain the most data richness because, in these materials, the celebrities focus either solely or for extended periods on discussions on their anti-trafficking activism and they discuss the bodies and agency of women trafficked for sexual exploitation.

The timeframe for the data is related to the start of each celebrity's activism, but both celebrities started their advocacy after the implementation of the main policy framework addressing human trafficking, the UN Trafficking Protocol. This is significant, since this is the definition of trafficking which I here adopt and it is also the definition based on which the hierarchy of victimhood is identified as problematic and critiqued not only in this thesis but also by migration and trafficking scholars. Hence, both actors' advocacy can be analysed in light of the media representations which have been produced after the UN Trafficking Protocol's definitions and resulting national policies were implemented. Thompson is more consistent and prolific in her advocacy, which dates back over a decade. The most prolific stage of her activism in terms of materials produced was between 2007 and 2011, when she was involved in the exhibition *Journey* and acted in an anti-trafficking video *Torture by Any Other Name*, and also in 2014, when she was a producer of the film *Sold*. Although she has not made similar content since then, her

advocacy continues at the time of writing in the form of presiding over the Helen Bamber Foundation and giving talks and interviews in support of the cause, such as speaking at fundraising events and supporting anti-trafficking campaigns.

3.4.4. Press journalism

As reporters of public events, Schudson (2008) argues, journalists are important actors in democracies because they cover both predictable events arising from public and private people, institutions, and other official sources, and uncommon events, scandals, accidents and tragedies. In this role, they act as witnesses to suffering and trauma, and contribute to formulating public discourse on these matters (Schudson, 2008, p. 56). Journalists form what Zelizer (1993) persuasively identifies as interpretive communities. She argues that journalists, as members of interpretive communities that operate within the parameters of journalistic practice, interpret key public events in their unfolding and retelling (Zelizer, 1993, p. 219). In making sense of public events at these distinct junctures, journalists generate discourses that fit within their own internal discursive logics and genre-specific principles, coupled with the "discursive power of centralised media institutions" that "construct the texts which the viewer then interprets" (Morley, 1992, p. 343). These internal logics of the genre, which constellate journalists as interpretive communities, constrain and enable the possibilities of meaning in mediated public discourse. Audiences are thus exposed to perspectives that journalists choose to privilege, although, as Chouliaraki (2000, p. 295) in alignment with Morley's statement above suggests, this does not "preclude the range of audiences' understandings of news meanings". Moreover, in addition to these linguistic forms of discourse, many news articles are accompanied by images which, as Hall (1981) reminds us, have symbolic meanings that can complement, extend or even challenge language. Newspaper articles, as products of journalists, are therefore a site where discourses about trafficking become particularly salient through the ability of journalists to interpret a variety of different events, thus forming, upholding and challenging different notions of public responsibility towards those who suffer.

As eyewitnesses, journalists relay objective accounts of events, positioning themselves as detached bystanders, while also bearing witness to events in the world

(Tait, 2011, p. 1233). This has a political function, and includes a potential for moral responsibility through ethico-political proposals for action (Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017, pp. 1163–1164). In this sense, journalists are witnesses who see events in the world and speak about them to audiences, thus existing at "the difficult juncture of experience and discourse" (Peters, 2001, p. 710). These varied proposals for action rest upon linguistic and visual mediated discourses that open up different forms of representation and depend upon the socio-political circumstances of showing and seeing (Musarò, 2015). Notwithstanding the problems arising from differences in context and knowledge presuppositions (see Peters, 2001), Frosh (2006, p. 281) argues that "media witnessing produces and maintains the ground of civil equivalence among strangers, upon which it subsequently becomes possible to see through their eyes". So, although witnessing has its issues when it comes to distance, veracity and point of view, it is ultimately the prerequisite for a more generalised moral responsibility or, in other words, a way of orienting public dispositions towards trafficked women as subjects of pity.

Critics of the representation of trafficked women in newspaper content, as I have indicated in Chapter 1, have noted that in this genre attention is routinely disproportionately given to sex trafficking as a topic, while other forms of trafficking are neglected (Farrell and Fahy, 2009; Pajnik, 2010; Sanford et al., 2016). Additionally, women are often disembodied (Sobel et al., 2019) and hierarchies of victimhood are created through moral frames (Bernstein, 2007; Kempadoo, 2015; Sheller, 2011; Soderlund, 2011), while agency is displaced onto other actors (Gulati, 2010; Sobel et al., 2019). This attention to newspaper representations of trafficked women, and the observations regarding these constructions, echo some of the depictions in the other genres, but it is the abundance of views and orientations facilitated by journalism as a genre, and its intrinsic and extensive ability to form, uphold and challenge representations and public orientations, that makes it an important place for the constitution of trafficked women as subjects in mediated discourse. The analysis of press journalism as the genre with the widest array of possible viewpoints and meanings, demonstrates how a victim hierarchy is expanded through negotiations and challenges in media discourses that exist in constant tension. Through the representations of multiple overlapping discourses, including death, control, injury and constructions of trafficked women as strangers, victims or

survivors, this genre demonstrates a high degree of ambivalence in its representations of trafficked women, thus expanding the hierarchy of victimhood when it comes to depicting trafficked women as subjects of public pity.

Chapter Four: Trafficked Women on Film: Establishing a Victim Hierarchy

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter I present an analysis of the representations of trafficked women in two films: *Trafficked* (2017) and *Doing Money* (2018), which maintain, I suggest, a victim hierarchy in their reproduction and validation of the discursive trope of what I have so far referred to as the "ideal victim". In the analysis I explore the forms of embodiment and agency present in the films, and how these tropes propose a particular construction of trafficked women who are deserving of public pity, by contrast with women who are othered and marginalised in a parallel process and therefore remain within ambivalent proposals for engagement. The analysis concerns how trafficked women's bodies are linguistically and visually represented to signify their vulnerability, and how their actions are portrayed within their circumstances. More specifically, I explore how discourses of vulnerability highlight the rewards of individual resilience and propose a hierarchy of victimhood through racial and religious imagery, and how the framing of characters highlights heteronormative femininity. This chapter thus represents an exploration of how trafficked women are established in public discourse as subjects of pity who are deserving of tender-hearted emotion, and foregrounds how characters who are presented as comparatively undeserving meanwhile serve to consolidate particular notions of public morality and feminine virtue. I argue that these two films establish, in their two trios of characters, a hierarchy of victimhood, which represents a relatively unified voice of morality that proposes a particular image of the kinds of experiences and identities that render a trafficked woman deserving of public care.

4.2. Description of data

The two films chosen for analysis explore different themes: *Trafficked* focuses heavily on the trafficking experience from the perspective of victims from different cultural, geographical, class and racial backgrounds, while *Doing Money* explores psychological abuse and police response, and revolves around the experiences of three Romanian women who have different attitudes towards sex work and who experience different forms of exploitation. Like other media genres analysed in this study, the films are examples drawn from US (*Trafficked*) and UK (*Doing Money*)

media. Both films focus solely on sex trafficking of adult women and they both contain claims about representing the reality of sex trafficking. *Trafficked* was released in 2017 and was reportedly made with the assistance of a scholar of trafficking, Siddarth Kara, who has researched and written widely about sex trafficking, including writing a book in which he outlines the business model of human trafficking, the problems with global poverty, and statistics on the prevalence and profitability of trafficking, and upon which the film is reportedly based (Kara, 2010). The actors who play the main characters are not well-known, but the film features a cameo by veteran Hollywood actor and feminist activist Ashley Judd, who is a prominent personality in the #MeToo movement as well as an anti-trafficking campaigner and an ambassador for the Polaris Project, an anti-trafficking NGO. The supporting cast includes Anne Archer, Patrick Duffy and Sean Patrick Flannery, who are all well-known English-speaking television and film actors. This support from well-known actors and activists, its rootedness in academic research, and its premiere at the United Nations New York headquarters help the film – a fictional and dramatised rendition of events – to retain an impression of being true to life. This was emphasised in press materials after the film's release (Erbland, 2017; UNODC, 2017).

The second film analysed here is *Doing Money* (2018), which was commissioned by the BBC, aired on 5 November 2018 on BBC2 television, and was subsequently available to view on BBC iPlayer and in arthouse cinemas. The film was written and directed by women, and is an account of the real-life experience of a woman named Anna, whose name the main character in the film retains, and who was trafficked in the UK. As a result of her involvement with the subsequent police investigation, members of the small trafficking organisation represented in the film were sentenced to three years in prison. Unlike *Trafficked*, *Doing Money* features Romanian actors, and was not made for mainstream cinema distribution, but aired on the BBC which is a widely watched public service broadcaster (Firmstone, 2019). It is a drama that moves at a slower pace and features less action than *Trafficked*, dramatising real-life events for the big screen. These two films were chosen for analysis because of their claims on and connections with real-life events. This brings them closer to the other genres considered, which have more inherent ability to claim connections with real life.

4.3. Analysis of *Trafficked*: Embodiment, agency and the construction of a victim hierarchy

Trafficked (2017) follows the story of three young women trafficked for sex work to a brothel in the US state of Texas: Sara, a white American woman; Amba, an Indian woman; and Mali, a Nigerian woman. The film opens with the story of how Sara comes to be trafficked, followed by that of Amba's kidnapping and trafficking from India to Texas, where on the last leg of the journey, sitting on the floor in the back of a darkened cargo truck, she wakes up in the caring arms of Mali. Sara is a young, pretty, slender, blonde and thus heteronormatively beautiful American woman who, on her 18th birthday, is informed that she is now too old for the Christian group home in which she has been living with her sister. She is promised work on a cruise ship, but is tricked by a social worker who hands her over to an organised crime gang running a brothel in rural Texas with the help of a Mexican cartel. Sara is the film's protagonist, while Amba and Mali are supporting characters. Amba is an athletic and intelligent Indian woman from a respectable and conservative well-to-do family who, after leaving a party in her hometown, is first the unintended victim of an acid attack and then kidnapped and trafficked to the US by an abusive suitor who is also a member of an organised crime group. Her virginity is traumatically bought and taken by a Japanese man in India before she is trafficked to Texas. Finally, there is Mali, a caring, beautiful, and sincere Nigerian woman who worked in the sex industry in Nigeria to alleviate her family's poverty before being smuggled (not trafficked) overseas into the same brothel as Sara and Amba. Sara's and Amba's back-stories are visualised at the start of the film, but the audience first sees Mali when Amba wakes up in her arms after her traumatic rape and forced trip overseas. Mali later narrates her story across a number of scenes interspersed throughout the film.

The main story unfolds after the three women meet at the brothel. While Sara fiercely and repeatedly refuses to see clients and is beaten and drugged as a result, Amba acquiesces to rape, becomes pregnant by a client and almost dies during an abortion at the brothel, while Mali's role is mostly to console the women, advising them to "lie back and survive" (18'25''). After Amba nearly dies and an opportunity for escape reaffirms Sara's faith in God, Sara orchestrates the women's daring

escape. During the escape Mali hurts her leg and is seized by the brothel-keepers, but the other two succeed in fleeing and are helped by a priest, following which we see the police swiftly dismantling the brothel and arresting all the perpetrators including the head of the crime syndicate and the corrupt social worker. Sara is returned to the group home and reunited with her sister and Mother Monica, the nun who cared for her, while Amba is returned to her parents, and Mali is shown resorting to street sex work. The storyline develops the relationship between the characters and the hierarchy of victimhood is established by coding the women's gender, race, class and religion in ways that emphasise Sara's innocence and resilience (traits of ideal victimhood) by contrast with the independent Amba (a redeemed victim) and compliant Mali (an ambivalent victim).

4.3.1. Constructing the ideal trafficking victim: Purity and innocence

In *Trafficked*, the purity and innocence of Sara and her status as a "good victim" are established through the depiction of her religious faith and her moral and sexual purity, which are highlighted as difference from the other characters. A contrast is drawn firstly with Amba's previous rejection of patriarchal gender norms, and secondly with Mali's racialised sexual availability and complacency about her engagement in exploitative sex work. These intersectional categories – expressed through particular patterns of embodiment and agency – produce a hierarchy of victimhood which positions Sara as the ideal trafficking victim, Amba as a redeemed victim, and Mali as an ambivalent victim. Ultimately, this contributes to the kinds of proposals for emotion and pity made with regard to each woman. A few scenes and situations illustrate how religion, race and sexualisation are rendered tropes of purity and innocence that converge to produce a hierarchy of victimhood. One such example is a scene in the brothel kitchen where Mali offers Amba food and consolation after she learns she is pregnant and refuses to eat.

> AMBA: I'm not hungry.
> MALI: Everybody's hungry. That's why we're here.
> AMBA: I thought you were here because you chose to do all of this.
> MALI: Maybe, but it's still hunger. Hungry for a better life is why my husband got that dodgy job in construction in Lagos. Hunger for profit is why they didn't have good safety and he busted his leg. That left us hungry for food so I had to leave my home.
> AMBA: But wasn't there any other job in Nigeria?

> MALI: We don't all come from nice families with money and cars and education. Am I right? Many girls from my village went abroad and made good money. I thought I'd be back a long time ago. Didn't work out that way. Before the madams were paid to bring us to Europe, we must first go to the juju priest. He takes our soul and sells it to the madams. If we do not repay our debts, the madams can curse us or our children wherever we touch the earth. I still owe those madams a lot of money. That's why I keep Nelson near me. They can't get to him until I am back home.
> AMBA: So you would go back home if you could?
> MALI: Wouldn't you?
> AMBA: I don't know.
> MALI: Don't do that.
> AMBA: Don't do what?
> MALI: Don't think about who you used to be. You have to keep that other girl buried far away 'cause in here she'll drive you mad.
> AMBA: But that's the girl my parents love. Not me.
> MALI: And she's the one who got you here.
> AMBA: No, she's at MIT getting her degree and meeting awesome people and she's on the swim team and she's kicking ass.
> MALI: And leave her out of it, okay? Amba, that girl got you here, and now this girl here is pregnant. You might as well tell Simon [the head of the brothel and a lieutenant in the crime syndicate that kidnapped the women] 'cause when he finds out he's gonna get rid of it.
> SARA: No, she can't get rid of it. It's against God's will!
> MALI: God, okay? Which God? The God that sent you here? Or maybe the one who got her pregnant by some wanker? You two girls are crazy, you know that? You think there's some other world out there that you belong to. Forget it. I see that crucifix you wear around your neck, but I don't see you praying anymore for some God to come and save you. You know why? 'Cause you know he doesn't care about you, me, or nobody like us.

Religion and spirituality are a strong motif in the film. Depictions such as those of Sara's upbringing in a Christian group home, her condemnation of Amba's abortion, Mali's observation that she has not been praying, Sara's belief that the opportunity to escape was God's doing, and her act of seeking out a priest she knows of in Texas rather than going directly to the police after the escape all establish religion as the source of Sara's purity, virtue and salvation, while, by contrast, Mali's denunciation of God ("Which God? The God that sent you here?"; "…you know he doesn't care about you, me, or nobody like us") and her continued suffering at the end of the film (she resorts to street sex work and the audience last sees her on the street, cradling her toy bear, Nelson, and another young sex worker) highlight the rewards of Sara's faith. These symbols are in line with an evangelical Christian and abolitionist anti-trafficking discourse that positions sex work as a human rights violation that should be abolished and criminalised (Doezema, 2010; Kempadoo, 2015). This view of sex work, which harks back to Victorian morality and associations of sex work with

social marginalisation, stigma, moral corruption, vice, immodesty, shame and impurity (Doezema, 1999, 2001; Ronald Weitzer, 2018) remains prominent in contemporary sex-trafficking discourse and policies. It is endorsed by abolitionist anti-trafficking groups which are associated with conservative Christian views of femininity and of women's sexual vulnerability (Berman, 2006; Bernstein, 2007; Soderlund, 2005), transforming issues of sexual politics into issues of morality (Bernstein, 2012). This combination of religious symbolism with the difference embodied by Mali drives the character of Sara to stand for purity and innocence, while Mali, by rejecting God, accepting sex work and making her body sexually available, comes to engender complicity in sex work and exploitation, and ultimately ambivalent victimhood.

This sexual availability that Mali exhibits is linked to her race. Mali is a black woman from Nigeria who knowingly and willingly uses her sexuality: she does sex work in order to send remittances to her family. The first half of the scene quoted above could be seen as doing two things: first, it pushes Mali's identity, as a black sex worker, into the category of "deviant sexuality" (hooks, 2015, p. 81), and second, it frames her acceptance of sex work – which is a form of agency in oppressive conditions – as an improper form of agency (for an elaboration of agency in oppression, see Madhok, 2013). "You lie back and survive. We'll get through it okay?" (18'25''), Mali assures a terrified and worried Amba after they meet in the back of the truck. The representational tropes of deviant sexuality and agency in oppression are not only deeply intertwined, but serve to highlight Sara's purity, while understating the political aspects of gender, race and class which the film only touches upon. Sara's purity is thus constructed by contrast with Mali's sexual availability. Mali is, to quote bell hooks (2015, p. 73) again, a "racial and sexual stereotype" in a Western culture which seeks to "reinscribe the image of black woman as sexual primitive". With regard to the racialised constructions of white women's purity via contrast with black women's sexual impurity, Collins argues:

> The prostitution of Black women allowed White women to be the opposite; Black 'whores' make White 'virgins' possible. The race/gender nexus fostered a situation whereby White men could then differentiate between sexualized woman-as-body who is dominated and 'screwed' and the asexual woman-as-pure-spirit who is idealized and brought home to mother. (Collins, 2000, p. 145)

The image of the black woman – Mali – who makes her sexuality available for male consumption thus serves to highlight the purity of the other two women, who are both shown enduring rape on multiple occasions, and both injected with sedatives in order to make them compliant and prevent them from fighting off clients. By contrast with Sara and Amba, who are constantly shown fighting the traffickers, Mali is never shown with clients or being physically handled by the brothel guards, who often nudge and prod Sara, Amba and other non-compliant women. Mali, in contrast, moves around the space and presumably works without complaining, so she fits the identity of a fallen woman. Black female sexuality is thus construed as transgressive, with Mali making herself "available for the white male's sexual consumption" (hooks, 2015, p. 74) without putting up a fight to preserve her purity and virtue.

In opposition to the outlook constructed in the film, whereby ownership of one's sexuality indicates sexual deprivation, I propose that Mali here demonstrates a form of agency within oppressive circumstances including poverty, lack of work and lack of education, which she mentions in the kitchen scene. This is a form of agency that Madhok proposes is predicated on a "non-insistence on maximal or free action" and is particularly important because it occurs "within conditions of severe oppression where it is hard to commit particular kinds of action" (Madhok, 2013b, p. 38). Thus, Mali's agency (in agreeing to do sex work for the sake of her family's well-being) is inconsistent with the gender norms on which the film places value; her poverty problematises the ability to uphold this value. However, this does not mean that Mali's form of agency is fully legitimated by the film. As I demonstrate in this chapter, the racialised sexualisation of Mali's status as a willing sex worker, and her difference from Sara and Amba, serve to further highlight their purity, but do not draw Mali into the same remit of good and deserving victimhood. While the film points to Mali's relative disadvantage, the resolution of her story, leaving her outside the protective care of the state, means that her vulnerability loses the ability to fully capitalise on the reformatting potential along the lines proposed by Madhok, and thus leaves her in an ambivalent position rather than wholly within the remit of care.

Related to the role of Mali's racialised sexualisation in the film's construction of a hierarchy of victimhood through contrast with purity is the role of patriarchal gender norms regarding the value of women's sexual virtue. This trope

helps to construe Mali's sexual availability as deviant through contrast with Sara's and Amba's purity. Throughout the film Sara is shown as demure and innocent and associated with modesty and Christian chastity, especially in the initial scenes where she is in the care of a nun and then reluctantly says goodbye to her younger sister, clutching her cross, adjusting her t-shirt nervously, her face worried and her shoulders tense as she leaves. Before arriving at the brothel she looks childish, wearing a loosely fitting t-shirt and jeans and a pink backpack, and throughout the film she wears a red bow in her long blonde hair, which, she explains to Amba and Mali, is from her "mama", the thought of which brings her to tears. Amba, meanwhile, is confident, ambitious and autonomous (for which she is initially punished but is later redeemed, as I demonstrate below). Audiences are introduced to her at a cocktail lounge, wearing an elegant black outfit, having a drink with her best friend, as she talks confidently and jokingly about her upcoming move to an elite university in the US. Later, when she is brought to the brothel, she remembers finishing a swimming competition to cheers and applause, and receiving praise from her delighted parents. In both scenes she rejects the romantic advances of the man who later pours acid on her friend, some of which burns Amba's hand, and who sells Amba's virginity in a brothel in India before trafficking her to Texas. Her boldness in refusing these romantic advances has a twofold meaning. While it demonstrates her confidence and resolve, her ability to say "no" (the first rejection comes immediately after she wins the swimming competition and the second while she is at a party, where male friends intervene when her rejection proves insufficient), her self-assured steadfastness also invites misogynist violence (the kidnapping and the scarring of her hand) and sexual assault. According to unjust patriarchal hierarchies, Amba's rejection unacceptably denies him something he is entitled to, for which he retaliates with misogynistic violence (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Manne, 2017, p. 158). Her rejection of heteronormative femininity is further accentuated in a scene where, with the support of her mother, she successfully convinces her disapproving father to let her stay at the party where later she is kidnapped.

However, after Amba is trafficked, her attitude towards independence and empowerment changes. At the brothel she is disoriented and frightened, her eye make-up is smudged, her hair dishevelled, and finally she endures a mental breakdown as shame and trauma set in after she finds out she is pregnant and is then

forced to have a painful and nearly lethal abortion. Her body and mind are thus broken, and after this, her traditional femininity is restored and she is redeemed as a good victim through Christian religious values. In the exchange previously quoted, as Amba begins to despair and feel responsible for the violation of her body, Mali advises her: "Don't think about who you used to be. You have to keep that other girl buried far away 'cause in here she'll drive you mad", to which Amba replies: "But that's the girl my parents love. Not me". Amba now feels like an undeserving victim because of something that was done *to* her. These feelings of shame and guilt are here depicted as the result of her initial rejection of traditional domesticity, and this experience maps on to the ritual of Christian religion where shame and guilt are emotions related to penance (Richardson & Wearing, 2014, pp. 87–88). Namely, she is ashamed of rejecting her traditionally feminine role and expresses her guilt to Sara (for the Christian motifs of guilt and shame in film see Richardson, 2004). After her traumatic experiences, which culminate in an abortion that nearly claims her life (and which is involuntary, thus not warranting any further guilt on Amba's part), she receives penance when Sara offers her a way to escape. Thus, Amba's refusal of domestic safety is shown as resulting in victimisation and punishment for refusing to be an obedient domestic feminine subject – a trope familiar in discourse on trafficked women (Andrijasevic, 2007; Szörényi & Eate, 2014) – but she is ultimately redeemed as a "good victim" thereby reclaiming her purity, once she repents for her mistake.

The purity trope is highlighted by feminist critique, such as Pollock's (1988, pp. 259–260) analysis of modern painting, where she argues that femininity is an ideological position that relegates the "female sexuality in a familial, heterosexual domesticity" where women's place as "sexed and classed subjects" is demarcated. In the same vein, Skeggs (1997, p. 129) reflects on the ideas of 19th-century female virtue, noting that the contemporary ideal of white middle class femininity is constructed on the basis of historical views that situate women as passive and dependent. Feminist critics of sex trafficking narratives similarly argue that discourses of feminine purity are omnipresent in representations of sex trafficking and that they legitimate women's domesticity and function ideologically to normalise patriarchal gender orders (Andrijasevic, 2007; Kelly, 2014). Thus, Amba's feelings – mourning the woman she could have been, losing her resolve and refusing

to eat, doubting her parents' love for her after rejecting feminine domesticity – demonstrate her penance and ultimately redeem her because they signal her wish to re-establish her place in the family home, a patriarchal order which values female purity, makes women responsible for male violence, and locates their place in the domestic realm. Amba is rewarded for this acceptance by her and Sara's successful escape from the brothel and her reunion with her family. At the same time, Mali's difference is highlighted: her sexual availability morally elevates Sara's sexual purity, and her decision to engage in sex work is framed as a morally ambiguous, perhaps even unacceptable, form of agency.

4.3.2. Constructing the ideal trafficking victim: Resilience and courage

At the start of the film, Sara exhibits meekness and inexperience (she is hesitant about leaving the group home and taking a job, tricked with regard to the job itself), but towards the second part of the film she develops resilience and courage with the help of religious faith (refusing to work as a sex worker, executing the escape and alerting the priest and, we presume, the authorities), signifying her growth and maturity. In parallel, Mali shows motherly care for Sara and Amba on multiple occasions, but this protective quality is repeatedly undermined as Mali is infantilised by the presence of her toy, Nelson, who represents her son and her spiritual obligation to her madam in Nigeria. Thus, the categories of religion and gender differently construe the subjects' personalities over the course of the film and shape how the trope of courage and resilience variously places these trafficked women on a hierarchy of victimhood.

Apart from playing a part in innocence, religion and spirituality are also important to the trope of resilience and courage. Upon hearing that Sara's hair bow was a gift from her mother, Mali says: "oh, then it's got good juju" and proceeds to explain that "it's like spirits. Good juju keeps you safe when trouble comes" (29'). In the kitchen scene quoted above, Mali again mentions the juju ritual that bound her to the madam to whom she owes money, and introduces the women to "Nelson", her small brown stuffed bear who represents her son. In another scene she calls it "my boy". She is hardly ever seen without it in the film. In the same scene she calls attention to Sara's faltering faith by observing that she has not been praying. Later in

the film, when Sara tries to convince Mali and Amba to go along with her bold escape plan, Sara states hopefully: “Don’t you see, God is helping us!”. Putting the escape plan in motion, Sara begins to carry herself with more confidence and drive. She no longer cowers and now speaks with confidence: “I have to get back to my sister” (1h 9′30′′), she tells Amba as she convinces her to come along, and she secretly flashes a wry smile to herself on the night of the escape as the brothel guard routinely and unsuspectingly searches her body before bedtime (1h 10′41′′). So, while Sara’s religious faith gives her the courage to escape and to rescue the others, Mali’s belief in the spiritual power of a juju curse serves to petrify her and to bind her to working at the brothel for fear of being cursed. In the film, Mali’s belief is not contextualised culturally, historically or geographically, so her sexual servitude, as enforced by a juju oath, represents a colonial form of visuality that exoticises her character. By construing her faith as debilitating, while Sara’s is empowering, juju is framed as morally wrong while Christianity is morally acceptable. Mali’s body is therefore subject to two forms of control: in symbolic terms existing within the film narrative the juju priest and the madam exercise spiritual control over Mali’s choices, while concurrently, in socio-historical terms that reference the world outside the film’s narrative, Mali represents a racialised subject of a colonial form of power over black bodies that construes them as primitive and seeks to place them into the “right” moral order. This is a form of oppression that post-colonial and black feminist scholars have criticised as producing mutually constitutive racialised and gendered bodies that emphasise difference “between bodies that inhabit the world together” (Ahmed, 2002, p. 61) and constitute and perpetuate dominant social orders of race in particular.

The discourses that justify social control of black bodies coincide with recent anti-trafficking policies and practices. The spiritual tradition of juju is still practiced in Nigeria and in other parts of West Africa today, and in recent years the ritual has been misused as a mechanism for controlling trafficked women (Dunkerley, 2018). Both the US Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report of 2019 (*Trafficking in Persons Report*, 2019) and the UK Home Office Country Policy Note on trafficking in women in Nigeria (UK Home Office, 2019) refer to juju as a control mechanism used on Nigerian women. The literature on the use of juju in this manner is scarce, but the UK report stresses the absence of evidence that all women believe

in the magical powers of the curse; rather noting that juju may be used in a form of agreement between a sex worker and a madam. This framing of Mali also sits in the context of a multitude of Christian-faith-based NGOs that operate in Nigeria and consider juju a sign of an improper moral attitude, seeking to convert women to Christianity (Plambech, 2017). This framing legitimates Christianity, implying that juju should be replaced with what is considered a higher form of public morality. The prevalence of this form of control and the moral panics that surround it are additionally evidenced by the presence of juju oaths as a topic in the news press – a genre discussed in Chapter 6 (in the article by Harvey, 2018).

Coupled closely with religion and spirituality as forms of oppression and social control, gender features prominently in the trope of resilience and courage. At the start of the film we see Sara make the symbolic transition from girlhood to womanhood when she turns 18, and throughout the film this theme is developed as she embodies resilience in resisting sexual assault, courage in confronting the traffickers, and responsibility in caring for the well-being of other trafficked women by alerting the authorities. These traits replace her initial innocence and her naïve view of the world. Mali, meanwhile, demonstrates the generally feminine trait of motherly care (for instance, Amba wakes up in her arms in the truck, and later Mali offers Amba food and drink and cares for her while she is convalescing from the abortion), but is also subject to infantilisation (shown clinging to a toy throughout the film, an image typically associated with comforting a child). And while, with the help of religious faith, Sara is transformed into a brave and bold woman who brings herself and Amba to freedom, Mali's motherly care is ultimately transferred to another young woman who we see embraced by Mali at the end of the film when she turns to street sex work, while her own infantilisation is reaffirmed as she still clings to the toy bear.

In relation to Mali's gender, her care for the other characters puts her in the position of a mother, but the way she is simultaneously infantilised destabilises this trope. On the one hand, Mali's motherly care gives strength and comfort to Sara and Amba, whose naivety (Sara) and emancipation (Amba) render them vulnerable. This mother-daughter relationship replicates hegemonic femininity, of women as nurturing family figures and caregivers of children as well as themselves vulnerable by virtue of their gender (van Zoonen, 1994, p. 53). Motherhood, as Gregoriou

(2012) suggests, positions women as more deserving of victim status and thus closer to the ideal victim category, especially if their care is directed at a child instead of an adult. Mali, however, fails in providing care for Amba because her nurturing behaviour is repeatedly undermined and overshadowed by the constructed immorality of the situation within which it exists (at the brothel and on the street), as well as by Mali's infantilisation. She is continuously infantilised, mainly through the presence of the toy, Nelson, but also through the aforementioned forms of social control which frame her beliefs and her body as needing transformative action.

Drawing on hooks's assertion that taking away non-Western women's agency constructs them as powerless others who need to be rescued by imperialist saviours, Desyllas (2007, p. 72) argues that infantilisation is a discursive trope which justifies rescue, which is in itself problematic because the rescue mechanisms advocated by many anti-trafficking policies and campaigners have long been criticised by migration and pro-sex work scholars for neglecting the rights and needs of migrants and sex workers (Agustín, 2007; Cojocaru, 2015; Desyllas, 2007; Mai, 2013; Segrave, Milivojevic, & Pickering, 2018; Snajdr, 2013). The film narrative favours good victims such as Sara and Amba, positioning Mali as vulnerable and as too weak to extricate herself from her predicament while failing to coherently account for the reasons behind her decision to remain outside the rescue process (for a critique of this trope see O'Brien, Hayes, & Carpenter, 2013). This is hinted at even when Mali agrees to escape with Amba and Sara, saying that she wants to see her son. It is a hint that her motherly caregiver attributes might prevail, but when audiences see her in the street waiting for clients, clutching the Nelson toy and a young sex worker, the discursive circle closes, her position as an ambivalent victim is solidified, and audiences do not see her again. Ultimately, therefore, in privileging the perspective of neoliberal feminist ideals and of Christian morality, Mali – as a poor black woman from the Global South – is othered and marginalised by not being afforded full political agency.

4.3.3. Proposals for feeling and pity: The hierarchy of victimhood

The discursive tropes of purity and blamelessness are intertwined and achieved by reference to the characters' race, gender, religion and class. The women embody

these differently through their actions and statements. Intersectionality thus plays an important part in the film because no one identity category alone determines the treatment and placement of the women as good or ambivalent or bad victims; it is the interplay between the categories, their framing, and their geo-political and socio-cultural context that determines this. And although the complexity of sex trafficking is hinted at, the representations do not open up the ideal victim category, which does not account for Mali's story in a way that would propose tender-heartedness or pity as the main feelings towards her. Instead, Mali, whose story does not fit into the ideal victim category, is an ambivalent subject described in terms of unstable discourses, whose presence does not disturb the ideal victim discourse. Mali's embodiment, or the process by which her body is invested with gendered and racialised meaning, is one that imbues her body with a moralising view of agency and victimhood. Ultimately, her story ends in ambivalence, as she is shown at the end of the film switching to street sex work. Mali is poor, but her choices are nonetheless shown as morally unacceptable and she is therefore further victimised, while Sara, who is also poor, makes good choices and is rewarded for this by the protection of the priest and the police, by her rescue and return to safety. Amba's family is better off economically, but she is a woman of colour and depicted as initially refusing the familial protection of the home and later coming to regret her independence, thus reaffirming domesticity in terms of the traditional family order.

Sara's transition from duped girl, via unwilling victim, into a courageous fighter is a discourse characteristic of postfeminism, which purports that individual women can create their own futures through individual action. In her critique of postfeminism, Gill (2017, p. 606) argues that contemporary culture is dependent on a particular register which cultivates "the 'right' kinds of dispositions for surviving in neoliberal society: confidence, resilience and positive mental attitude". Sara displays these characteristics in her agentive moves, which drive the film to a positive conclusion. What this agentive construction ignores, however, are the complex political and social circumstances that produce inequalities and vulnerabilities and which render the other two characters unable to perform the same feats of strength and independence. This is evidence of "the ways in which vulnerability is unevenly distributed across different bodies", but the film fails to give full force to vulnerability in constructing Mali; it does not give a full account of "how

vulnerability might be lived with and conditions of precarity endured" (Page, 2018, p. 282). In spite of her visibility, therefore, Mali's story does not give enough visibility to the intersecting vulnerabilities that describe her life. This is what Banet-Weiser identifies as a characteristic of popular feminism, which is close to what has so far been discussed as a postfeminist sensibility (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Gill, 2007b, 2017; McRobbie, 2009). Embedded in the patriarchal power structure, and emphasising women's empowerment, popular feminism offers visibility to marginalised groups, but manages and controls this visibility in ways that perpetuate dominant power relations by ensuring the maintenance of boundaries and borders of visibility (Banet-Weiser, 2018, pp. 25–26). Sara is ultimately the ideal victim whose actions invite a tender-hearted form of solidarity and care. She has full agentive potential and is a social and political actor, but this form of resistance seemingly works only for white Western women. This form of agency is constructed as superior and thus given political force through contrast with the agency of emotionally weak Amba and stoic Mali.

The film reproduces ideas of agency which reward the women who conform and punish the woman who does not. Indeed, the UN Trafficking Protocol has been criticised for placing too much emphasis on the purity of trafficked women and thereby focusing on recruitment, coercion and movement, for example by emphasising the protection of national borders, "white slavery" and morality around sex work as a human rights violation, while neglecting the rights of migrants and sex workers (Demetriou, 2019; Doezema, 2002; Kempadoo, 2015; Wijers, 2015). All these play out in the film in a way that constitutes a hierarchy in which Sara and Amba deserve and receive help, while Mali is less deserving and seemingly chooses to stay outside the remit of government intervention. Ahmed argues that the process of racialisation – and to that I would add the process of gendering – is not underpinned by whether particular bodies are represented as good or bad; "what is at issue", Ahmed argues, "is how black bodies become 'seen' as other, as marked by their difference from the white subject". And this process, as I have tried to demonstrate, occurs not just through one trope or form of visuality, but through the combination of race, class, gender and religion and spirituality, and through the creation of nuanced hierarchies and differences between different characters occupying the same symbolic and narrative space.

Meanwhile, audiences are placed in the position of helpless spectators. This is, admittedly, dictated by the genre, which invites the viewer to suspend disbelief and submit to the narrative. On the other hand, in emphasising its rootedness in true events this film implies a relationship with reality. Not only was it based on an academic book on trafficking, it also features the actor Ashley Judd, who is an anti-trafficking campaigner, and offers onscreen information about sex trafficking before the end credits, combined with the film's premiere at the UN's New York headquarters, hosted by the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC), which is the main UN body in charge of addressing human trafficking (UNODC, 2017). These elements imply the film's relationship with reality and its support for anti-trafficking action. So, while audiences are visually and linguistically confronted with Sara and Amba's suffering (Sara's physical altercations with traffickers and clients and her resulting beatings and rape, Amba's rape and abortion), they never see Mali with a client or being mistreated by the brothel staff. Mali's very identity – that of a sex worker – renders her complicit in her exploitation and makes her an ambivalent victim. This ambivalence, in turn, precludes her experiences from becoming politicised because sex trafficking and sex work are equated in this film in a way that betrays the film's political alignment to the criminalisation of sex work and its abolition. As such, while Sara and Amba's stories are resolved through rescue, which satisfies this narrative politics, Mali's story is interrupted and there is seemingly no good solution to her predicament and no happy ending for her. This is because the film's neo-abolitionist politics does not permit for the possibility of a person making the choice she has made, that is, engaging in sex work as labour. The only resolution to Mali's situation, then, is to interrupt the narrative and leave Mali's story unresolved.

Mali's victimisation at the hands of a racist and patriarchal system is therefore implied, but the system itself favours a different kind of victim. Discussing the idea of a woman of colour seeking justice, hooks (2015, p. 80) argues that "while it is crucial that women come to voice in a patriarchal society that socializes us to repress and contain, it is also crucial what we say, how we say it, and what our politics are". The fact that all three characters are seen here in the same film and as part of the same milieu suggests that they are all afforded voice and recognition. But, as hooks (2015, p. 80) observes, they exist in a socio-political system with a history

of oppressing and marginalising black women, so the absence of an explicit reference to racial difference and social inequality in a feminist context is what ultimately fails to bring Mali into the realm of feminist politics and thereby into the realm of good victimhood (Berlant, 2008; McRobbie, 2009). As hooks (2015, p. 82) further argues, the stoicism of a black woman in the face of sexist and racist abuse and her absence of anger or passion – which rings true for the stoic resignation with which Mali accepts her work at the brothel – make this depiction a form of female victimisation with no constructive confrontation of patriarchal social domination – in other words, with none of the political agency which could mobilise her vulnerability in service of good victimhood.

This construction of characters has repercussions for the proposals of pity that the film puts forward because the way in which it construes victims becomes key in positioning audiences in relation to the trafficked women. As Ahmed (2002, p. 60) argues, this ambivalence of space, whereby the black body is not always depicted as opposite to or distant from others, but is at times depicted as desirable or good, actually "reconstitutes social space through the reconstitution of the apartness of the white body". So it is the ways in which purity, resilience and courage are constituted through race and gender that demarcate the boundaries between the three women and this is also what marks Mali's body as different. At the culmination of the film, as the three women execute Sara's escape plan, Mali hurts her leg and is unable to continue. She stays behind and is discovered by the traffickers, who are in pursuit. It is a moment in the film where the physicality of her body (her injured body betrays her, rendering her unable to run to freedom) and the symbolism of her agency (her willingness to do sex work) meet to establish her as an ambivalent victim. The film concludes with swift police action; the brothel is disbanded, the perpetrators arrested, the women from the brothel rescued, and Sara and Amba returned to their homes.

Mali is last seen in a scene of street sex work, cradling her teddy bear and a new, young woman, in a manner reminiscent of an earlier scene in which she cares for Amba. Mali thus remains outside the protective hand of social institutions (US law enforcement) and remains an irregular migrant living on the street. By remaining outside the boundary of legality, she also remains on the margins of the symbolic space of public care because her decision to avoid rescue and therefore to not adopt

the state-approved status of a victim (and the protections this may bring) seems self-imposed. At the same time, a message about the inadequacy of law enforcement, policy and healthcare responses to irregular migrants and smuggled people, as well as questions about global wealth inequalities, racial discrimination and the morality of sex work, all loom in the background but are not addressed by a coherent critique. Thus, even though Mali's agency in her exploitation does not entirely preclude her from the remit of care, her struggle for survival does not do enough to make a claim for the collective struggle for transformation (Wilson, 2008). This makes Mali an ambiguous character, but instead of engaging with the complexity of her situation, her expulsion from the space of public compassion makes it seem as if neither the film characters nor their audience are in a position to help Mali. Remaining in street sex work obscures the context of Mali's gender subordination since the film fails to make a coherent connection to social justice that is, it does not fully mobilise her suffering as a moral obligation (Moyn, 2018, p. 149; Ticktin, 2011).

Finally, effects of gender differences are seen in the proposals made by the film's textual strategies in relation to the characters. On the one hand, audiences can relate to Sara's and Amba's plight because in the end these characters fully conform to traditional heteronormative gender norms of passivity and innocence and therefore become sympathetic and legitimate ideal victims. On the other hand, Mali's consent to sex work illustrates that, while violence against her purportedly represents the universal suffering of a woman and a mother, the film's failure to fully bring out the specific historical and cultural attributes of her suffering make her less visible and worthy of care (on gender and deserving victimhood see Ticktin, 2011, p. 260). The film proposes to audiences a position of helplessness with regard to this woman, therefore making only an ambivalent call for moral responsibility. It is ambivalent because, in spite of leaving the narrative open with regard to Mali, which has the potential to add complexity to her situation (Plambech, 2016, p. 189), the repeated emphasis on Mali's difference and deviance significantly weakens this proposal and makes her an ambivalent sufferer.

4.4. Analysis of *Doing Money:* embodiment, agency and a problematisation of the victim hierarchy

Doing Money (2018) follows the story of Anna, a Romanian woman living in London who works as a cleaner and studies nursing until she is kidnapped by a Romanian organised crime gang who threaten to harm her mother in Romania if she does not comply with their demand to work as a sex worker in their "pop-up" brothels around the UK and Ireland. Although the film focuses heavily on the experience of Anna (who is nicknamed "Blind One" by Ancuta because her glasses are taken away from her when she is kidnapped), audiences are also introduced to two supporting characters: Daniela ("Skinny One", as Ancuta calls her), a naïve young woman who also works at the brothel at the behest of her manipulative boyfriend, and Lily, a cynical mother who accepts the exploitative brothel conditions for the sake of making money to support her family. Ancuta is the cruel Romanian madam, whose character is left unexplored apart from her drug use, lack of sympathy for trafficked women, complacency and encouragement of violence towards them. The silent but manipulative and psychologically abusive brothel owner is a Romanian man, Ionut, whose controlling influence is what keeps the brothel operational and the women obedient. The film is a harrowing account of Anna's experiences, starting with her kidnapping and ending within minutes of her escape, with character development happening within the context of the sexual assaults she suffers. Throughout the film the three women wear tank tops and shorts, with lacy underwear sometimes visible under these clothes. They are often seen sitting in the living rooms and kitchens of rented apartments that act as "pop-up" brothels, and there they sometimes wear zip-up hoodies over their "uniforms", which they are sometimes seen taking off when clients arrive. The term "pop-up" brothel refers to temporary accommodations and short-term lets that act as premises where sex workers do their work. Although these kinds of accommodations are used by sex workers who work independently and voluntarily, in the UK they have been the subject of sensationalist media reports and policy inquiries where they are identified as a concern for the police and associated with trafficking and organised crime (Scoular, Pitcher, Sanders, Campbell, & Cunningham, 2019, p. 226). Such short-term premises are thus associated with moral panics regarding sex work and research has shown that there is a lack of understanding within the police of the need for such spaces in spite of the laws which prohibit co-operative indoor sex work, thus necessitating forms of mobile working and exacerbating the challenges and exploitation faced by sex workers (Scoular, Pitcher, Sanders, Campbell, &

Cunningham, 2019, p. 227). The film is based on the experience of a Romanian woman, whose pseudonym in the media is Anna. She testified against her traffickers, who received three-year prison sentences and she also provided testimony during the debates that led to the introduction of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 in Northern Ireland. In a news interview, she stated her support for the final version of the Modern Slavery Act, which criminalises buying of sex and decriminalises selling sex which, she notes, is meant to help victims and punish traffickers (quoted in McDermott, 2018). Thus, her position is abolitionist inasmuch as it does not recognise sex work as a form of labour or a choice that entails more complex negotiations of a woman's agency than those that occurred to her and which are addressed by this Act. In recognition of this point, the film starts and ends with information about the prevalence of sex trafficking and about the legislation introduced in Northern Ireland following Anna's testimony.

Like most films about human trafficking, this account is difficult to watch because of its depiction of the brutal exploitation and psychological aggression inflicted on women. The story is told entirely through Anna's experiences and no other character is developed in any depth. Importantly, the film attempts to go beyond highly criticised sex trafficking stereotypes by problematising trafficking in terms of police response and psychological abuse, thus addressing some commonplace questions about trafficking exploitation. It delves into the emotional experiences of trafficked women, exploring why it is difficult for law enforcement to address sex trafficking and why these women endure such physical exploitation and emotional abuse. My two main points of entry into the analysis of women's construction here as subjects of public pity are women's bodies and agency, which, as in *Trafficked*, open up broader issues regarding trafficked women's identities and their worthiness as subjects of pity. The body is explored through the violence on Anna's body and its subsequent cleaning, while agency is explored through Anna's acts of resilience, Daniela's youthful gullibility, and Lily's survival in oppressive conditions.

4.4.1. Constructing the ideal trafficking victim: "Breaking the girl"

In this first part of the analysis I explore how Anna's innocence is established and how sexual assault and psychological abuse functions as a method of "breaking in" a trafficked woman. In comparison, Daniela and Lily's experiences point to youth, sexualised culture, and poverty as causes for their vulnerability, but these circumstances are not construed in a way that opens the possibility for politicising their situations. Anna is the protagonist of the film, whose psychological and physical experience of trafficking forms the crux of the narrative. She embodies classic heteronormative beauty; her body is thin and toned, and, in the first scene in the film she walks and works with purpose and comfort. The brief snapshot of her happy life in London working as a cleaner and studying to be a nurse (which occupies only the first three minutes of the film) is interrupted when a small Romanian gang is shown violently kidnapping her. "One move and you're dead", a man says as he grabs Anna by the neck and forces her into a car. As the car moves off her voice narrates: "We hear about the girls who are groomed. The girls who are tricked into falling for men's stories. 'Silly girls' we all think. But I'm not a silly girl. And nobody has groomed me or tricked me. The men are Romanian, like me. They have stolen me off the streets of London. And all I can think is, nobody knows where I am. Not even me" (5'30''). Anna is thus initially established as an independent and savvy woman and a hardworking entrepreneurial migrant (Georgiou, 2019). The trope of the gullible victim who is tricked, which is characteristic of the prevailing trafficking narratives, is avoided and she is instead presented as an independent, self-sufficient subject. However, according to research, kidnapping represents a relatively uncommon trafficking scenario, but is nonetheless a common trope in films on sex trafficking (Austin & Farrell, 2017; Baker, 2014; Szörényi & Eate, 2014). Apart from adding drama to the story, the kidnapping also shifts attention away from the structural factors resulting in women's exploitation to focus instead on an innocent and uncooperative victim – in other words, another "ideal" trafficking victim (Baker, 2014; Cojocaru, 2015; Stiles, 2018; Vance, 2012).

Anna's innocence is further highlighted by her repeated use of the term "girls" to refer to trafficked women, which, used in this context, infantilises her and makes her seem youthfully innocent. Although it is often used among sex workers in a non-infantilising way, in this context it can be interpreted as somewhat infantilising. Upon her arrival at the brothel the process of Anna's "breaking in"

begins. Trafficking exposés and victim dramatisations often rely on the notion of women being beaten and raped in order to break their will and imbue a sense of powerlessness (O'Brien, Carpenter, et al., 2013). Anna is subsequently raped and beaten numerous times by both traffickers and clients, and is seen on a few occasions lying on a bed and crying after client visits or showering while the blood from cuts sustained during violent sessions with clients washes down the drain. Throughout the first half of the film Anna is repeatedly shown fighting against sexual assaults and questioning the traffickers' logic until, half way through the film, we see Ionut finally "break her in". Sitting in his chair, he states that clients do not like Anna because she smells bad, is uncooperative and "just lays there". In front of Ancuta, Daniela and Lily, Anna stands nervously but unwaveringly, her hair dishevelled, dark circles around her eyes, wearing a black mini-dress, and says "My teeth are broken in pieces. Of course my breath smells", adding after a brief exchange: "I can hardly walk and you want me to enjoy it?", upon which Ionut calmly and ominously gets up, grabs her by the neck, puts her into a car – Ancuta following them – and drives her into the countryside in the middle of the night. After some threats and abusive remarks, he violently drags her out of the car by her hair, puts her in the middle of the road, pushing her head down so she is bent over looking at an oncoming truck, and tells her:

> I look after you, I protect you. From the police, immigration, the others. Or I leave you here alone. In the middle of nowhere. I will ask you just once more. Do you wanna work for me? Do you wanna do money for me, or do you prefer to die like a dog in the middle of the road? That your poor mama will never know what happened to her baby?

Anna is next seen getting into the car and closing the door behind her, indicating her acquiescence, and in the following scenes she becomes despondent and listless, and endures what is done to her already injured body. With this, the psychological and physical violence inflicted upon Anna reaches its maximum and is consolidated to render her the ideal trafficking victim.

Daniela and Lily, the other two women shown moving around with the brothel and carrying out sex work, have neither been trafficked nor smuggled but work willingly. Because of their cooperation and acquiescence to the pimps' demands they do not endure beatings or threats and they are never shown with clients. Daniela is very young and naïve, believing that her boyfriend loves her and

wanted her to work at the brothel to finance their future life together. “I’m here to do webcam. No sex. It’s what my boyfriend told me”, she tells Ancuta. “Wear pretty clothes and just talk to the camera, is what he said”, to which she receives a derisive scoff from Lily, while Ancuta ignores her and continues explaining the prices and the sex services they are going to offer. “The split’s 50-50 for all my girls, except Blind One, who likes it so much she does it for nothing”, she adds, referring to an earlier encounter between the two women when Anna refused a customer, incurring Ancuta’s punishment (10'15''). Coercive control and manipulation are thus established as both physical and psychological, as Ancuta here simultaneously exerts pressure on Daniela to do more than she had agreed to, and threatens Anna with the withdrawal of her money and – later in this conversation – even of food.

Lily is knowledgeable about how things work at the brothel and disillusioned about the possibility of making a livelihood in any other way. She is mostly silent, her expression derisive and annoyed, but one conversation in particular illustrates her cynicism and hopelessness. After their first arrest, as Anna, Daniela and Lily sit in a jail cell and Anna questions the morality of buying sexual services, she makes an observation about the kind of sexual assault that occurs routinely to her at the brothel, saying: “It isn’t sex though, is it? It’s rape”. With weary indifference Lily responds from across the cell: “We go along with it. It’s our job. You think you’re special, Anna? You’re just a hole. *[turning to Daniela]* She’s a hole. I’m a hole. That’s how men are” (15' 40''). Lily sees herself as an object for the enjoyment of anonymous men who become entitled to it through a transactional exchange. This scene problematically conflates (Lily’s) sex work and (Anna’s) rape, but also implicates Lily in her own victimisation, thereby placing her lower in the victim hierarchy. She is depicted as complicit in her own exploitation because, unlike Anna, she does not attempt to escape. In this way the narrative elides important socio-economic factors which may have contributed to Lily’s choice, and relies on dominant forms of social imaginary about the kidnapping and coercion of trafficking victims (Baker, 2014; Yea, 2015) to construct hierarchical difference between Anna and Lily. While Anna unfailingly objects to the entire situation and therefore occupies the position of an ideal victim, Lily accepts her work at the brothel. She sees herself as objectified by men and accepts that this as a social situation which she cannot change but must exist within. This is a trope that relies on two elements. On

the one hand, we see gendered representations of women as sexual objects for the consumption of men which draw from popular culture and persisting historical representation of women in the media. Feminist critics have in recent years identified this as the "sexualisation of culture", arguing that women's sexualisation has been reformatted as empowering and agentive and thus dislodged from its cultural and social embeddedness (Gill & Donaghue, 2013). As a sexual object, Lily represents a commentary on the culture which objectifies women for others' consumption, and therefore represents a victim of this culture, but this does not mean that she is fully free of agency; instead she uses cynicism to make Anna see her side of the story. On the other hand, Lily's acquiescence to sex work is shown as a choice she has made – presumably within the limited choices she had.

Perhaps, more broadly, the depiction of Lily's agency in choosing sex work could be seen as an implicit commentary on dominant media discourses of trafficking that focus on oppressed ideal victims who need rescue, and overlook women in precarious circumstances of migrant labour (Desyllas, 2007; Galusca, 2012; Kempadoo, 2015; Matthews, 2015). The film attempts to problematise this media image of sex trafficking and exploitative sex work by addressing not only psychological abuse, coercion and control (in Anna's case), but also different identities and experiences that complicate the notion of agentive action (in Daniela's and Lily's). Anna, as the protagonist and the only person seen in the film being sexually assaulted, suffers the most because she is an unwilling worker. Daniela and Lily observe Anna's resistance and resulting suffering and in their interactions they, on the one hand, dismiss her and, on the other, reveal the difficulties of their own situations (as in the jail scene quoted above). Anna is thus separated from Daniela and Lily experientially. She is undoubtedly an ideal trafficking victim, but also a vehicle through which audiences come to understand more complex forms of exploitation.

Lily, in particular, meanwhile embodies a form of agency in oppressive circumstances but her identity is not unified or articulated in a way that makes her subjective experiences easily understandable (on agency and identity in oppressive circumstances see Madhok, 2013a, 2013b). Immediately after the above-mentioned exchange, still sitting in a jail cell, Anna asks a passing police officer if she can call her mother – as she asks various people many times throughout the film and is

always ignored until after her escape – to which, with agitation, Lily comments: "Would you just shut up about your mother! We all have mothers… and some of us have children too" (16'15''). In this brief exchange, upon which Lily does not elaborate in the rest of the film, Lily's and Anna's views and experiences are thus established as very different. As audience we do not know how Lily came to work at the brothel, but we are made aware that her life circumstances and responsibilities are different from Anna's, which, in turn, implies that perhaps sex work is the best option available to her. Therefore, embodying both a vulnerable woman and a resigned mother who does what is needed to support her son and thus does not openly resist her oppressors, Lily allows her body to be mistreated but nonetheless shows acts of agency – not in order to fulfil patriarchally accepted moral standards, but to fulfil moral obligations towards her family (Madhok, 2013a, pp. 37–38). She thus embodies a gendered discourse that is unstable and contradictory (Ahmed, 2002), but that is in line with a complex view of agency that trafficking scholars identify as an important element in fully understanding exploitation, sex work, migration and trafficking (O'Brien, Carpenter, et al., 2013; O'Connell Davidson, 2016). Like Mali, the character from *Trafficking*, Lily is a poor woman who accepts sex work as a survival strategy (Wilson, 2008), but what the film does not address are the socio-economic circumstances (or any circumstances whatsoever) that have led her to choose (or to be coerced into) sex work, and to do so at this particularly violent brothel. Thus, although the film gestures towards this woman's vulnerability, it does not carry a sustained call for moral responsibility.

4.4.2. Constructing the ideal trafficking victim: Resilience in vulnerability

Anna is distinct from Daniela and Lily not only in terms of her experience of trafficking, but also in her character's narrative arc and the actions she takes. Daniela and Lily mostly observe, react and comply with the traffickers' demands, showing a form of agency that is less about improving their situation and more about existence and survival within oppressive situations. Anna, on the other hand, observes, learns, and acts in the interest of escape, which is to say that her vulnerability is mitigated by her resilience that is, an ability to recover from shock or difficulty (Gill & Orgad, 2018), when she acts to change her own circumstances. After her "breaking in" experience, Anna acquiesces for a while, going through the motions of sex work

without fighting back, and even offering to help with the maintenance of the online service through which clients contact the brothel, and with depositing the brothel's profits in Ionut's bank accounts. Approaching silently and timidly, but hopefully, she says to Ionut: "I can do some of that. Take the burden off Ancuta" (48'), referring to the ringing phone and offering to arrange client visits. When she does well and performs helpfully, she demonstrates that she is smart and capable, and is trusted with more responsibilities and freedoms.

When the opportunity arises, she plots her escape by taking advantage of the arrival of Declan, a regular client. Under the pretence of an "out call" or visit to a client outside the brothel, Anna pleads with Declan to help her escape and, after agreeing to help, he asks: "If it was so bad why did you never just leave?", to which Anna responds: "I was too scared… and they make you believe it's all you're good for" (1h 6'30'). Two elements of this brief exchange establish Anna as a resilient woman but also undeniably a trafficking victim in spite of her acquiescence to the traffickers. Firstly Declan's ignorance serves to stress Anna's vulnerability and exploitation and therefore to position her as undeniably a trafficked woman since, let us remember, the UN Trafficking Protocol stipulates that "the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability" constitutes the means of trafficking (United Nations, 2000). This trope differs from many familiar images of anti-trafficking campaigns where exploitation and abuse is stressed with images of chains and women tied to beds and other objects (for an analysis of this trope see Andrijasevic, 2007). This scene focuses instead on psychological abuse of power, which in many countries is a legal requirement for proving one's status as a trafficking victim and accessing legal and other recourse (Andrijasevic, 2003; Wijers, 2015).

Secondly, this exchange marks a turn in Anna's attitude, as she regains her will to escape and save herself from suffering. Although this first escape attempt is unsuccessful and Anna is briefly returned to the brothel, she immediately escapes again on realising that her punishment for the attempt will be brutal. "If nobody wants to buy her then the obvious destination is Dubai. They love girls like her over there… for a little while", says Ionut, brainstorming on how to get rid of Anna. "Dubai, where old whores go to die", adds Ancuta with contempt (1h 9'15'). Hearing what might be in store for her, Anna uses a moment when a client is entering the brothel to finally successfully escape, and through this action she

becomes the "right kind of help-seeking victim" (Gill & Donaghue, 2013, p. 254) – a victim who understands her own vulnerability, sees through the manipulative exploitation, fights against injustice and maltreatment, and through individual action leaves behind oppressive conditions. Anna demonstrates resilience through this ability to recover from shock and trauma enough to act on her own behalf. However, resilience, like vulnerability, has a contradictory and unstable character. While Anna has experienced suffering and damage to her body, she now overcomes her position through individual action (Bracke, 2016). This individual action (she does not wait for the police to rescue her even though their investigation is pending throughout the film), and in the context of Anna's race and class – a lower middle-class woman – her resilience in line with a postfeminist sensibility, that allows her to overcome the fragility and passivity of traditional femininity and instead to act on her own behalf and overcome her exploitative situation (Bracke, 2016).

Compared with Anna, Daniela is childish and naïve. Her age and gullibility suggest this, and it is further highlighted by the way she perceives her own situation and by her blindness to what is obvious to Anna – that both her boyfriend and the pimps are exploiting her. Just before audiences see Daniela for the last time, she and Anna lie talking in makeshift beds on the floor of an unfurnished room in the rented flat which acts as a temporary brothel. Everything is dark and quiet, and in a mid-shot Daniela can be seen lying on her back, her arms behind her head, looking up at the ceiling, while Anna lies on her stomach next to her:

> DANIELA: When I was little I wanted to grow up to be a princess. One day I'm going to have a little house in the forest, where I can have dogs… and chickens. And live there with my boyfriend.
> ANNA: I know you still think he's coming for you…
> […] *A short exchange ensues where Daniela announces that she is leaving for Stockholm and suggests that Anna come with her.*
> ANNA: I'm going to get you out of here. (1h 0'0")

Daniela's youth and naivety are here established through both her childlike upward gaze and her fantasising about princesses and a life in the forest. Moreover, she mentions her boyfriend three times in the film, and each time – through the stark contrast of her situation at the brothel where the pimps move her across the country without asking and where she does sex work which is not something she initially agreed to do – audiences are reminded of the falsity of his love and promises to her.

Her naivety, coupled with her continued gullibility about her boyfriend's love and her denial of the reality of the situation as seen through Anna's and the audiences' eyes, positions Daniela as childlike and hence in need of help. And indeed, Anna – who is until then focused exclusively on her own escape – promises this help upon hearing Daniela's childish ruminations. Daniela is infantilised, in a similar way to Sara in *Trafficked*, through the emphasis on her youth, which is a recurring trope in representations of trafficked women (Andrijasevic & Mai, 2016; de Villiers, 2016; Farrell & Fahy, 2009; Gregoriou, 2018; Johnston et al., 2015; Szörényi & Eate, 2014; M. Wilson & O'Brien, 2016), but, unlike Sara, Daniela is not seen to grow out of her youthful ignorance and gullibility.

Crucially, Daniela's failure to recognise her own exploitation, coupled with her childish gullibility, thus implies that she is weak and helpless and therefore in need of a rescuer to make her aware of her own exploitation. These tropes are in line with gendered notions of vulnerability whereby as weak and young, Daniela is seen as in need of help, which would in turn justify various forms of control over her body and behaviour (Mackenzie, Rogers, & Dodds, 2014a; Walklate, 2011). At the same time as she is positioned as an infantilised, gendered subject, she is thus also not presented as a good subject like Anna, or like Sara in *Trafficked*, who both recognise the harm of their situations (which are, of course, different from that of Daniela, who has not been kidnapped) and attempt to overcome these harmful circumstances through individual action. On the contrary, the emphasis on Daniela's youth presents this as inviting outside action and control over her body through rescue. This is another trope in anti-trafficking representations, related to women's infantilisation and vulnerability, and critiqued for ignoring individual subjectivities and the possibility that some women choose sex work as the best option available to them (Blanchette et al., 2013; Jones, King, & Edwards, 2018; Ray, 2018; A. Russell, 2014). In light of the framing of the character of Daniela as naïve and inexperienced, her rejection of the proposed rescue and Anna's subsequent repeated attempt to learn what happened to her after she leaves for Stockholm, serve to demonstrate Daniela's false consciousness in choosing migrant sex work and to justify her perceived need to be rescued (on false consciousness in sex work, moral panics, and justifications for rescue, see Brennan, 2017; Weitzer, 2007).

Positioned lowest on the hierarchy of victimhood is Lily, who is never offered rescue and nor does Anna enquire about her whereabouts or well-being when she questions the police about Daniela. Lily's acquiescence is established early in the film, on Anna's first night at the brothel when she attempts to climb through the window of their bedroom but is confronted by a panicked Daniela and deterred by a sleepy Lily who speaks with urgency and knowledge. Woken by a noise at the window, Daniela panics:

> DANIELA: What are you doing?
> ANNA: Shh, stop.
> DANIELA: Lily, you need to wake up, stop her.
> ANNA: I have to get out.
> LILY: They've got your passport, right? Your clothes and your glasses. How far are you going to get in your knickers in a foreign country? The window is nailed down. Now, can we all get some sleep? (12' 30'')

While the exploitation of Daniela's youthful vulnerability is positioned as inviting Anna's help, as well as, implicitly, the help of benevolent benefactors, Lily's cynical outlook invites ambivalence rather than tender-hearted emotion. And while Anna tries to escape and thus demonstrates resilience, Lily does nothing to change her oppressive circumstance, indeed she actively tries to deter Anna from attempting an escape. So, while Lily is presented as a vulnerable woman who is exploited because of her difficult life circumstances, we also see her as a sex worker who is complicit in her exploitation and lacks the ability to overcome her vulnerability. She is, in other words, not a resilient subject, a condition which research in the UK has shown to be associated with working-class mothers, which suggests that they lack the material and psychological substance to overcome poverty and vulnerability (Gill & Orgad, 2018; Harrison, 2013). This tension between her complicity and lack of resilience on the one hand, and her complicity in exploitation on the other, is what produces a sense of ambivalence around Lily that does not constellate around Anna, whose fervent refusal and repeated escape attempts make her both legally and discursively the ideal trafficking victim (for a detailed account of the criminal justice response to sex trafficking and its investment in ideal victimhood, see Segrave et al., 2018). Thus, the film makes a proposal to reflect on Lily's cynicism as a coping strategy, although it does more to establish Anna as a good victim than to open up questions of Lily's comparative disadvantage.

The reason why the image of Anna as an ideal victim is more meaningfully proposed is because her suffering is visualised and contextualised. In contrast, there is little in the film that serves to contextualise or historicise Lily's circumstances, which highlights her lack of resilience rather than politicising her plight by unpacking the conditions of her vulnerability. Her existence serves to construct Anna's actions as tropes of ideal victimhood rather than to politicise Lily's own presumed experience of poverty and motherhood. Dressed in the same "uniform" as Anna and Daniela, Lily is often seen throughout the film in lacy underwear (for instance in the bathroom and bedroom scenes quoted above) or in a tank top and mini-skirt or shorts, sometimes accompanied by a sweatshirt and comfortable boots (as in the jail scene). Visually and physically, she only appears in the context of sex work at the brothel – indeed the only time we see her outside of the brothel is in the jail scene. She mostly exists in the background of Anna's traumatic experiences and observes the situations quietly. She rarely speaks in front of the pimps or communicates with them; instead she does what she is told and stays out of their way, but she speaks with Anna and Daniela, often instructing them on how things work and what they should not do. For instance, Lily offers a survival strategy to Anna and Daniela by explaining why they need to "go along with it", and alerts Anna to the dangers of escaping in the middle of the night, which could be seen to constitute resilience, but it carries less potential to politicise her situation because it is deprived of any context and history. This ambivalence is further solidified by her exclusion from Anna's subsequent escape attempts and from any resolution to her story. Instead, after her quiet appearances throughout the film, Lily stays behind at the brothel and disappears just as quietly when Anna escapes, and is not heard from again.

4.4.3. Proposals for feeling and pity: Consolidating the hierarchy of victimhood

In the narrative of *Doing Money,* Anna is represented as an ideal victim not only because she manages to escape and because her actions result in cooperation with police and the institution of a new law governing "modern slavery", but because this further actualises her resilience to become an active subject whose goal is to instigate wider change through her own, individual actions. Meanwhile, Daniela and Lily's different sets of intersecting oppressive circumstances is not explored, leaving them

at the margins of compassionate care. While in *Trafficked* individual action results in the culmination and resolution of the film but elides more salient structural issues, *Doing Money* engages with these issues in a more explicit way but still does not go so far as to substantively elucidate the intersection of (socio-economic, cultural, geopolitical, and potentially other) vulnerabilities that led Daniela and Lily to the brothel.

While Anna's emancipated independence is stifled by her kidnapping and "breaking in", she is a resilient subject who, after multiple failed attempts, succeeds in escaping from the brothel. As her story unfolds, the two supporting characters, Daniela and Lily, represent less developed but, as research indicates, more common scenarios of exploitative migrant sex work. Daniela's youthful gullibility makes her an infantilised subject inviting rescue (Anna asks police about her whereabouts in the last scene of the film), but she legally falls outside this remit (the police officer observes that she will not be helpful in the investigation and therefore decides not to pursue her case any further), while Lily's quiet acquiescence makes her an ambivalent subject, neither worthy of a rescue attempt nor morally contemptible, but somewhere in between. I suggest that such a construction of the three characters constitutes, as in *Trafficked*, a victim hierarchy, which brings Anna into the remit of compassionate care, but leaves Daniela and Lily on the margins of it. In spite of the higher level of engagement with issues of sex work, in this film, like in *Trafficked*, the narratives close with Anna's rescue and thereby the stories of Daniela and Lily are interrupted, leaving the proposals for moral compassion partial. This could be read as a symbolic comment on the inadequate nature of the recourse offered to these ambivalent subjects,[9] thus, as Plambech suggests, introducing complexity and leaving viewers with the responsibility to question the dichotomy of agency and

[9] The main protocol governing human trafficking: the UN Trafficking Protocol, upon which many national approaches to human trafficking and sex trafficking are based, has been regularly criticised for excluding people in precisely these kinds of ambivalent situations. In the US, the 2000 Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) has been criticised for collapsing the distinction between forced and voluntary sex work thus focusing on abolitionist interventions, and on rescue and rehabilitation of victims through brothel raids and Christian-based rehabilitation projects (Cojocaru, 2016; Soderlund, 2005). In the UK, the Modern Slavery Act 2015 has likewise been criticised for its focus on immigration issues over protections for victims and prevention of exploitation, and for subsuming many different forms of labour and exploitation under the term "modern slavery" (Lammasniemi, 2017). For instance, while the Modern Slavery Act expands the remit for border protection, it places almost no requirement for addressing structural change and the causes of inequality (Ras & Gregoriou, 2019).

vulnerability (Plambech, 2016, p. 189). However, the film does not offer much commentary in this regard – save for the police officer's observation about Daniela's move to Sweden – so such a reading cannot be fully substantiated in this case.

Instead, an explanation for this lack of resolution for Daniela's and Lily's situations is that, like with Mali in *Doing Money*, the film's neo-abolitionist political orientation, which is in line with laws and policies governing human trafficking in the US, equates sex trafficking with sex work. Positioning Daniela and Lily lower on the hierarchy of victimhood can, therefore, be interpreted as a result of the film's support for the criminalisation of sex work. Daniela's vulnerability and Mali's exploitative working conditions are circumstances that are framed as less deserving of public pity. This is because these women's choice to work in the sex industry is not considered a legitimate choice but always necessarily a violation of their human rights regardless of the circumstances, oppressions, and exploitations that may impact this choice. This affects each woman's positioning on the victim hierarchy: Daniela's gullibility and initial rejection of sex work as labour positions her as a more deserving victim than Mali, who knowingly and consensually engages in sex work. In terms of a politics of pity, the film resolves this issue in a way that places sex work as a form of labour as an impossibility while prioritising the narrative of rescue and abolition. This means that an argument about whether sex work can be a legitimate choice as labour is precluded in this narrative and instead a politics emerges that favours the view of all trafficked women and sex workers as vulnerable women in need of rescue. Yet, the film simultaneously treats as ambivalent victims those who reject this construction of victimhood and in doing so, already settles the possibilities of meaning both in terms of feelings towards trafficked women as sufferers (placing some lower and others higher on a victim hierarchy) and in terms of the film's politics (favouring the criminalisation of sex work). Thus, in interrupting the stories of Daniela and Lily, the film misses the opportunity to make a substantive critique of the dominant trafficking narrative or of the gendered assumptions that accompany the representation of these characters.

With regard to embodiment, Sobchack has argued that the material reality of a body is not just what is visible; the lived body is lived dialectically both from the perspective of the embodied viewer, and from what is visible to the viewer. She further notes that, as "materially embodied and visual beings, we are always and

simultaneously personal subjects of vision and social objects of vision" (Sobchack, 2004, p. 181). These two processes, Sobchack argues, "highlight the way in which the objectively visible stands as only one side of vision and needs to be thickened by the subjective and value-laden side of vision that exceeds and enfolds vision's visible productions" (Sobchack, 2004, p. 181). While Anna's embodied experience is examined in detail and accompanied by a contextualised story, and Daniela's character is lightly touched upon through her gullible personality and age, Lily's embodied experience and her actions are left almost entirely unaddressed. She exists at the margins of the narrative, standing or sitting and mostly watching with detachment, and the only aspects of her subjectivity that are visible are those that are contrasted with Anna. Thus Lily embodies a form of vulnerability that does not stand on its own to tell a coherent story. Her detachment itself is not without meaning – it signifies her objectification and complicity in sex work, but through the lack of context around the tension between her objectification and her complicity with staying at the brothel, she emerges as an ambivalent subject. She is neither fully deserving of public pity – as illustrated by her absence from Anna's post-rescue enquiries, nor is she an undeserving victim.

The ambivalence with which Lily and (to a lesser extent) Daniela are treated points to the instability of public discourse and to the limited moral obligation towards them. That limitation stems from simplifying the experiences of gendered subjects and exploring their vulnerability mainly through one aspect of their identities and experience while overlooking others (see for instance Mai, 2018; Gregoriou, 2012). "Since it [is] not tradition or biology but gender that [brings] these persons together," Grewal notes, "it [is] necessary to understand gender as a highly contingent and diverse formation that could not be understood outside its articulation with race, nation, religion, class, or sexuality" (Grewal, 2005, p. 136). In the context of sex trafficking and of this hierarchy of victimhood, it seems that the articulations of gender with other factors such as poverty, abuse or other kinds of social exclusion are elided, and these kinds of omissions are telling. Daniela and Lily's characters reveal briefly and in passing the life circumstances that intersect to create their vulnerabilities: they are poor, immigrants, mothers, subjects of partner abuse, all of which constellates different categories of vulnerability from Anna and contributes to their attitudes toward sex work. In light of these factors, their identities become

complex and a different sense of agency and victimhood emerges which does not correspond to Western notions of agency as free choice. Their willingness to expose their bodies to potential rape and abuse becomes an agentive move, so their vulnerability constitutes a form of resilience and agency in oppressive conditions (Butler, 2001; Madhok, 2013).

In order to fully integrate these identity categories into their characters and mobilise them in a meaningful way it would have been important to move away from the way in which the film presupposes a universal understanding of rights and justice by creating a victim hierarchy. As Moyn (2018, p. 169) proposes, human rights discourse focuses largely on "sufficiency" of recourse towards ideal victims who are clearly in need of help. In relying on such moral obligations, this discourse fails to account for structural inequalities because it focuses on the lowest point of equality, or as he calls it the "floor of protection" against suffering (Moyn, 2018, p. 202). In order to facilitate recognition, as Butler argues, it is important to acknowledge difference in its particular social context – and this is precisely the kind of inequality what the hierarchy of victimhood precludes (Butler, 2001a, p. 92). It legitimates a particular victim – Anna – by arranging representational tropes in ways that emphasise her suffering over the experience of others and by showing police action directed solely at the ideal victim, while excluding others. Thus, in the construction of the characters of Daniela and Lily, the articulation of gender with other identity categories is missed, as is therefore the social context that describes their experiences.

4.5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have analysed two films, *Trafficked* and *Doing Money*. Both films, I suggest, maintain a victim hierarchy through the ways in which they construct trafficked women as subjects of public pity. I have used the analytics of mediation and the categories of embodiment and agency to explore what proposals for emotional and moral engagement are constructed. I propose that the tropes of purity, innocence, and physical violence as well as resilience and bravery are used to construct ideal victims and marginalise ambivalent subjects.

I suggest that in *Trafficked* the ideal victim, Sara, is positioned as pure and innocent, displaying resilience and courage in order to escape and to rescue the other women. Her innocence and purity are constructed throughout, by comparison with Amba's initial rejection of domestic familial safety which, it is suggested, invited male violence. Throughout the film, Sara seeks to go back to the safety of the Christian group home, while Amba comes to regret her rejection of the domestic familial home and is then rewarded by being rescued and returned home, thus re-establishing her traditional femininity in the domestic realm. Mali represents an ambivalent subject in the film whose sexual availability, as well as her belief in the spiritual juju curse, serves to create an ambivalent character. Namely, her vulnerability due to poverty and her duty as a mother and wife create a discursive tension and thus an ambivalence in the proposals for feeling towards her. In a similar way, the characters in *Doing Money* also form a hierarchy of victimhood that is based on intersectional factors that impact women's experience of sex trafficking and migrant sex work. Anna, the ideal victim and the film's protagonist, is constructed as independent and as innocent, and the depiction of her brutal "breaking in" positions her as a sufferer. Daniela represents a youthful gullibility that becomes associated with an imperative to rescue her from an exploitative situation, while Lily represents a complicity with sex work emphasised through her resigned acceptance of it as a way to make money, and her cynicism does not change throughout the film. The discursive tension which produces ambivalence in her construction rests on the contrast between her status as a poor immigrant mother and her complicity with sex work. She remains a detached subject and is ultimately lost to the narrative, and thus her suffering is not capitalised upon in order to politicise her plight.

This genre, I therefore propose, represents a hierarchy of victimhood whereby ideal victims are positioned as fully within the remit of tender-hearted care, while characters that fall outside this remit represent gendered and racialised subjects whose marginalisation is capitalised upon as a form of exclusion from, more often than inclusion in, the realm of care and moral responsibility. Nonetheless, in this genre intersectional elements such as gender, race, class and religion and spirituality are not omitted, but are rather mobilised to create a hierarchy of victimhood. This hierarchy, in turn, while not positioning some women as bad and others as good victims, does contrast ideal with ambivalent victims. Ambivalence is significant

because it opens up possibilities for relating to trafficked women and understanding their social oppression in meaningful ways, but here it does not work in such a way because this kind of understanding is precluded. The depictions in the film thus foreclose the potential to politicise the marginalised characters through the way the narratives close without substantively addressing the intersectional conditions that render some women ambivalent subjects of pity.

Chapter Five: Trafficked Women in Celebrity Advocacy: The Performances of Emma Thompson and Jada Pinkett Smith

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter I present an analysis of the advocacy projects of two celebrities: Emma Thompson and Jada Pinkett Smith. Both of these, I argue, destabilise the hierarchy of victimhood. The actions of celebrities introduce contradictions into the depiction of the kinds of experiences and identities that define trafficked women as deserving of public pity. This happens because, in their advocacy work, the celebrities do not resolve or close down particular victim narratives, thus leaving open possibilities of meaning that move away from ideal victimhood. The genre of celebrity advocacy employs textual strategies that accommodate such constructions. Namely, because celebrity as a genre is predicated on the process of personification, that is the celebrity's combination of public and private persona, Thompson and Pinkett Smith's performances of advocacy make proposals for who is worthy of compassion, that sometimes destabilise the hierarchy of victimhood. Specifically, while both Thompson and Pinkett Smith participate in the creation of anti-trafficking materials such as YouTube videos (both), public testimonies (Pinkett Smith), and art installations (Thompson), in press interviews they also speak about sex trafficking in ways that are more informal and open-ended than those seen in the videos, the installation and other media texts. Here the limits of the ideal victim image that their advocacy outputs establish are probed, and importantly, women who fall outside of the ideal victim discourse are included into the realm of care. In this way celebrity advocacy represents a destabilisation of the victim hierarchy.

5.2. Description of data

These two celebrities, like the films and newspapers discussed in this thesis, represent examples from the UK (Emma Thompson) and the US (Jada Pinkett Smith). Unlike the other genres considered, celebrity advocacy occurs over a longer time period. Accordingly, I needed to expand the timespan for data collection, since both celebrities started their anti-trafficking activism before the news and film content analysed were created, and both continue with this work as of 2018. These celebrities have produced content sporadically over the years in response to laws and policies or to other events in the anti-trafficking movement, such as Thompson's

promotion of the *Journey* exhibition, or the adding of her signature to a petition advising Amnesty International, when the organisation was debating its stance on the trade, to take an abolitionist stance towards sex work.

I chose to analyse the exhibition and the anti-trafficking video in depth because Thompson was personally highly visible in both and because these typify the ways in which she brings trafficked women into co-presence. I further illustrate her reflections through a sample of interviews she gave between 2007 and 2018. These were selected for their ability to illustrate what I have identified as the predominant discursive constructions of the body and agency in her advocacy. Pinkett Smith's advocacy, she has claimed, started when her daughter brought sex trafficking to her attention in 2014. Like Thompson, she has been active in supporting the cause over the years, if with fluctuating intensity. In analysing her advocacy, I focus in particular on a video she made with her band, on a video interview in which she discusses sex trafficking, and on a reflective video posted on a website called *Don't Sell Bodies*, which she created in support of her anti-trafficking work. I further illustrate the tropes used in her advocacy with a selection of interviews given between 2014 and 2018. The endpoint for this data sampling, the year 2018, corresponds to my dates of collection for film and press journalism.

5.3. Emma Thompson: A feminist fighter

Two-time Academy Award winning performer and screenwriter Emma Thompson is an acclaimed British actor who has achieved success in Hollywood. She is regarded as one of the foremost female actors of her generation and is also a veteran screenwriter and comedian. She has an influential public persona, often speaks about feminist issues such as the sexualisation of women in show business, chooses projects which are in line with gender equality, and is an outspoken advocate on various human-rights issues. She was the protégé of philanthropist Helen Bamber and upon her passing took up the position of President of the Helen Bamber Foundation, a charity for women that helps victims of violence, including women trafficked for sexual exploitation (Helen Bamber Foundation, n.d.). In addition to her work for the Foundation, she has produced and performed in a number of anti-trafficking films and videos in collaboration with UNODC, the Body Shop, and with

artists (for instance on the art installation entitled *Journey* which has travelled internationally) and filmmakers (most notably as executive producer of the 2014 film *Sold*) ("Emma Thompson's Journey," 2008). All these aspects of Thompson's persona give her legitimacy in acting as a spokesperson for anti-trafficking efforts and exemplifying an educational form of feminism and public morality.

Emma Thompson has been a feminist activist and campaigner for decades, recently showing her support for the #MeToo movement and taking a stand against sexual harassment by withdrawing from acting in the film *Luck* after learning that Skydance, the film's production company, had hired John Lasseter to be its head of animation. Lasseter had left Pixar months earlier after allegations of workplace misconduct and, upon learning of his new appointment, Thompson quit the project and sent an open letter to company executives explaining her decision (McNamara, 2019). Thompson's principled stance – enabled by her privileged position of established celebrity – illustrates the place where her private and public personas meet and allowed her to write the following as a reason for quitting the film:

> I am well aware that centuries of entitlement to women's bodies whether they like it or not is not going to change overnight. Or in a year. But I am also aware that if people who have spoken out — like me — do not take this sort of a stand then things are very unlikely to change at anything like the pace required to protect my daughter's generation. (McNamara, 2019)

Apart from illustrating how Thompson's personal morality and feminist values intertwine with her professional life, her stance in this excerpt from the letter also exemplifies the two main aspects of her activism: she does not shy away from facing trauma or injury in the way she brings subjects of suffering into a performance (referring to "entitlement to women's bodies"), and she embodies a protective public persona (taking on the role of speaking up). Meanwhile, her activism has a clear feminist orientation and her agency is supported by her significant cultural capital (her departure from the film, along with the full open letter, made international news). In what follows I first provide a descriptive account of some of Thompson's activist performances and depictions of trafficked women's embodiment and agency, taking as examples a video and an art installation. Throughout this analysis, and as I outline the tropes that construct trafficked women, I also rely on a selection of interviews in which Thompson has spoken about sex trafficking and about her advocacy for victims. In Thompson's advocacy the proposals for meaning are

constructed through Thompson's persona as a feminist, as well as through the generalisation of suffering and the avoidance of sexual objectification of trafficked women's bodies.

5.3.1. Emma Thompson's performance and personification: Examples

Two examples of Thompson's anti-trafficking activism illustrate particularly well the proposals of meaning made about trafficked women's bodies and actions in her advocacy. She participated in the making and promotion of both of these projects, which include an anti-trafficking video and an art installation. In developing anti-trafficking projects and strengthening her knowledge of sex trafficking Thompson claims to be aided by her role in the Helen Bamber Foundation, through which she comes into contact with trafficked women and hears their stories. "I've travelled enough and I've spoken enough to hundreds of women around the world. I know what's going on. I've seen it first-hand. And I haven't even been to many places! But it's endemic in so many countries and, it turns out, pretty common in ours" (quoted in Shoard, 2009). Using first-hand accounts to substantiate her claims and to legitimate her role as a spokesperson, Thompson establishes her celebrity capital and hints at her role as a witness to human suffering. In this way a connection is established between her private morality (which feels compelled to witness others' suffering) and her public persona (which seeks to bring trafficked women into co-presence in the mediated public sphere through speaking on their behalf).

One analytically salient instance of her advocacy is a short anti-trafficking video, made in collaboration with the Helen Bamber Foundation, entitled *Torture by Any Other Name*, where Thompson uses her own body (her public, celebrity persona) to depict the experience of a trafficked woman (Moy, 2011). The video features Thompson lying on a bed covered by dirty linen. The colour palette of the wall, bedsheets, her bare skin, and part of a man's hand, which is all that is visible in the video, is all shades of beige. Throughout the video only Thompson's face and shoulders are visible and she speaks in a low tone and in short, simple sentences, from two interchanging perspectives: Elena and Maria. These are actually the same person, but one is the woman's identity before and the other after being trafficked. The video begins with a mid-shot of Thompson lying in profile and turning to the

camera to say in a high, soft voice “Elena didn’t think anyone would hurt her. Elena trusted everyone”; then the camera cuts to her body from the same perspective but with something outside the frame pressing on it, and her voice becomes deeper and more strained as she says “Maria doesn’t trust anyone”. She then continues switching between the two identities (the same frame of the actress on a bed, but with short cuts between her speaking in different intonations), with Elena lying still and Maria shown being increasingly harshly handled – suggesting she is being raped – as a man’s arms appear over her face in one instance, and her face is straining and contorting with pain in others. Changing between a calmer, even tone and a deeper, strained tone that is at times interrupted by forceful movements, she delivers the rest of her lines:

> Elena wanted to learn English / Maria gets beaten if she says no.
> Elena worked in a market to support her family / Maria works for nothing.
> Elena wanted to help people and be a nurse / Maria services up to 40 men a day.
> Elena used to cry when her father was cross with her / Maria doesn’t feel anything… any more.
> Elena’s family thinks she’s dead.

This is followed by a quick “help me”, uttered while lying on her stomach with her head pressed into the sheets by a male hand. The sequence finishes with Thompson revealing that “I was Elena/ I am Maria. Help me. I’m here”. In between these sequences, images appear of feet in high-heeled red shoes, heavy chains on the floor, and Maria being turned around and roughly handled by male hands. The final seconds include the text “Women enslaved by sex trafficking lose more than just their names”, “Trafficking is torture,” and the logos and names of the Helen Bamber Foundation and the Body Shop, which were co-producers of the video.

Another instance of Thompson’s activism is an art installation entitled *Journey*, which she helped to create as part of her work for the Helen Bamber Foundation. She has said in one interview: “I designed one of the [shipping] containers and we had some very high-profile artists each taking one of the other cars to fill out the experience”, showing that she uses her celebrity capital to advance her anti-trafficking work (quoted in Stepanek, 2009). With Thompson’s help, the exhibition opened in London’s Trafalgar Square, and travelled to Vienna, New York, Madrid, and the Hague between 2007 and 2011 (*Journey*, 2012). Drawing on her interviews with a woman who is given the pseudonym “Elena”, as well as on

conversations with other trafficked women, Thompson helped to create *Journey*, which dramatised the experience of sex trafficking in seven connected shipping containers which audiences were invited to walk through. With women's bodies scarcely present, the installation offered a visual, olfactory and auditory experience of being tricked, coerced into sex work and sexually exploited. Each container represented a step in the trafficking process, including one that represented hope, or "what you might hope for at the beginning of such a journey", as Thompson explained. There were messages on the walls reading "Would you like to go to England, she said", and small, simple doll figures of a woman sitting in a modest home and the same woman with a suitcase and a larger female doll behind her, representing the trafficker. This was followed by an empty grey container with repetitive noises mimicking the inside of a truck to show "the monotony, but also the violence and the disruption of the journey" (*The Journey—Unfolded by Emma Thompson*, 2008). Next, one arrived in a container representing what it looks like to work in what Thompson called "sexual slavery". This was a container with a dirty, foul-smelling bed with soiled bedsheets and a nightstand with lingerie and condom wrappers (*Emma Thompson makes a "Journey,"* 2009). Another container held representations of a brothel, where images of women with their heads blacked out could be seen through a peephole, and yet another container represented the "rejection" that comes when "you tell your story and no one believes you, and that's the worst thing" (*Emma Thompson makes a "Journey,"* 2009).

Viewers had to pass through each container in sequence before exiting, and during this "journey" they were confronted with, among other things, bloody and filthy beds, foul smells, condom wrappers, whiteboards with lists of sexual services and prices, haunting messages on walls such as notches denoting a woman's number of customers per day, trash bins with bloody napkins and condom wrappers, lipstick, lingerie, and a peepshow of women standing in shorts and crop tops with their faces blacked out. Even the transitions between the connected containers were unsavoury – at least one of the openings between the containers included a curtain made of condoms tied together, which visitors had to shift aside in order to proceed. Thompson travelled to the exhibition's openings in various countries and often gave interviews and hosted dignitaries who came to see it, speaking about the process of creating the exhibition, her relationship with Elena, and how important it is to

convey the gruesomeness of trafficking exploitation. As Thompson has said, the installation was "part of [Elena's] therapeutic process" and its goal was "to take her capacity to tell her own story into something more, bigger, and more powerful, in order to help other people" (*The Journey—Unfolded by Emma Thompson*, 2008). As she inaugurated the exhibition and travelled to its various openings, Thompson gave numerous interviews, appearing approachable and knowledgeable, speaking in a measured tone and coherent manner with occasional animated moments, especially when trying to convey the urgency, distress and violence the installation was trying to convey. Such a videoed moment is when, standing in front of the installation, she says to an interviewer "When Elena was asked whether she wanted to tell the story and why, she said… [and then Thompson raises a finger, frowns, clenches her jaw, and continues] 'I just want people to know for five minutes… what it's like. Five minutes'". Then Thompson relaxes her face to neutral, keeping eye contact with the interviewer (*Emma Thompson on Sex Trafficking*, 2011). She has thus utilised her celebrity capital, her seemingly personal opinions and knowledge, and her professional acting skills, merging her public and private personas in her advocacy role. In the next sections I consider the possibilities of meaning of these two projects, as well as other moments in Thompson's advocacy work, through the analytical lenses of embodiment and agency.

5.3.2. A feminist disposition towards trafficked women: Thompson's critique of vulnerability

Emma Thompson's anti-trafficking activism exists in the context of the celebrity as a feminist persona. She seems to subscribe broadly to the values of Third Wave feminism and her activist performances focus on fighting for gender equality, which are – in her advocacy projects – located in unequal gender relations and security practices. Oppressive social arrangements, however, are only hinted at and instead her proposals for moral compassion point more towards women's vulnerability and public morality than existing intersecting inequalities between race, class, gender and other categories. Thompson's commitment to women in particular, expressed via her opposition to and reconfiguration of the sexualisation and objectification of women in the media, her support for the #MeToo movement, and her withdrawal from a film project because of her support for women's empowerment, position her as an ally of

women both ideologically and practically. Meanwhile, her feminist persona is mobilised to propose a relationship between vulnerabilities of the women she advocates for and the gender dynamics which lead to their objectification.

The personification of feminism as a form of moral education, which I discuss below through interview excerpts, are used to identify gender-related power dynamics that create and perpetuate women's vulnerabilities. For instance, Thompson discusses the demand for sex work and stresses the need to protect women, stating in one interview:

> You find that the reasons for paying for sex are as different as human beings are different. It's not all anger-fuelled, it's not all violent – although a lot of it is. Some of it is to do with not being able to arrive at any sort of sexual satisfaction in any other way, and a lot of it is men who have money who want more than what they can get from their partners. We've got to get into a conservation [sic]. Because if prostitution is always going to be here, we've got to make sure that it's safe. We cannot have it that women are used in this way, as slaves. This is not to be borne in the 21st century. It's absolutely antediluvian. Everyone needs to be more active and to ask these questions. Why are all these women coming to this country, who's paying for them? It's probably someone you know. (quoted in Shoard, 2009)

In moral terms – and in the context of her feminist persona – Thompson's advocacy revolves around an understanding of women's oppressions. This occurs through a non-judgmental attitude towards sex work ("if prostitution is always going be here, we've got to make sure that it's safe") and an emphasis on the need to protect women who engage in this form of labour. In terms of policymaking, she has expressed an interest in the Nordic model of criminalising clients who buy sexual services, but not in criminalising sex workers for selling these services, saying that "Sweden has now made paying for sex illegal across the board – very interesting" (quoted in Shoard, 2009). A few years later, in 2015, she confirmed this stance by joining numerous Hollywood celebrities and women's rights advocates in signing a petition opposing Amnesty International's decision to support the legalisation of sex work. In the petition it was argued that decriminalising sex work would encourage pimping, brothel owning, and exploitation, so the organisation was urged to support criminalising sex work, a stance it ultimately rejected, positioning itself in favour of decriminalising sex work (*The Guardian*, 2015). The abolitionist position of the Helen Bamber Foundation where sex work and sex trafficking are both considered exploitative further confirms Thompson's attitude towards sex work. Thus,

Thompson expresses empathy and solidarity towards trafficked women as vulnerable subjects, stressing elements of culture as the origins of these vulnerabilities, and the moral imperative to address them through particular (neo-abolitionist) policy solutions.

Equally, Thompson is critical of immigration policies and securitisation practices that target vulnerable people, including trafficked women, and her statements represent attempts to reframe trafficking in terms of vulnerability. She is quoted as saying in one interview: "When sex slaves are thrown into jail they usually can't speak English; the vast majority of the men and women trafficked come from Eastern Europe and they have no papers because they are illegals. In the detention centers, they are not helped in any way and then they are deported" (Stepanek, 2009). Vulnerability is here highlighted through the denunciation of practices that fail to protect women as sufferers. The focus is on women as vulnerable migrants but this formulation does not question the logic of border protection even though it expresses a call for a more nuanced approach towards women as subjects of multiple forms of marginalisation. This formulation thus brings intersectional categories into the conversation and implicates practices of bordering in exacerbating women's vulnerabilities, but structural inequalities which participate in the creation of women's vulnerabilities are not called into question. Importantly, Thompson here identifies trafficked women simultaneously as "sex slaves" and "illegals", and although she calls for their protection, these two terms represent an internal tension within this statement. Namely, while references to sex slavery bring about discourses of ideal victimhood (Hoyle, Bosworth, & Dempsey, 2011; O'Brien, 2016b), the reference to the illegality of trafficked women creates a contradiction in this formulation by referring to women's agency as irregular migrants. However, within the context of this statement, highlighting women's irregular status represents a proposal for compassion towards trafficked women in spite of the generally negative associations evoked by irregular migration, which tends to position smuggled migrants lower on the victim hierarchy (Farrell & Fahy, 2009; Pajnik, 2010; Sanford et al., 2016; Vance, 2012).

Further, in Thompson's activist projects, the causes of women's vulnerability are located both in individual people and in social inequalities. The demand for sexual services, according to Thompson, originates in people's individual

preferences, experiences, and needs ("the reasons for paying for sex are as different as human beings are different", "not being able to arrive at any sort of sexual satisfaction in any other way", "men who have money who want more than what they can get from their partners"), and "everyone" in society is implicated in the production of this demand. There is, therefore, a proposal here to address the gender aspects of the demand for sex, expanding the remit of her activism to address not only vulnerable subjects but to implicate cultural elements in their vulnerability. Namely, in the open letter in which she stated her reasons for withdrawing from the film project *Luck,* a few years after the above-quoted interview, she refers to "centuries of entitlement to women's bodies" as being part of the problem, which points to social aspects and women's disadvantaged position in society as the cause of their vulnerability. Additionally, a proposal is made for questioning women's treatment in wider society ("Why are all these women coming to this country; who's paying for them?"), which engages a feminist critique that locates women's oppression in a variety of intersecting oppressions. In this way, through reliance on feminism, Thompson's activism destabilises the victim hierarchy first by pointing to cultural factors which result in women's various vulnerabilities, and second, by including all vulnerable women in the remit of protective care, even those who, as I have demonstrated in relation to the genre of film, may become ambivalent subjects due to their intersectional status as both vulnerable victims and "illegals".

What Thompson's activism does not address, however, are the particular aspects of social structures and arrangements that are implicated in, on the one hand, men's behaviours and, on the other hand, women's poverty and marginalisation. Instead she proposes a moral condemnation of a society in which "men are paying for sex" (Shoard, 2009) by identifying the demand for sex work in cultural mores and arrangements. Thompson's activism thus makes visible the gender and migration aspects of women's vulnerability that destabilise the victim hierarchy, as well as pointing to individuals in society who create the demand for sex work. She thus implicates wider social inequalities in women's vulnerability to exploitation, but does not turn a critical eye to particular institutions which are implicated in the creation and perpetuation of these vulnerabilities.

5.3.3. Embodying trafficked women: The generalisation of suffering

To visualise trafficked women's suffering, Thompson uses her own body to bring trauma into public view and her voice to speak on these women's behalf, thus performing as a celebrity persona. To bring the suffering closer to the public, in one appeal her body is a site of violence, while in another appeal, violence is displaced onto the material space of the art installation. As an extension of the act of showing trafficked women's suffering in public, she supports these advocacy projects with incitements to action or, as she says, to "engagement". She thus proposes a moral orientation towards suffering as cause for action. The ways in which trafficked women are brought into public view in her activism is through portrayals of suffering and violence inflicted upon bodies, and by stressing the moral imperative to act.

The *Torture by Any Other Name* video illustrates how suffering is staged and portrayed in Thompson's advocacy. In this video Thompson utilises her professional acting skills to embody the way she imagines the trafficking experience to be, using her body and voice to enact an experience of rape and to declare a public imperative to act (for instance, through stating "help me" on behalf of trafficked women). In this appeal, one trafficked woman, Elena, is brought into co-presence. The video stages the ideal trafficking victim narrative of poverty ("Elena worked in a market to support her family"), hope for a better life ("Elena wanted to learn English", "Elena wanted to help people and be a nurse"), and innocence ("Elena didn't think anyone would hurt her. Elena trusted everyone", "Elena used to cry when her father was cross with her"), as well as coercion ("Maria gets beaten if she says no", "Maria works for nothing"), rape ("Maria services up to 40 men a day"), and trauma ("Maria doesn't trust anyone", "Maria doesn't feel anything… anymore"). Meanwhile, in the exhibition *Journey* various settings and paraphernalia are staged in order for audiences to have a multiple sensory experience of an imagined sex trafficking experience (the sound and darkness of the "truck", the olfactory experience of the bedroom, the visual staging of objects associated with sexual encounters). Speaking about the *Journey* exhibition and the similarly named film *The Journey*, both of which she helped to create, Thompson said "I particularly suggested that [the portrayal of sex trafficking in the film] be that brutal, because people just don't know (about this)" (quoted in Shoard, 2009). Thompson thus refers to the purposeful

staging of the spectacle of suffering to capture attention and moral compassion. Moreover, her celebrity provides visibility to audio-visual advocacy materials, which serves to contextualise these projects by stressing the importance of listening to the voices of those who suffer and publicly showing this suffering. In these projects the devices used to bring attention to the experience of suffering are the celebrity's staging of violence on her own body (in the video) and the placement of spectators in a constructed physical space that mimic the trafficking experience (in the art installation), both of which are attempts to highlight the experience of the suffering body.

At the same time, in press interviews Thompson's private and public persona are both mobilised to stress the importance of bearing witness to others' suffering and of the public imperative to act. In one interview she said: "our engagement with people who have suffered is full of riches. […] I'm not really interested in people who haven't suffered much. […] That's a bit mean. But I'm always interested in the stories of all our clients [referring to the clients of the Helen Bamber Foundation]. And our curiosity needs to be engaged, instead of pity. We need engagement rather than charity" (quoted in Bunting, 2007). Thus, as well as enacting and showing trafficked women's suffering, Thompson has here identified a crucial aspect of depicting others' suffering within the remit of a politics of pity that seeks not only to do something about the suffering but to allow the other to speak on her own terms about her experience (for suffering others speaking on their own behalf see Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2019; Silverstone, 2007). The first part of this statement refers to Thompson's experience of bearing witness to the suffering of others (Oliver, 2004; Tait, 2011), which is, according to Oliver, "experienced as the sense of agency and response-ability that are constituted in the infinite encounter with otherness, which is fundamentally ethical" (2004, p. 81). Thompson's bearing witness is therefore an attempt to politicise trafficking on the basis of the subject position of trafficked women as sufferers and her claim to knowledge of their condition. One implication of this form of witnessing, as Peters points out, is an epistemological gap between testimony and experience, because the event involves an actor who becomes a producer of knowledge and discourse (on the performative role of witnessing in media discourse, see Peters, 2001, p. 709). Thompson justifies taking up this role by stressing her direct relationship with, for example, Elena, whose story she has

recounted in multiple interviews, and indeed whose story formed the basis of both *Journey* and *Torture by Any Other Name*. She also expresses awareness of the power of celebrity to bring visibility to trafficked women. "My calls tend to be taken", she has said, referring to how she obtained permission from the Mayor of London to stage the opening of *Journey* in London's famous Trafalgar Square (quoted in Bunting, 2007). Notwithstanding her reflexivity, it is ultimately the celebrity agent who gets to choose the direction and the ethical stance of framing both how the story is told and how trafficked women appear in it, even if trafficked women are consulted while doing so.

The second part of the above statement builds on the call to look and to act on behalf of trafficked women. Speaking about this imperative, Thompson has said: "now is the time for more militancy than before," thus expressing, in militaristic terms, the need to mobilise for the anti-trafficking cause. This echoes her previous statement about engagement on behalf of people who suffer, instead of expressing pity (see Thompson quoted in Shoard, 2009). Thompson thus exemplifies an orientation towards urgent action on behalf of trafficked women. She speaks in the third person about Elena's experiences, but also switches to the second person ("you tell your story and no one believes you"), which serves to universalise the experience of isolation and stigma that ensues after trauma. In this way trafficked women's suffering is generalised and brought into the domain of care and responsibility in line with Boltanski's (1999) notion of politicising others' suffering within the topic of tender-heartedness and with an action-oriented outlook. In line with her feminist persona and the importance placed on showing others' suffering as cause for action, Thompson stresses the importance of *how* trafficked women are portrayed, and makes a broad claim that spectators should do something about trafficking, which corresponds to the general awareness-raising purpose of anti-trafficking NGO campaigns (on awareness-raising in anti-trafficking campaigns see O'Brien, 2019, p. 117). A particular policy towards trafficking is not explicitly stated, but the aforementioned broader context of Thompson's advocacy, along with her position in the Helen Bamber Foundation, the Foundation's support for the criminalisation of sex work, and a focus in Thompson's advocacy on the exploitation and suffering related to trafficking, reveal her general view that sex work is equal to sex trafficking. Thus, although not overtly stated in her advocacy projects or interviews,

this dominant anti-trafficking rhetoric, and a neo-abolitionist politics that accompanies it, underpins her advocacy. Thus, Thompson's advocacy projects bring attention to the severity of women's suffering and are oriented around a broad call to action on their behalf, and this call to action is underpinned by a general, though not explicitly stated, support for the Swedish model. This suffering is constructed through embodying trafficked women in ways that avoid their sexualisation, which is in accordance with Thompson's feminist persona.

5.3.4. Embodying the protection of trafficked women: Reconfiguring sexual objectification

At the same time as embodying the trauma of trafficking, Thompson performs the role of a protector. Like the trope that I summarise as e*mbodying trafficked women: the generalisation of suffering* (in section 5.3.3), this trope has its roots in Thompson's feminist persona. It is based on the moral imperative to act on the suffering of others, especially since the orientation towards women's vulnerability corresponds to her performance of feminism as a core value. This trope is operationalised as a proposal to protect trafficked women from the public gaze through the aesthetic and rhetorical choices in depicting sex trafficking and sexual violence. In brief, the depictions of trafficked women in her activist projects are based on the feminist concern with protecting trafficked women's bodies from being depicted in ways that objectify and sexualise them.

The protection of trafficked women is evoked through Thompson's commitment to largely shielding trafficked women's bodies from public gaze, and on focusing on the experience of suffering and violence. This form of representation can be found in feminist film studies which provide critiques of the frequent use of sexual signifiers in association with women's bodies (Mulvey, 2015). In this case, the aesthetic choices made in the video for *Torture by any other name* represent an attempt to re-signify visualities which are traditionally associated with the sexual objectification of a woman's body for the viewer's pleasure. However, two visual choices work to re-signify the reading of the body as sexualised for the viewer's pleasure and instead to emphasise sexual violence. First, the body is placed in the context of rape taking place on screen, and this framing works to reject an

interpretation that the body is on display for the viewers' sexualised pleasure. Second, the framing in the video alludes to the idea that Thompson's body is nude which could be interpreted as sexualising. However, the nudity in this instance serves to emphasise the suffering and violence exerted upon the actor's body, particularly because the only parts of Thompson's body visible throughout the video are her head and shoulders. The scene can therefore be interpreted through the lens of feminist film studies as a way to reconfigure this display from pleasure to violence. This is done by revealing little of the nude body itself and by focusing on the suffering of the woman throughout the act of rape taking place. In the context of broader feminist critique, the visuality of Thompson in the video relies on some of the elements identified by feminist scholars as the sexualisation of culture, but re-signifies these to focus on violence. The sexualisation of culture refers to the erotic representations of women's (and girls' and men's) bodies in public space which are coded sexually (Gill, 2007, p. 150). In the video, however, such a reading is altered because the body is not revealed beyond the head and shoulders, and because of the strong allusion to sexual violence upon the body, in combination with Thompson's narration of Maria/Elena's tragic account of suffering. In addition, the framing of Thompson's body does not entail a sexual display meant to convey empowerment (Gill, 2007) or sexual objectification, but instead one that conveys vulnerability and exploitation. As such, in spite of the rape scene and the allusion to Thompson's nudity, the context of the celebrity's advocacy, the story narrated in the video, and the body parts which feature on screen seem like an attempt to re-signify elements generally associated with sexualisation of the female body with a focus on sexual violence. In this way, the video tries to draw attention to the violence involved in rape and to avoid an overt sexualised display that is common in popular culture, which is consonant with her stated objection to the casual sexualisation of women in the media (see for instance Thompson's statements in Shoard, 2009).

As well as replacing their bodies with her own, as in *Torture by Any Other Name*, the women who are the subjects of Thompson's advocacy also usually speak from behind the scenes (as in Thompson's work on *Journey*, made in conjunction with Elena but without including the latter's body in the exhibition), and trafficking is signified in ways that largely circumvent depictions of bodies. In *Journey* and in interviews about the exhibition, Thompson spoke on behalf of women who had

disclosed their experiences to her. In *Journey*, the containers were set up for acts involved in trafficking (the truck is on the move, the dirty bed moves up and down), and the paraphernalia needed for sexual services (condoms, lingerie, price list) is dispersed around the container, but no people are seen performing these actions, except in the small photographs of women, with faces obscured, seen through a peephole – but these are seen standing still and alone. Instead the people populating the containers were the viewers confronted with the life-size display. Similarly, in *Torture by Any Other Name*, Thompson herself imitates a rape scene, utilising her skill as a professional actor to bring the experience into public view. The narratives are based on anonymised, fictionalised and generalised accounts, and these are likely positive choices made in order to avoid secondary trauma and to protect women's safety and identities. Thus Thompson, who personifies empathic emotions, mobilises her own public visibility in order to offer an appropriate moral frame for feeling about trafficked women. In her advocacy projects trafficked women are largely hidden from publicly and instead they recount their trauma and victimisation which are then translated into material artistic and activist outcomes. In this way, she personifies a strong, experienced, knowledgeable and reliable personality who stands up for women both in the acting profession and in anti-trafficking advocacy. To accomplish this proposal for protective feelings, she relies on her feminist persona, attuned to women's oppression and gender inequalities with a background of public actions that position her as an active ally (such as the withdrawal from the *Luck* movie project and the open letter explaining her feminist position), which is fused with an invitation that appears to come from Thompson as a private, "real", person (for the celebrity as a private and public persona see Chouliaraki, 2012; King, 1985b).

Protecting trafficked women by avoiding sexually objectifying public depictions of their bodies reflects Thompson's feminist disposition and she has discussed this as a conscious choice. In one interview in which she discussed sex trafficking at length, she reflected on mundane depictions of women's bodies and stated: "I would ask people to question the way in which [advertisers] are selling their products", adding "I would ask the government to question the way in which it's a normal thing to walk into any newsagents and see very overt sexual pictures of women everywhere" (quoted in Shoard, 2009). She thus critiques popular media for

perpetuating harmful discourses of femininity via sexual objectification, relating these representations to the proliferation of sexualised texts in popular culture, which is a contemporary media trend well documented by feminists (Attwood, 2006). Thus, the attempt to avoid or reconfigure sexually objectified depictions of trafficked women in her advocacy, when seen in the context of her feminist statements, constitute a comment on the mundane practice of women's sexual objectification in popular media. Within a feminist framework, she thereby points a finger at the sexualisation of culture, that is the Western media's saturation with sexualised representations and discourses, and tasks individuals and governments with questioning these visualities (for a critique of the sexualisation of culture in postfeminism, see Gill & Donaghue, 2013).

5.3.5. Utilising celebrity capital to address the public: Feminist persona

As a veteran award-winning actor and screenwriter, and a charismatic personality whose career reached new heights in 2019 due to multiple film projects and her visibility in the #MeToo debate, Emma Thompson wields significant social and symbolic capital. In anti-trafficking activism she describes herself as a storyteller and a communicator, a role she grounds in personal relationships with the trafficked women on whose behalf she speaks, and in the social capital of her celebrity status (Driessens, 2013, p. 550), which she mobilises to secure locations, funding and publicity for advocacy projects (see interviews with Thompson in Marchese, 2018; Stepanek, 2009). If celebrity capital is conceived as a form of Bourdieu's symbolic capital – or "the recognition and legitimation of especially economic and cultural capital", which can work across social fields (Driessens, 2013, p. 551), then Thompson's ability to migrate from the celebrity field to the charity sector, and thus to speak for and confer visibility upon trafficked women, stems from her initial capital as a celebrity. Indeed, adopting charitable causes is part of many celebrities' personal brands and such altruistic action works to increase their capital across different fields.

Thompson's agency through celebrity capital is mobilised across many different tropes, and is characterised by her invitation to audiences to question Western cultural values through normative claims about ending others' suffering and

protecting women from exploitation. Overall, Thompson's anti-trafficking activism corresponds to a postfeminist sensibility because on the one hand, it destabilises the hierarchy of victimhood and brings attention to the suffering of trafficked women through an imperative to look and an avoidance of sexual objectification, but on the other hand, the proposals for emotion that these representations construct focus on inviting audiences to reflect on the sexualised culture without comprehensively addressing the institutions and structures that contribute to social inequalities and women's vulnerability to trafficking and sexual exploitation.

Thompson's personification of suffering focuses on bodily injury and attempts to re-signify sexual objectification, and she uses interviews – a characteristic way for celebrities to speak to the public – to provide moral education to audiences and to mobilise support for the anti-trafficking cause. Thompson has a charismatic public persona and is a powerful speaker and activist, and she mobilises these in the service of providing proposals for feeling towards trafficked women. She evokes her diligent resistance to women's oppression in society and her opposition to their sexualisation in popular culture in order to make the connection between women's exploitation and the aspects of culture that contribute to their objectification. Specifically, she focuses on the demand for sexual services, calling for a public debate about this. In one interview she noted:

> Men are paying for sex. We can't demonize that; we've got to find out about it. Why are we suddenly doing this so much more than we used to? Why is there no stigma or shame attached to that whatsoever anymore? Because if that's the result of the sexual revolution, then it's fucked us up big time. Not that I want to bring back Victorian morality, because of course then it was all underground. But what I do want to do is start a debate. No one's talking about this. (quoted in Shoard, 2009)

So Thompson stresses the imperative to avoid sexual objectification and expresses this in a feminist context. With this in mind, she reflects here on wider society in order to point to the need to "start a debate" about the social power relations which contribute to women's vulnerabilities and to their sexual exploitation. Over the years, she has consistently emphasised the need to listen to people's stories. Reflecting on sexual violence and her anti-trafficking activism in the wake of the #MeToo movement, she said:

> The complications are the things we need to discuss. […] Woe betide you when you judge because it always comes back to bite you on the arse. […] When you're young, you think everything is your fault. That's why people don't say anything. We are given to feeling ashamed. So when things do come to light we have to recognize the fact that it *is* confusing. But let's listen to who's talking and let's work with them. And let's *talk*. (emphasis in original) (quoted in Marchese, 2018).

As in previously cited instances of her advocacy, Thompson operates here within a politics of pity by stressing the importance of listening to the voices of sufferers. But more salient to this section is her encouragement of publics to start a debate about the moral state of Western society, challenging the idea of sexualising women and commercialising the sex industry. While she still relies on dominant trafficking narratives to visualise trafficked women (as shown in section 5.3.3 on *Embodying trafficked women: The generalisation of suffering*), she does point to a harmful symptom of the sexualised consumer culture, noting how it is the sexualisation of women in media texts which facilitates an environment where such oppressive discourses come to dominate everyday depictions. Thus, Thompson's invitation to "start a debate", "listen", and "talk" about tensions in the social constructions of violence and of women's vulnerability – or, as she says, of things that are "confusing" – is an important element of her advocacy.

This imperative to engage in debate refers also to acknowledging women's differing subjectivities. Namely, she destabilises the victim hierarchy by including into the remit of care migrant woman who are not generally considered ideal victims, but she does this in interviews, while her campaigns contain only ideal victims. Such representations can be thought of in terms of, what Mai calls, biographical borders – the recognition that women's subjectivities and experiences of trafficking are varied, but the inevitable enactment of ideal victim paradigms in order to achieve recognition and believability (Mai, 2018, p. 116). In other words, because dominant trafficking narratives are easily recognisable, they are staged to achieve visibility for anti-trafficking advocacy, but Thompson adds complexity to these by speaking and performing feelings of compassion and solidarity with a wider circle of women.

Further, she stresses the importance of a non-judgmental attitude in listening, and this is a key element of her advocacy that opens up, instead of closing down, the

possibilities of meaning with regard to trafficked women. Describing sex trafficking in an interview, Thompson asked: "How do we make sure that we don't allow a build-up of resentment of people different from ourselves? *Journey* was a way of communicating without judgment. Unlike the media, which can be very reductive with its simple messages, we need to allow people to make their own minds up. It's about engaging people" (quoted in Bunting, 2007). She thus personifies a moral imperative to look, allowing the voices of distant sufferers to be heard and accepting that victimhood does not always exist in its ideal form. Thus, although her advocacy projects rely on dominant trafficking discourses, operating within the remit of a politics of pity allows her to question public attitudes and mundane depictions of women. In this way, her calls to action implicate gendered social arrangements in constructing the underlying conditions that contribute to the exploitation of women's vulnerabilities.

However, in spite of her feminist persona and a value-oriented approach, Thompson's advocacy fails to address the broader institutional and social structures that contribute to women's exploitation. Instead, in her advocacy projects it is individual spectators who are asked to reflect on the aspects of culture that are harmful to women, and individual people who are asked to engage in the anti-trafficking effort. While she discusses gender and nationality (irregular migrant status) as categories that contribute to women's objectification and exploitation, her advocacy could be characterised as what Mai has termed "sexual humanitarianism" (Mai, 2018). This is a form of neo-abolitionist anti-trafficking activism that blames the demand for trafficking on individual customers and criminal networks, while ignoring the responsibilities of institutions which implement restrictive labour migration regimes. These regimes generate the conditions in which forced labour occurs and perpetuate the demand for people smuggling and trafficking (Mai, 2018; O'Brien, 2016). By not addressing these underlying conditions of insecurity and inequality, Thompson's advocacy fails to fully engage the political function of vulnerability. Her personification of the anti-trafficking cause mobilises feelings of care towards trafficked women, and engages an action-oriented feeling that proposes a reflection on the sexualisation of culture, but stops short of a fully political proposal.

While Thompson personifies a knowledgeable and devoted feminist fighter, and refuses to rely on sexualised representations of women, my second celebrity case study demonstrates how Jada Pinkett Smith constructs a similarly rights-oriented persona, but one reliant on constructs of self-actualisation and empowerment associated with and alongside a more complex performance of black motherhood.

5.4. Jada Pinkett Smith: A performance of motherhood and empowerment

Jada Pinkett Smith is an American actor, talk-show host, singer and activist, as well as the matriarch of a Hollywood family which includes her husband, actor Will Smith, and their two adolescent children, Willow and Jaden, who are also involved in the entertainment industry. She is best known for her supporting role in *The Matrix* (2003) film franchise, *Girls Trip* (2017), and her Facebook talk show *Red Table Talk* (2018). She is an outspoken and imposing personality, sometimes seen as intimidating, and she often promotes racial equality and feminist values in her professional and public engagements. Pinkett Smith has been sporadically involved in anti-trafficking efforts since 2012, routing her advocacy through her organisation, *Don't Sell Bodies*, which provides informative resources on the prevalence of sex trafficking in the United States (Haynes, 2014). Together with trafficked women, she has spoken to the US Senate and Congress, discussed trafficking and child sexual exploitation in interviews, participated in a CNN special report on trafficking in the US, and made an anti-trafficking music video with her band, among other anti-trafficking activist projects (Dailey, 2012). In this analysis I use excerpts from a sample of these media texts to illustrate the tropes that typify her anti-trafficking activism. In her advocacy work for trafficked women, Pinkett Smith relies on discourses of sexualisation, motherhood, rescue and empowerment, demonstrating a post-feminist sensibility. As opposed to Thompson's consistent critique of and deliberate refusal to depict sexually objectified bodies on screen, Pinkett Smith uses this visual trope in her advocacy. Like Thompson, she evokes issues of justice, but focusing on racial justice rather than explicitly on feminism, although her celebrity persona is generally consistent with feminism.

In this section I argue that Jada Pinkett Smith's advocacy is political not only on the issue of sex trafficking as violence against women, but on sex trafficking as

violence against racialised subjects, and that therefore Pinkett Smith's advocacy occurs on two levels, since it consolidates her activism both for racial justice and against trafficking. Her celebrity persona, in the context of her advocacy, is characterised by four tropes. Firstly, she embodies an empowered form of womanhood based on an intersectional orientation towards racial justice and empowered motherhood; secondly, in constructing an image of trafficked women she relies on visualities of the ideal trafficking victim, and at the same time on her own sexualised body; thirdly, in performing a representation of protective care for potential victims of trafficking and in reflecting on their oppression, Pinkett Smith reaches the limits of the ideal victim trope and destabilises the victim hierarchy through an intersectional lens; and fourthly, in providing a moral education for audiences about the correct forms of feeling towards trafficked women, she relies on her race and on the celebrity capital of empowered womanhood, but ultimately stays within a form of care that relies on individual solutions to complex structural oppression.

5.4.1. Jada Pinkett Smith's performance and personification: Examples

The music video Nada se Compara, was performed by Pinkett Smith's band, Wicked Evolution and directed by fellow actor and human-rights advocate Salma Hayek (Hayek, 2012). Pinkett Smith sings the song and appears in the video, which follows the story of a young Mexican woman who is tricked by a man pretending to be her boyfriend and sold to traffickers. The video follows a single linear narrative about a young and naïve woman, but is interspersed with quick shots and cuts that introduce three more themes. Pinkett Smith dominates these short scenes as she sings and appears nude in various positions, shot in black and white. This is interrupted by a non-linear narrative of the young woman's future as a trafficking victim, shown alongside other women in dark spaces. Finally, a few short scenes show the young woman's mother despairing after her daughter's disappearance and praying for her at an elaborate home-made altar. I give more detail below in relation to celebrity and trafficked women, but do not focus on the mother since she is not a trafficked woman. The song is performed in Spanish and a translation into English is not available, and neither are the audio-visual interviews in which Jada Pinkett Smith

and Salma Hayek discuss the video. An English version appears to have existed, but at the time of data collection was unavailable on all streaming platforms where it was once available (Vimeo, YouTube, SoundCloud). I have therefore analysed the visual performance, but not the lyrics, since all other content of this thesis is in English. Moreover, all other texts analysed in this thesis are geared towards English-speaking audiences who would not be able to understand the lyrics in their present form, having access only to the audio-visual element of the song without understanding the words. Nonetheless, this song is an exceptionally salient example of Pinkett Smith's anti-trafficking activism and therefore an important element of this case study because it illustrates how the celebrity brings trafficked women into co-presence with audiences, offering her celebrity visibility to trafficked women. She uses her body and constructs trafficked women's agency – the key elements of analysis – in ways that are particularly telling both of Pinkett Smith's gendered celebrity persona and of trafficked women as subjects of public care.

Throughout this video for *Nada se Compara* Pinkett Smith appears nude and is filmed in black and white. In one scene she sits in a small empty room on a worn and dirty mattress, her knees bent and her arms clutching opposite shoulders and covering her torso. In another scene, in the same room, she crouches, in a tight profile shot, again clutching her knees to her chest. Her body is clean and toned, her hair straight and long. In another composition, a wall takes up half of the shot and she stands against it in full profile, hitting the wall theatrically while mouthing the words of the song. Her knees are slightly bent so her body creates a beautiful curved line, her muscles accentuated by shadows. Later in the video, there is a scene of trafficked women sitting in a dark room on the other side of this wall, while Pinkett Smith hits it with her fists. In another tight head-shot she lies in shallow water with wet hair, and in yet another scene she is behind iron prison bars which she later dramatically grips as she sings to camera. Then there is a scene of Pinkett Smith in front of a back-lit wall, her arms and legs spread, clenching her fists and bending her elbows, and later on bending and folding her body, creating a broken silhouette. After showing her nude throughout, the video ends with Pinkett Smith putting on an oversized white t-shirt with the word "STOP" printed on it.

The main linear narrative of the video revolves around a beautiful young Hispanic woman who sneaks out of her family home to go to a party where she

exchanges looks with a handsome young man. Interspersed with scenes of trafficked women – one of whom is her, which anticipates her future – there are scenes of a summer romance: the lovers holding hands in front of a rustic wooden wall, kissing on an abandoned concrete structure, exchanging enamoured glances. Finally the woman is shown sneaking out of her mother's house with a travel bag and getting into the man's car, after which he delivers her, terrified, to a tattooed man and receives an envelope (presumably his payment for her). The third set of scenes, interspersed throughout the video, is of trafficked women being forcibly awakened from sleep in a small, basic, dirty, claustrophobic room, being gripped violently by the tattooed man and lined up in a row from which one of them is then curtly pulled. Throughout, these pretty, young, thin women – in other words, women who conform to heteronormative femininity – have pained facial expressions and wear ragged clothing. At the end of the video a series of short sentences, in English and Spanish, issue a warning: "Most victims are trafficked by someone they know" and "The most common way to recruit trafficking victims is not kidnapping but love". The video thus aims to educate viewers about sex trafficking.

Another instance of Pinkett Smith's advocacy is her 2016 video interview with Judith Rodin, President of the Rockefeller Foundation, entitled *Deepening How We Love* (Pinkett Smith, 2016). In the interview Pinkett Smith wears a pale grey flowing shirt and matching trousers with beige stiletto-heeled shoes, sleek and simple gold earrings, multiple rings, and thin necklaces; her hair is parted in a tidy low pony tail, and she has long, manicured burgundy fingernails. She is relaxed but alert, and frequently gesticulates and pauses for effect while giving her thoughts on love, family, communication and sex trafficking. She is confident, passionate and commanding, at times becoming intense in her gestures and tone to enhance her seriousness about trafficking. She is also playful, using urban slang, and smiles and laughs occasionally while speaking, and on one occasion starts to cry as she discusses sex trafficking. She begins her discussion of trafficking by saying that "any one of us could fall victim to this epidemic" and "all women are vulnerable to this epidemic". She identifies intersecting oppressions and shame as aspects that keep people in exploitative circumstances:

> …because of economic vulnerability there are a lot of poor women that are lured into trafficking but what I've learned is that this is an

> epidemic that affects every… single… woman. Educated… um I've talked to women that have been from communities of affluence that have been trafficked. That all women are vulnerable to this epidemic. And one of the things that I've also learned that was life-changing for me was that when I listened to how traffickers… relate to women that are being trafficked – I have to be honest with you that it's not very different than a lot of what we see going on in our homes. Meaning, a trafficker will tell you, you know, if you do this – we need this – I need you to go out and… and sell your body and do this for us, because of how I love you. And if she goes out and she makes a certain amount of money, then he gives her love, and if she doesn't, she's punished. And I looked at how we deal with love in our own houses. We love our children when they do well. We punish them when they don't. (Pinkett Smith, 2016, 24' 40'')

Shortly before this, she talks about shame:

> It has to be […] such an extreme situation, so whether she's been… broken bones or broken jaw, put in the hospital, but even then there's so much shame… she or he doesn't even feel like they can come back because of what our judgment might be, because of what they've been told about women or men that get caught up in these kinds of circumstances. So I say all this to say that one of the things that we can do in regard to combatting trafficking is deepening how we love. (Pinkett Smith, 2016: 27')

The most important way to combat trafficking, she asserts, is to "be in communication with your children" as a way to protect them from the harm they will inevitably encounter online. Although she starts by discussing sex trafficking and vulnerability in general, in the second half of this excerpt she discusses parenting, which has connotations of youth rather than adulthood. Throughout this interview she alternates between discussing, under the umbrella of human trafficking, the experiences of adults and of children. She gives an example of the pervasiveness of sex trafficking in society and begins to cry as she finishes the last sentence:

> The stories that I've heard of young girls online… and how they get lured… Just innocently wanting to socialise. These are not bad girls – they're just socialising. And they'll go meet a guy they think is their age, that's cute… at the mall… for pizza, with her girlfriend… he ends up being a 35-year-old dude and the next thing they're snatched, and they're gone. And their mother is in the parking lot. So, an understanding also that the children that get involved in this are not bad kids. (Pinkett Smith, 2016: 30'25'')

A final instance of her advocacy which I will mention here is Pinkett Smith's video blog, posted on the website of an anti-trafficking campaign she has created

called, *Don't Sell Bodies* (Pinkett Smith, 2015). In the five-minute video she reflects on the first day of shooting a CNN Special Report on Sex Trafficking entitled *Children for Sale: The Fight to End Human Trafficking* ("CNN, Jada Pinkett Smith Join Forces for Special Report on Sex Trafficking," 2015). Despite what its title suggests, the special report centres on sex trafficking of adult women and adolescents and not on human trafficking in general or on child sex trafficking in particular. The video illustrates how Pinkett Smith brings trafficked women into co-presence, and in it she reflects on her encounter with two adult trafficked women at a women's shelter. She is seated in a hotel room, presumably in front of a laptop or cell phone camera, so viewers can see her face. The tone of her voice is quiet and she appears to be oriented as much towards her own reflections and challenges to her own knowledge as towards viewers. She recounts her interaction with a woman whose "gateway to trafficking […] was stripping" (Pinkett Smith, 2015, 5'') , and who saw sex work as a way to achieve financial independence. Pinkett Smith reflects on how this woman willingly decided to enter the sex industry in order to make extra money. She imitates the woman's reasoning: "A couple Johns here and there […] I'm in control, I got this" and then switches tone to her own reflection: "only to fall into the trap of no longer being in control and ending up being trafficked" (2'10''). Then, introspectively, she continues: "It helped me see messaging that women are receiving that for some reason [I] missed" (2'40''). She muses, referring to popular culture exhortations about the importance of women's financial independence: "I missed that young women were perceiving stripping as a way of being independent" (2'55''), and notes that it was this woman's choice to become an exotic dancer and a sex worker, and that this choice should be respected. So, finally, with resignation, Pinkett Smith decides: "I still have some things I need to reconcile within my own understanding" (4'48''). Like Thompson, then, Pinkett Smith's advocacy is permeated by discursive tensions, an analysis of which is my focus in the remainder of this chapter.

5.4.2. A womanist disposition towards trafficked women: The performance of motherhood

Jada Pinkett Smith is a mother of two teenagers and was introduced to and inspired to take up anti-trafficking activism by her then 11-year-old daughter, Willow

(Hubbard, 2016). Pinkett Smith's husband, Will Smith, is a Hollywood actor and both their children are in the entertainment industry; daughter Willow is a singer and a co-host of their Facebook web series *Red Table Talk*, which focuses on social and family issues, and son Jaden is a singer and actor. Being a member of this family is part of Pinkett Smith's celebrity persona, and the press often refers to her in relation to her family, even when the family is not involved in the project of hers under discussion. She is thus part of a happily married, heterosexual, black family, which connotes a politics of respectability that goes against stereotypical representations of black families, with a single, poor mother and an absentee father (Chatman, 2015; Collins, 2006). Such images of black celebrities are significant in contemporary celebrity culture (for instance with regard to Beyoncé and Jay-Z or Michelle Obama and Barack Obama), because they represent a positive example of family life (Chatman, 2015). In her anti-trafficking activism she capitalises on this celebrity matriarch status through a combination of her confident, opinionated and outspoken personality and a performance of protective motherhood which she extends to the wider community by discussing what it is like to be a parent and offering advice on these matters. Consequently, she expands this protective care to trafficked women as the subjects of her activism.

The most important element of Pinkett Smith's public persona as a mother figure is that this is a natural extension of her racial identity and her dedication to racial justice. Her public persona is constellated around being a mother figure to young people who serves to empower them to be agents of change, to overcome adversity, and to resist victimisation. In her anti-trafficking activism Pinkett Smith discusses both underage girls and adult women interchangeably as subjects of trafficking. In the interview with Rodin she talks about "women", "young girls" and "your children", even though her anti-trafficking work largely shows the experiences of adult women ("CNN, Jada Pinkett Smith Join Forces for Special Report on Sex Trafficking," 2015; Pinkett Smith, 2016).[10] In the context of Pinkett Smith's

[10] Since in this thesis I am only interested in the media representations of adult trafficked women, I have not included any of Pinkett Smith's advocacy materials where she discusses children exclusively. However, in the Rockefeller Foundation interview with Judith Rodin, for instance, she discusses parenting and children as well as the trafficking of adult and underage people. Another example of the conflation of the trafficking and exploitation of adults and of underage people is her appearance in front of the Committee on Foreign Relations of the United States Senate on 17 July 2012 (Review of *The Next Ten Years in the Fight against Human Trafficking: Attacking The Problem With the Right Tools*, 2012). During her statement on human trafficking she introduces three adult

celebrity mother persona, this amalgamation of women and children into the same category creates a symbolic relationship between the celebrity and the trafficking victims, whether they are adult or underage, in which Pinkett Smith becomes a caring mother figure. She does this by locating the roots of vulnerability in the home and in parents' conditional love for their children, stressing the importance of communicating with one's own children (in the Rodin interview, for instance she says: "all women are vulnerable to this epidemic", "I looked at how we deal with love in our own houses. We love our children when they do well. We punish them when they don't" and "be in communication with your children").

Within black feminist studies, this performance of a motherly care that extends outside her own family is historically situated. Collins relates it to the historical understandings of black motherhood as rooted in the notion of Other-mothering, that is the black woman's role as not just a mother to her own children but to other people's children too, often out of necessity brought on by poverty (1987, pp. 4–5). This community care is related to womanist ethics, where "love is the basis for community, and community is the arena for moral agency" (Collins, 2000, p. 171). Within this ethics, to which Pinkett Smith has referred in stating that she identifies as a womanist[11] rather than a feminist, love is a form of resistance to the systems of domination because it can "shape, empower, and sustain social change" and "propel African-American women toward the self-determination and political activism essential for social change" (Collins, 2000, p. 172). In this context, Pinkett Smith's performance of motherly care and her insistence on "deepening how we love" hints at a political dimension intimately related to social justice and in particular to racial justice, which, by the same logic, she extends to form an

women who are survivors of child sexual exploitation and who were, at the time of the hearing, involved in rehabilitation programmes and formal education in the US. Strictly speaking, sex trafficking and child sexual exploitation are two distinct crimes, but here she speaks about both under the umbrella of human trafficking.

[11] Womanism is a term used to describe the social theory that pays attention to the experiences of women of colour, particularly black women. It falls under the umbrella of feminism but, since feminist approaches have generally been criticised for placing too little emphasis on the structures of domination that describe the experiences of women of colour, womanism addresses this question in particular. Epistemologically, it is related to the black feminist movement and to other social movements that trace the experiences of women of colour at the intersection of gender and race (Collins, 1996). In this thesis I have chosen to analyse Pinkett Smith's advocacy from an intersectional perspective, paying special attention to her identity as a black mother, and I discuss her self-definition as a womanist in these terms. I have done this because it allows for consistency in analysis and theory, but still attends to Pinkett Smith's race as an important identity category.

imperative to care and act on behalf of all trafficked women as vulnerable and marginalised subjects.

Thus, in her anti-trafficking activism Pinkett Smith draws on her public persona as a celebrity mother to her two children as well as on her activism in the area of racial justice. Drawing on womanist ethics, her public persona takes on the characteristics of a caring mother figure who personifies a positive example and moral education for audiences in order to empower vulnerable populations. Her legitimacy to speak on the subject is symbolically drawn from her childhood in Baltimore, illustrated by her statement that she grew up in poverty and consequently "I had those same vulnerabilities as those girls" (Pinkett Smith, 2016). Her persona thus legitimates her advocacy for racial justice and politicises her role as a caring mother figure, so that she can make a proposal for protective care towards all people vulnerable to the trafficking "epidemic", with special attention to those whose gender and class render them vulnerable. Apart from using her celebrity capital to speak and act on behalf of trafficked women, she also brings these women into co-presence by enacting sex trafficking, and this trope is the focus of the next section.

5.4.3. Embodying trafficked women: Dominant trafficking discourses and the sexualisation of the celebrity body

Similarly to the ways in which trafficked women are depicted in Emma Thompson's advocacy, Jada Pinkett Smith's anti-trafficking work relies on dominant discourses of youth, naivety and coercion. In contrast to Thompson's stated objection to the sexualisation of women, and to the absence of sexualised women's bodies in her advocacy, Pinkett Smith's projects contain sexualised images of herself, hinting at her self-empowered choices which stand in contrast to the objectification of trafficked women and their lack of agency. This depiction of an empowered form of womanhood is in line with a postfeminist sensibility; it embraces some of the latter's main discursive characteristics, including proposals for individual action to address systematic oppressions and reliance on sexualised depictions of women as an empowered choice (Jess Butler, 2013; Gill, 2007b, 2017; McRobbie, 2009). This sensibility, feminist theorists argue, is based on (among other things) individualistic exhortations to self-determination, independence and success, all of which Pinkett

Smith embodies through her public persona, and which her advocacy reflects. Notwithstanding, therefore, the origins of her self-empowerment in an espousal of womanist values and a general alignment with feminism, these discourses stand in tension with the way in which trafficked women appear in her performance of advocacy, which is also aligned with a postfeminist sensibility because it simultaneously represents progressive and regressive feminist values (McRobbie, 2009).

In her advocacy Pinkett Smith relies on dominant trafficking discourses of youth, naivety and coercion. In the video *Nada se Compara,* save for the brief opening scenes of infatuation between the main victim and her trafficker, trafficked women are seen in dark spaces with anguished faces, wearing ragged clothing, sitting in dirty rooms, and standing in lines in front of large, ominous-looking men who resemble typical film criminals with tattoos, shaved heads, angry facial expressions, and bulky jewellery (Szörényi & Eate, 2014). The innocence of the main trafficked-woman character is firmly established through her initial enamoured joy. Her kidnapping and placing into the dark spaces inhabited by the other trafficked women clearly signify coercion. Pinkett Smith relies on a similar imaginary of trafficked women as ideal victims in the interview with Rodin, where she discusses, through tears, how "vulnerable" "good girls" easily "fall victim" to the trafficking "epidemic".

In contrast, Pinkett Smith personifies a confident, knowledgeable, and caring attitude towards these vulnerable women. In *Nada se Compara,* she occupies a space with soft lighting where her toned body, beautiful face with almost no visible make-up, neatly arranged hair, and flawless skin are typical examples of heteronormative beauty, and the performance itself is aesthetically well-crafted. Within this flattering visuality, Pinkett Smith adopts tender, determined, and saddened facial expressions, demonstrating compassion and care for women who suffer and her sadness at her inability to rescue them, which is particularly emphasised towards the end of the video when she fervently hits the wall that separates the visual space between her and the trafficked women as the song reaches its climax, and sings a higher note, only to fall to the ground crying. The knowledgeable and empowered celebrity thus proposes a feeling of sadness at her inability to help, but also of empathy and compassion towards women in this video. Additionally, through the text that follows

the video ("Most victims are trafficked by someone they know"; "The most common way to recruit trafficking victims is not kidnapping but love"), she offers education and advice to audiences about the potential dangers in the infatuation of romantic relationships, reflecting Pinkett Smith's message from the interview with Rodin that anyone can become trafficked.

The disempowerment, coercion, and objectification of trafficked women depicted in the video is thus contrasted with the empowerment and sexualisation of the celebrity. This is done through Pinkett Smith's beautiful nudity and obvious desire to protect, and the trafficked women's tattered looks and helplessness. Pinkett Smith's choice to sexualise her own body is therefore seemingly a sign of her empowerment to choose how she is presented and how her body is seen and used. It is, however, also a common form of embodiment in the music industry, where sexual objectification is a common form of visuality (Frisby & Aubrey, 2012, p. 80). Sexual display is also a postfeminist trope whereby sexualised images are reclaimed as an empowered choice to indicate confidence, success, power, and assertive female sexuality (Attwood, 2004; Gill, 2007a, p. 38). Thus, while her sexualisation performs a function – to point out the contrast between her freedom and the coercion of trafficked women – it also points to her participation in a sexualised culture (Attwood, 2006). Indeed, her own nudity is unnecessary for the effective transfer of the video's message that sex traffickers use the prospect of a romantic relationship to coerce and sexually exploit women, and thus it serves a more aesthetic purpose. Notwithstanding its potential coding as empowerment, the sexualisation of Pinkett Smith's body remains within the remit of heteronormative beauty that dominates popular culture and it therefore serves others' pleasure more than Pinkett Smith's empowerment.

In light of Pinkett Smith's orientation towards activism on racial justice and her mother figure persona, and in the context of this music video, her sexualisation is fraught with some discursive tensions. On the one hand, the aesthetic of empowered nudity in the video connotes a postfeminist figure that corresponds to her public persona.[12] On the other hand, the heteronormative beauty of the body on display

[12] The *Nada se Compara* video was made in 2012, and thus preceded the #MeToo movement and Beyoncé's brand of empowered black feminist womanhood, which reached high visibility with her 2014 performance at the Video Music Awards where she sang with the giant word "Feminist" behind her (Chatman, 2015). It is, however, in line with Pinkett Smith's consistent embrace of motherhood as

conforms to popular music visualities that use sexualised bodies to achieve visibility (Frisby & Aubrey, 2012). Pinkett Smith's nudity is therefore simultaneously imbued with histories of gender oppression and the hyper-sexualisation of black female bodies, and also with the confidence and empowerment of a Hollywood celebrity (Elias, Gill, & Scharff, 2017). This visuality is placed in contrast with trafficked women who are shown as scared and powerless, so through the personification of Pinkett Smith's sexual autonomy, she proposes the feeling of sadness and compassion for those who suffer.

5.4.4. Reflecting on social oppression: consolidating empowerment and motherly care to destabilise the victim hierarchy

Similarly to the tensions that exist in Thompson's advocacy whereby her projects rely on dominant trafficking discourses but in her interviews she expands the remit of care to migrant women, Pinkett Smith's personal reflections on sex trafficking destabilise the hierarchy of victimhood that constructs as deserving largely those women who embody ideal victimhood. Like Thompson, then, Pinkett Smith's destabilising of the victim hierarchy reveals the inadequacy of dominant trafficking discourses to address the complexity of the experiences and identities that she witnesses. Two instances are particularly illuminating of this aspect of Pinkett Smith's advocacy: a comment she makes during a short television interview while promoting her film *Girls trip,* and a self-reflexive video posted on the *Don't Sell Bodies* webpage. In both of these instances it is the issues of agency and choice in relation to social oppressions that highlights the limitations of the ideal victim construct.

"The horrific stories I hear about how these young women are treated and the amount of physical abuse in very graphic detail… But then the other things I've learned is that many times those that victimise have been victims. And that has been the other side of human trafficking, so it's a vicious cycle", says Pinkett Smith when asked about trafficking in an otherwise promotional interview for her film (Pinkett Smith, 2017). This is where the discursive power struggles appear and cause

an empowering identity, and therefore her video, as well as her public persona, was in some ways a challenge to traditional femininity of black womanhood before feminism achieved spectacular visibility in Western popular culture (Banet-Weiser, 2018).

instability in singular trafficking narratives. Although on the one hand there is an attempt to create an image of the ideal young, kidnapped, suffering victim, on the other, Pinkett Smith acknowledges the complex cycle of sex trafficking in which a "cycle of violence" is created and perpetuated due to vulnerability, which exceeds the ways in which victims are generally portrayed in anti-trafficking activism. Similarly, in the video on the *Don't Sell Bodies* website, Pinkett Smith reflects on the interlocking oppressions which are often elided in victimising trafficked women showing that these women are not simply naïve and tricked, but that their choice to engage in sex work is informed by poverty and the search for financial independence ("the gateway to trafficking for her […] was stripping", "a couple johns here and there"). Pinkett Smith in this way introduces ambivalence into the discourse of ideal victimhood by showing empathetic and caring feelings towards a sex worker and exotic dancer.

This is an important challenge to the construction of trafficked women which is largely consolidated in terms of ideal victimhood in Pinkett Smith's advocacy. It points to what critical migration and trafficking scholars have asserted for many years, that is, that sex work may not always be the last option for people and that not all sex work is coercive. These kinds of narratives, let us remember, are left unfinished and unaddressed in the genre of film where the narratives of the characters who are sex workers (Mali in *Trafficked*, Daniela and Lily in *Doing Money*) are not resolved and instead these women are abandoned and forgotten. While Pinkett Smith places the woman's wish to achieve financial independence into the context of consumer culture, scholars offer a more nuanced understanding of this cycle, arguing that the global economy in conjunction with intersecting racial, gender, and class inequalities leads exotic dancers (and sex workers) to engage in sex work not only out of necessity, coercion, or to escape oppressive conditions, but due to a complex combination of factors, including as a strategy of advancement (Berman, 2010; Saunders, 2005). These complex and evolving experiences that inform sex workers' conditions of agency and exploitation are what Mai refers to as "mobile orientations" (Mai, 2018, p. xi). It is these mobile orientations that Pinkett Smith reflects on, which prompted her to question the image of the ideal victim which she tends to bring into appearance in her anti-trafficking work. It is also this questioning that breaks from otherwise neo-abolitionist politics of representation in

her advocacy. While she mostly speaks about trafficked women as groomed, innocent, and naïve – thus relying on dominant trafficking discourses – these stereotypes are unable to account for the experiences of the exotic dancers and sex workers she encounters. By reflecting on their stories she acknowledges that these women's experiences of agency in choosing sex work as a way to make a living reaches the limits of neo-abolitionist discourse and fails to include them into the remit of not only tender-hearted care but also the remit of political and ideological visibility.

In expressing compassionate care for the trafficked women whose experiences do not fit into ideal victim narratives, Pinkett Smith destabilises the trafficking narrative that is elsewhere constructed through her celebrity performances of advocacy. Indeed, her openness to the possibility that victims can also be perpetrators and that those who are thought of as trafficked women could instead be sex workers who are exploited is in line with her celebrity brand of an accepting mother figure who resists a social system that is based on racialised and gendered oppressions. In acknowledging that she needs to learn more and "reconcile some things within my own understanding", she acknowledges that assumptions about ideal victimhood fail to account for the true complexity of oppressive life circumstances. And while her openness to destabilising the dominant trafficking discourse is commendable, she only hints at the connection between women's intersecting oppressions, sex work, and exploitation. In other words, she does not point to the solutions proposed by those who advocate for the decriminalisation sex work, who have long argued that abolitionist policies cause harm to those migrants, sex workers, and trafficked women who exist at the margins of this discourse. Her proposal for moral responsibility that implicates individual actors and sexualised culture in issues that are matters of institutional change further exemplifies this failure to politicise trafficked women as subjects of pity.

5.4.5. Using celebrity capital to address the public: Empowerment, motherhood and moral responsibility

Celebrity capital is a form of recognisability or an "accumulated media visibility through recurrent media representations", which can be converted into other forms of

capital and thus gain value within different social fields (Driessens, 2013, pp. 556–557). Pinkett Smith converts her celebrity capital into visibility and legitimacy within the field of social advocacy, but instead of moving across social fields, her celebrity advocacy is closely aligned with her personality as a celebrity mother, singer, and actor, as well as to her persona as an advocate for equality and racial justice. Accordingly, her advocacy is aligned with her entrepreneurial persona in a way that *extends* her celebrity brand rather than merely demonstrating a mobilisation of her celebrity in the service of her advocacy. In a similar manner to the trope of *utilising celebrity capital to address the public: feminist persona* in Emma Thompson's advocacy, this trope interacts and co-exists with other forms of visuality in Jada Pinkett Smith's performance of advocacy, and imbues all her other tropes with underlying ideas about protecting young women. Pinkett Smith's exemplary mode of celebrity motherhood extends to educational and motherly care for trafficked women, and this is, in turn, related to her personal brand of empowered womanhood situated in her racial identity. It is the co-articulation of these discourses that creates a tension characterising her advocacy and reveals the kind of moral education that she provides audiences with. This sense of empowerment and familial care renders women's participation in sexualised culture acceptable, but she is also attuned to the harm caused by sexualised representations and consumer culture.

The discourses that Pinkett Smith relies on in her advocacy are those of motherly care and empowerment as a moral imperative to help both ideal victims of trafficking and those whose agency places them outside of this remit. She calls on the public to "communicate with your children", and uses her racial identity and discourses of confident motherhood to educate both parents and children about the warning signs of trafficking. By performing this empowered motherhood she serves as an aspirational example, but also places the responsibility for empowerment in the hands of individual actors who are called upon to address symptoms of issues that are rooted in systems of structural oppression. She is aware of these systematic oppressions and the harmful potential of the popular culture exhortations to empowerment and financial independence, which she demonstrates by accepting into the remit of care both ideal victims and those who do not fit into this category, such as sex workers who operate in exploitative conditions and claim belonging to the category of trafficked women.

In the video on the *Don't Sell Bodies* webpage, Pinkett Smith hints at these exhortations in popular culture that ignore social inequalities and emphasise independence and financial success. Reflecting on her visit to a shelter for trafficked women, Pinkett Smith says: "She said she wanted to be an independent chick, she wanted to make that money, she wanted to be the girl that she saw in songs, […] she says it makes [sex work] okay" (2'55''), and then she reflects on her surprise that "I missed that young women were perceiving stripping as a way of being independent" (2'55''). Thus, she acknowledges the sexualisation of culture that she claims has changed since the time when she was growing up, when exotic dancing was, in her view, not seen as a socially acceptable job opportunity: "stripping was the bottom […] the stripping culture was not glorified when I was coming up. If you were stripping, there was a problem" (3'13''). She thus makes a connection between sex work, exotic dance, and the social acceptability of the sexualised body but, importantly, she does not relate this to her own sexualisation in the *Nada se Compara* video, presumably assuming that her intentional sexual display in a music video is a positive example of her as an active sexual subject and thus not related to a view of women as passive and objectified (Gill, 2007a). She also does not relate this to the failure of neo-abolitionist ideology and politics to account for the complex negotiations of agency that occur in people who experience oppression, exploitation and disadvantage, nor does she acknowledge the possibility of seeing sex work in a different way, that is, as a legitimate choice of labour. The combination of her personification of aspirational motherhood and her proposal for accepting sex workers into the remit of empathy consolidate into a moral imperative to educate young people. Using these tropes, Pinkett Smith addresses audiences as individual actors in order to empower them to enact personal solutions in the interest of their families and the wider society. In placing the responsibility for change on individuals by instructing them to become educated, empowered, self-governing subjects, this call fails to capitalise on an understanding of sex trafficking as a collective struggle or on the complex interplay of agency and exploitation that surround trafficking, migration and sex work.

Thus, in the same vein as the postfeminist sensibility that characterises her performance of empowered sexual subjectivity in *Nada se Compara*, where attention is drawn to ideal victimhood without a coherent commentary on the underlying

causes of vulnerability that also permeates her other anti-trafficking performances, Pinkett Smith's moral education denounces the symptoms of a problem but not the issue itself. Namely, insofar as the complicity of Western states and their policies of migration are not addressed in Pinkett Smith's anti-trafficking activism, her activism constitutes a denial of responsibility for the inequalities perpetuated by a global economic system. In particular, state powers which restrict freedom of movement and implement measures to address "modern slavery" are deeply implicated in creating and perpetuating the inequalities and precarity experienced by many sex workers (O'Connell Davidson, 2016). By not addressing this institutional aspect that contributes to women's vulnerability, therefore, Pinkett Smith's call to action does not denounce the structures responsible for the underlying conditions. As mentioned above, anti-trafficking interventions which focus on rescue and coercion fail to account for the negotiations of agency in oppressive circumstances and therefore frame as ambivalent the plight of those trafficked women who do not conform to the ideal victim discourse (Agustín, 2007). This binary of agency and victimhood is why it is difficult for Pinkett Smith to reconcile the agency of the exotic dancers with their willingness to work in the sex industry because, in exercising agency in oppressive conditions (Madhok, 2013a), they no longer fit into the ideal victim discourse.

The key insight from this analysis of Jada Pinkett Smith's advocacy is that she mobilises empowerment, motherhood and interest in the politics of race, which are elements of her public persona, in order to personify a moral obligation towards trafficked women as subjects deserving of public compassion and empathy. Trafficked women are constructed through a reliance on dominant trafficking discourses, while the sexualisation of her own body highlights the contrast between empowerment and victimhood. She also destabilises the victim hierarchy created by dominant discourses by accepting all vulnerable victims into the remit of care, including sex workers, who are not usually part of the ideal victim discourse. However, her incitements to public action fail to engender collectivity and political struggle because she places responsibility on individuals for resolving inequalities and vulnerabilities which originate at the institutional level and because she does not acknowledge a politics of representation that proposes the decriminalisation of sex work. The implication of this form of pity is that she does not mobilise the political

aspect of pity to denounce any particular system and therefore the call to systemic change remains unaddressed.

5.5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have analysed the celebrity anti-trafficking projects of Emma Thompson and Jada Pinkett Smith. I have used a version of the analytics of mediation and, through the analytical categories of embodiment and agency, examined how trafficked women are constructed as subjects of public emotion. I suggest that, although both celebrities perform open-minded attitudes towards trafficking, their projects do not go far enough in fully politicising sex trafficking. Put simply, proposals for care towards trafficked women goes beyond caring only for those who are presented as ideal victims, but the invitations to public action do not denounce particular institutional actors and structures, even though the intersecting oppressions that coalesce to create various forms of vulnerability are identified.

Emma Thompson performs a feminist persona and in her anti-trafficking activism trafficked women are constructed in ways that are in line with feminism. In her advocacy, women are depicted as ideal victims and their sexual objectification is avoided or re-signified through sexual violence when their bodies appear in her projects. Moreover, Thompson personifies an accepting and non-judgmental attitude towards migration and accepts irregular migrants into the remit of care, thus destabilising the victim hierarchy. Further, Thompson has a feminist persona and in line with this, she implicates the sexualisation of culture (Attwood, 2006) and the social arrangements associated with women's objectification, in the demand for sexual services. However, her activism fails to fully engage the political aspect of vulnerability because it does not denounce governments for implementing restrictive labour migration regimes which contribute to women's vulnerability. Jada Pinkett Smith performs a form of womanhood based on her focus on racial justice and her embodiment of empowered motherhood. Her performance of trafficked women's suffering employs discourses of ideal victimhood and an emphasis on women's oppression in contrast with an empowered sexualisation of her own body, but these discourses are destabilised when sex workers are included in the remit of her

empathy. She uses these forms of embodiment to comment on the forms of social oppression that intersect to create the vulnerabilities experienced by trafficked women and, by reflecting on these, she reaches the limits of the ideal victim discourse, thus destabilising the victim hierarchy. Ultimately, however, like the proposals for moral responsibility in Thompson's activism, Pinkett Smith's advocacy fails to politicise pity because it misses an opportunity to implicate institutions and governments in creating and perpetuating conditions that contribute to women's vulnerability.

Taken together, the performances of these two celebrities represent a destabilisation of the victimhood hierarchy, since both ideal victims and those who do not fit into the ideal victim discourse are deemed deserving of public care. While the advocacy projects of both celebrities rely on depictions of ideal victims, emphasis falls on the intersections of gender, race and class as important factors in creating vulnerabilities. In this way the two performances open up the possibility of meaningful understanding and recognition of marginalised identities and experiences. However, in spite of this openness, both celebrities ultimately make individuals responsible for questioning the moral order in society (Thompson) and for educating their children about trafficking (Pinkett Smith), thus acknowledging women's disadvantage but failing to denounce social institutions for their role in perpetuating inequality and oppression.

Chapter Six: Trafficked Women in Press Journalism: Expanding the Hierarchy of Victimhood

6.1. Introduction

In this chapter I present an analysis of media texts about trafficked women in seven newspapers from the UK and the US: *The Guardian*, *The Times*, *The Telegraph*, *The Sun* (UK); and *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *USA Today* (US). Press journalism, I suggest, expands upon the victim hierarchy which is established in film and destabilised by celebrity advocacy. This occurs, I propose, because press journalism gives a platform to a multitude of voices and scenarios, introducing into the ideal victim discourse a variety of tensions and contradictions and thus expanding the ideal victim image. Even though trafficked women as subjects are still constructed either as worthy of tender-hearted emotion or as ambivalent subjects whose vulnerability does not fully constitute them as deserving of public pity, the space of ambivalence is wider because it is more meaningfully articulated by the presence of many voices, including those of trafficked women themselves.

My analysis yielded six tropes that are presented below in a manner differing slightly from the presentation of film and of celebrity advocacy in the thesis. The tropes are highly interrelated, but for reasons of clarity they are presented in a way that distinguishes between two clusters. The first cluster (presented in sections 6.3.1, 6.3.2 and 6.3.3) represents three forms of embodiment and agency in which trafficked women are represented as deceased, controlled, and injured subjects. The second cluster (presented in sections 6.3.4, 6.3.5, and 6.3.6) represents three forms of visibility in which trafficked women are constructed as strangers, victims, and survivors. These tropes were separated for analytical purposes, but I draw many comparisons between mixed groups of tropes on the basis of the similarities that appear across the categories. I argue that, similarly to celebrity advocacy, newspaper representations depict multiple trafficking experiences and different forms of public morality, thus expanding the unified image of an ideal trafficked woman. In this genre, the conditions under which trafficked women gain public visibility are varied (death, control, injury), they entail different formations of embodiment and agency, and within these conditions of visibility trafficked women take on different forms of appearance (stranger, victim, survivor). This genre represents the most complex hierarchy of victimhood because not only are the discursive tensions within these

media texts more nuanced and therefore harder to place on a victim hierarchy, but trafficked women are also explicitly set either in harmony or in contrast with various institutional actors, who thus complicate their placement within the hierarchy of victimhood.

6.2. Description of data

In the context of press reporting, the analytics of mediation and the analytical categories of embodiment and agency helped me to look into how trafficked women are constructed as sufferers. In the genre of news, embodiment features differently than in the other genres considered because trafficked women are often disembodied through statistics and policy discussions, or are voiceless but ventriloquised by various official and civil society actors. The data collection process is detailed in section *3.4.1 Data selection and data collection*. In terms of sources, I chose to analyse broadsheet newspapers with the highest circulation in the UK and in the US (prioritising their circulation numbers to their left- or right-leaning orientation), which means that I include broadsheets like *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*. However, I also included the UK tabloid, *The Sun*, as this was, at the time of data collection, by a significant margin the newspaper with the highest circulation in the UK (ABC, 2018). To illustrate in the analysis what I have identified as the commonly occurring tropes, I selected article excerpts from an array of these newspapers. As in the analyses of films and celebrity advocacy, in this genre I am interested in the possibilities of meaning that different forms of embodiment and agency offer to audiences with regard to trafficked women as subjects of pity.

6.3. Trafficked women as subjects in press journalism

Given the nature of press journalism as a genre, the sample was selected to encompass multiple news outlets and voices, which inevitably represent trafficked women in different ways. The tropes therefore represent this multitude of voices, which draw on similar language and images but frame trafficked women in different ways and for differing purposes, destabilising the dominant discourses and thereby expanding the hierarchy of victimhood. The six categories defined as characterising the ways in which trafficked women are constructed in press journalism are divided

into three forms of embodiment and agency (*6.3.1 Deceased trafficked women, 6.3.2 Controlled trafficked women,* and *6.3.3 Injured trafficked women*) and three forms of visibility (*6.3.4 Trafficked women as strangers, 6.3.5 Trafficked women as victims,* and *6.3.6 Trafficked women as survivors).* This means that through the first cluster of categories I explore how trafficked women are constructed through embodiment and agency, and through the second cluster I describe how they emerge as subjects in media texts. Because these are interrelated categories, there is overlap between the various discourses that bring trafficked women into public view, which helps to illustrate the complexity of these discourses and the multitude of voices and experiences brought forward.

The representation of trafficked women in newspapers spans visualities that include the dissolution of bodies through death, the use of women's bodies as objects, and the reclaiming of injured bodies through healing, recovery and charity work. These forms of embodiment code the body on a spectrum ranging from being annihilated through death to being objectified either through institutional or individual control, or reclaimed through the voices of others or the trafficked women's own voices. The tropes contain overlapping, contradictory, and shifting discourse, so I do not claim that they are mutually exclusive or that each article or image falls neatly into one category. For instance, the tropes of *deceased trafficked women* and *trafficked women as strangers* both describe the condition of being separated from society, either through physically disappearing from the world or through being irregular migrants in foreign countries and encamped in migrant reception centres. In a similar way to this kind of physical separation from society, the tropes of *trafficked women as strangers* and *trafficked women as victims* describe the condition of symbolic alienation from society where women are marked by difference and thereby othered. Within the tropes of *deceased* and *controlled trafficked women*, meanwhile, bodies are marked as racialised and abject and are thus subject to various forms of control, turning them into ambivalent subjects of pity. In other words, the categories are separated for analytical purposes, but the newspaper stories from which they are drawn represent complex discursive objects, fraught with internal tensions, that draw on a variety of socio-economic and historical conditions to construct trafficked women as subjects.

Referring to their embodied experiences of trauma and injury, but also to recovery narratives, this typology of depictions in the press brings about the potential for trafficked women to reclaim their bodies, their voices, and their sense of self. Although their embodiment creates difference through death, objectification, or racialisation, this does not mean that trafficked women have no agentive potential. Ambivalence renders their identities complex and gives their experiences and identities depth and a multitude of meanings. So, although their experience of trauma is constructed as profoundly shaping their subjectivities, trafficked women nonetheless show agency in negotiating their situations. In these media texts, they show agency through speaking, educating themselves, and helping other trafficked women. For instance, in the trope that relies on the injured bodies of trafficked women, injury is sometimes represented in ways that not only establishes this discourse but also challenges women's trauma, injury and victimhood. In the rest of this chapter I focus on the six categories of representation through which trafficked women emerge as subjects: *Deceased trafficked women, Controlled trafficked women, Injured trafficked women, Trafficked women as strangers, Trafficked women as victims,* and *Trafficked women as survivors*.

6.3.1. Deceased trafficked women

In this category of representation, the narratives focus on trafficked women's tragic deaths. This trope includes both detailed and passing descriptions of women who have died as a result of trafficking exploitation, unsafe working conditions, and violence perpetrated by traffickers and clients. Although their deaths render them unable to explain their own aims, desires, or their subjectivities, trafficked women here speak through death or, put otherwise, death is the condition under which they appear to audiences and their death as it appears on media discourse constitutes the proposal for emotional and moral engagement.

One example of this discursive construction is the story of an Albanian woman, Silvana Beqiraj, whose naked body was found in Montpellier, France, and whose murder the police never solved (Bindel, 2018). The woman in the article is constructed as a trafficked woman and the article contains a description of how Silvana's body was hauled from a canal and an observation that "there were no signs

of injury, but her nakedness was a cause for concern", suggesting that her death was likely the outcome of foul play. The author also quotes a police officer who, upon being asked about the possibility of sex trafficking, stated: "if she does not think she is a victim, why should we?", echoing wider patterns of journalistic reporting of sexual violence against women, where narratives tend to maintain stereotypes about "appropriate" femininity through dichotomies between "victims" and "whores" and a reliance on ideal victimhood (Benedict, 1993, p. 22; Greer, 2007, p. 49). In addition, and in the context of Julie Bindel, the article author's status as a neo-abolitionist activist, this article acquires meanings that are aligned with the abolitionist movement. As an activist and writer (see for instance Bindel, 2017), Bindel is critical of the movement that advocates for the decriminalisation of sex work and instead proposes criminalisation as a solution. Bearing in mind the article author's position, the police officer's justification of violence and the police's failure to protect a vulnerable woman from violence can be interpreted as a call to criminalise clients instead of sex workers. Silvana's status as a victim of trafficking is thus asserted at the same time as it is undermined by the possibility that she was a sex worker, which also in this context diminishes her worthiness as a subject of pity. The author notes that Silvana's brother and parents, who are described as modest people living in rural Albania and pictured in front of their small, bare, decaying house, think she was a sex worker because "if she had a trafficker he wouldn't let her send us money". This confirms the police officer's suspicion that she was not trafficked and imbues her death with suggestions of vulnerability and victimhood, on the one hand, but also of agency and complicity in migrant sex work, on the other. As Gregoriou (2012) has argued, in death, sex workers are less deserving of victim status, especially if a central aspect of the story of their death is what they did for a living, in other words, if they are identified through a "type" (sex worker) rather than through an identity.

Accounts of death and suffering thus include both vulnerability and agentive migration, with the former evoking compassionate pity while the latter puts this sentiment in doubt by suggesting complicity in migrant sex work. In a different article, a journalist writes about the experience of Grace, a Nigerian woman whose "imagined comfortable new life in Europe never got beyond the barbarities she suffered in anarchic Libya" (Harvey, 2018), suggesting that Libya is an undemocratic Third World state she was escaping by migrating to seek a better life

in Europe, and thereby constructing Grace as a migrant other, marked by difference. The same theme is present in another article, where a woman named Rosemary Ubogu, who is now an "anti-slavery campaigner", is quoted as describing how she "saw her best friend die of thirst in the Sahara", which they were forced to cross on their migration route to Libya. Describing her experiences, Rosemary is further quoted as saying: "I was sold three times in Libya to different men. I had to go with them. If you argue, you die" (Harvey, 2018). Instances of death and the threat of death that are present in these descriptions of women's migrant routes through the Sahara, where "the only water to drink was from an oasis with a body floating in it" (Harvey, 2018), as Rosemary recounts, illustrate the dehumanisation of irregular migration by detailing the horrors and perils that people encounter as they traverse migration routes to Europe. In the article about Silvana Bequraj, the journalist describes the death of another trafficked woman:

> One 20-year old victim who ran away on discovering she was pregnant to one of the men who bought her was found and taken to a building site. In full view of other women, who had been taken to the site to watch, she was severely beaten before being bricked into a concrete wall while still alive. (Bindel, 2018)

Accounts of the horror of death and suffering thus demonstrate vulnerability and the dangers of irregular migration to Europe, while at the same time both stressing the reasonable aspirations of victims (seeking a "comfortable new life") and implicating them in trafficking by noting their (at least initially) voluntary involvement with traffickers ("if she had a trafficker he wouldn't let her send us money"). Indeed, the shocking nature of these crimes brings these women into visibility in spite of the general tendency of journalism to underreport sexual violence against women of colour (Meyers, 2004), but in spite of achieving visibility these women are still constructed as at least partially responsible for their victimisation. Trafficked women are thus depicted as subjects of extreme dehumanisation and vulnerability and simultaneously as migrant others thus muddling the distinction between practices of securitisation and humanitarian intervention on behalf of trafficked women as subjects of care (Aradau, 2004; Squire, 2015, pp. 35–39).

As subjects of public emotion, trafficked women here appear under the condition of death, which brings with it visibility but also the possibility of utilising

the death as a way to impose political and ideological context. Similarly to what occurs in celebrity advocacy, the annihilation of women's voices opens a door for a woman's death to be the catalyst for other actors to produce knowledge and discourse surrounding this event (Peters, 2001). Death, therefore, is a particular state of (not) being; it means that the woman is no longer able to think, feel, strive, speak or act and so she can no longer be a threatening, sexualised, or desiring subject, and can no longer challenge any societal norms (as she did by migrating to seek a better life and by engaging in sex work). Indeed, the spectacular violence that these accounts contain, which bring trafficked women into visibility, also fail to connect their deaths to broader patterns of gender inequality and poverty, which is another widespread pattern documented by feminists in relation to journalistic representations of sexual violence against women (Easteal, Holland, & Judd, 2015).

Although these accounts bring forward proposals for compassion by quoting the dismissive police officer, showing the family's grief, and focusing on the shocking violence, they obscure these women's desire for life. Namely, by submitting to the generalised vulnerability of women as subjects of sexual violence and exploitation, women are generalised as victims (Ahiska, 2016, p. 224). "How these women wished to live", Ahiska argues, "what kind of pleasures they sought in their lives, not only becomes impermissible but also unthinkable" (2016, p. 224). This focus away from women's desires and ambitions works to efface women's subjectivities and does not name or challenge the wider social context of male dominance and women's social inequality which these women may have confronted and wanted to escape (Easteal et al., 2015). The focus on the circumstances of death and details of trauma obscure the women's desires and make proposals to remember them as vulnerable bodies, so this discourse does not mobilise vulnerability in order to challenge stereotypes or highlight women's subjective experiences, but instead highlights the spectacular death. The obliteration of their individual desires additionally eliminates the possibility of women's sexual agency. In emphasising the gruesome deaths of women who migrate to Europe from Nigeria, Libya and Albania in search of work, these articles propose passivity because they highlight the notion that these women no longer have independence or individuality. As Bronfen (1992, p. 181) argues, the death of the migrant other serves to reconfirm and secure the

cultural norms that may have been challenged by her presence. This dehumanisation of women as beings renders them, as Ahiska (2016, p. 220) argues, non-threatening.

This eradication of women as independent subjects, positions deceased trafficked women as subaltern. Discussing the relationships between desire, power, and subjectivity and critiquing Foucault and Deleuze for their failure to connect these elements in their theory of ideology, which, in turn, fails to accommodate different subject positions, Gayatri Spivak (2010, p. 68) discusses the subject position of the subaltern, as embodied by oppressed and marginalised people whose social position mutes their struggle. Rethinking her initial argument that there is no space from which a subaltern can speak (Spivak 2010: 103), Spivak later proposes that "the subaltern is in the space of difference" and that difference gives meaning to death (Spivak, 2010, p. 233). Building on this work, Rajan proposes that the death of a subaltern:

> …is not merely a question of causality (what are the causes of death?) or even of visibility (what are the conditions that make the death of a subaltern woman available for accounting in the archive?); it is a question of the historian's dependency on the subaltern woman's death and on death being made to appear as the condition of possibility of the subaltern woman's emergence into historical discourse. (2010, p. 117)

Death thus becomes the condition of possibility under which a woman in a subaltern position enters public discourse, the circumstances of death being shocking enough to propel her into public view. However, this does not mean that death serves to overcome the status of subaltern. Trafficked women's deaths are what gives the narrative its shock value, but the proposals for emotion on their behalf are what politicises their plight. As audiences are invited to witness the violence inscribed on women's bodies, Ahmed (1998, p. 182) argues, the violence is repeated and restaged, and attention is drawn away from violence and towards ambivalence. Sexual violence and the resulting death of women who can no longer assert their agency or their voice as migrants, sex workers, mothers or trafficked women gives way to discussion by other actors who do not bring attention to the wider problems taking place in society that played a part in these women's vulnerability. Thus, the death of trafficked women here gives way to ambivalence, and this ambivalent space is filled by other voices who do little to politicise it.

6.3.2. Controlled trafficked women

This trope is characterised by the internal tension that is present in media texts where trafficked women lose control over how their bodies are used, and yet continue to reject control through agentive acts. It contains articles about women who refer to their bodies being subjected to a variety of abusive and exploitative experiences resulting from manipulation and deceit, so the body becomes an animate object controlled and used by outside parties. In this trope the female body is controlled by one of two parties: on the one hand, the body is subject to the biopolitical management of the state apparatus, which exercises *institutional control* over the bare life of its subjects, while, on the other hand, it is subjected to forceful control by madams, pimps, traffickers, and "foreign men", who are framed as exercising coercion and violence through *individual control*. Both forms of control objectify and dehumanise the female body through difference, at the same time as these bodies resist such control through acts of agency.

The first form of embodiment, through *institutional control*, is seen in stories of women being treated as no more than bodies with names to be recorded and sorted and having their basic bodily needs met through government programmes, enacting what Agier calls a "politics of containment" of migratory flows in its desire to both control and rescue victims (Agier, 2010, p. 30). In this category of reporting, women are vehicles for securing funding for migration reception camps, collateral damage of funding cuts, or subjects of exploitation, deportation or imprisonment. Their bodies are treated as passive objects with basic needs that need to be met, which results in women going missing from government records or sometimes speaking up against such treatment. In this form of embodiment, women's bodies are vehicles for the financial gain of corrupt migrant camp managements, while their bodies and their mental health suffer as a result of imprisonment, deportation, insufficient care, or funding cuts and their complex long-term needs are left unaddressed.

In one article a woman's arrival at a migrant reception camp is described in the following way:

> After an appalling journey, via Tripoli, which took nearly three weeks, Joy arrived at the port of Augusta on Sicily's east coast. She had no papers or passport. All she had was an Italian phone number, which her maman [the madam] had stitched into the sleeve of her jacket. When the migrants got off the boat, an armed military

> policeman in a bulletproof vest stood guard as another patted them down and took knives from some of the men. Those with documents were taken to a large tent lined with army cots. One woman handed out shoes and flip-flops, and another gave them bruised yellow apples from a large metal tub. An officer used a black marker pen to write a number on the migrants' left hands. Joy was number 323. (Nadeau, 2018)

The dehumanisation and control described in this excerpt frame Joy, a Nigerian migrant, as a victim who "fell into the trap set by traffickers who lure women into slavery and prostitution". A key feature of this form of embodiment is the insertion of trafficked women into the faceless bureaucratic machine of humanitarian aid or government care and securitisation, which does not distinguish their individual needs, their legal status, or their victimhood, and instead sees all potentially trafficked women as bodies to be managed. The way Joy is controlled is further emphasised through her objectification by the madam, who has stitched a phone number to her sleeve, and by the officer who marked her body with a number. This inclusion of bodies into the operation of government is what Foucault calls biopower – "the regulations of the population" through a series of institutional interventions "directed towards the performances of the body, with attention to the processes of life" (Foucault, 1990, p. 139).

Other stories are accompanied by images of women now in social care, seen sitting, standing or reclining in small, modest rooms. The shots are tight, their faces sullen or covered, and their clothing basic, implying their bare life,[13] where basic bodily needs are safeguarded while their political and other needs are overlooked (Agier, 2010, p. 31), implying, as a filmmaker quoted in one article observes, "a suffocating absence of hope" (Kelly & McNamara, 2018). Some stories are accompanied by images of women waiting for customers on street corners, and shots of cars with women in revealing clothing leaning into them (Nadeau, 2018). Women's faces in these images are neutral, blurry, or obscured by darkness. They

[13] The notion of bare life, to which I refer here, is conceptualised by Giorgio Agamben in *Homo Sacer* (Agamben, 1998). He draws on the work of Hannah Arendt as well as on Michel Foucault's (1990) theories of governmentality and biopolitics to develop an account of life in a detention camp that is described as a political state of exclusion and dehumanisation. His work has been taken up, critiqued and expanded by media scholars, feminists, criminologists, and other scholars studying migration and humanitarianism, and critiqued for its limitations vis-à-vis agency. For accounts of bare life in the context of migration that are critical of its preclusion of the possibility of agency, see Franko, Aas & Bosworth, 2013; Squire, 2015; Ticktin, 2014.

look like the stock images, common in the media, of sex workers soliciting clients, which – through blurring, obscuring, and cropping out women's faces – suggest facelessness and lack of personal identity (the scenarios and images described here are in the following news articles: Bell & Hatcher, 2018; Kelly & McNamara, 2018; Nadeau, 2018).

When it comes to the proposals for emotion within this trope, the *institutional control* of women is evocative of the biopolitical management of women which shifts the possibility of tender-hearted concern for women as vulnerable migrants into an ambivalent space. Namely, women's bodies are treated as needing only basic survival provisions and are therefore subjected to "interventions and regulatory controls" or in other words, to biopolitics (Foucault, 1990, p. 139). Critical migration scholars describe this as a form of bodily control that seeks to exclude by creating structural boundaries and thereby exercising power over its subjects while maintaining an appearance of care (Agier, 2010; Fassin, 2012; Redfield, 2005; Squire, 2015). In other words, they are subjected to "humanitarian securitisation", or the competing imperative to balance humanitarian care for vulnerable others with security concerns for state sovereignty (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2017; Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2019; Vaughan-Williams, 2015). This unstable balance of simultaneous and indeed complementary claims to humanitarian care for the needs of strangers and biopolitical work to restrict their movement and confine their bodies to camps results in the ambivalence of the figure of the migrant other (Berman, 2010; Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2019). It also reflects what scholars who support the decriminalisation of sex work would identify as a moral panic whereby trafficked women are relegated to the position of victim while their agency in making "unacceptable" choices justifies the control of their bodies and actions (Dagistanli & Milivojevic, 2013; Keo, Bouhours, Broadhurst, & Bouhours, 2014; Weitzer, 2007). In the examples used here, trafficked women speak of being reduced to faceless bodies, and of losing their political potential through exclusion from public life, yet at the same time this very exclusion is the result of their agency as migrants and speaking subjects who, through this act, demonstrate political subjectivity. Thus, critics argue, such constructions draw attention away from women's suffering and the realities of their agency and exploitation, and towards reactionary policies that only account for the experiences of ideal victims (Dagistanli & Milivojevic, 2013, p.

231). As opposed to their representation in the *deceased trafficked women* trope, women here are agentive subjects who challenge both national borders and the symbolic boundaries that construe them as ideal – young, innocent, kidnapped – victims who would not abandon their traditional feminine roles and undertake migratory projects unless forced to. Indeed, women who migrate for sex work and seek the help of smugglers do so for economic and other reasons, which constitutes a negotiation both of traditional gender roles and of ideal victim discourses. But the focus on women's injury and containment precludes an empathetic understanding of the oppressive circumstances they faced and obscures an explanation of their negotiated agency. This instability of discourses that describe the dehumanisation of their bodies at the same time as offering insufficient context for agency thus results in an ambivalent proposal of care. This trope neither offers proposals for full compassionate care nor does it condemn their agency.

The second trope, of *individual control*, is seen in articles referring to incidents of the grooming, recruitment and sexual exploitation of trafficked women. Such articles include, for instance, stories of underage women who were groomed and trafficked by "foreign men" and remain traumatised as adults (Swerling, 2018), of the bodies of Nigerian women bound to their madams by juju rituals and released from curses by juju priests (Adaobi, 2018; Freeman, 2018; Johnson, 2018), of a domestic labourer sold by her family and forced to have children with her captor (Pook & Graham, 2018), or of revelations about a cult leader and his female recruiter who exploited women by putting them in the position of slaves to the cult leader (McMillan, 2018). A woman's debt bondage through juju is described in the following way:

> Before being smuggled into Europe, women and girls in the area, which falls in present-day Edo State, are made to sign a contract with the traffickers who finance their journey, promising to pay them thousands of dollars. The agreement is sealed with a voodoo, or juju, ritual, conducted by a spiritual priest, known here as a native doctor. Pieces of their clothing, fingernails or hair are mixed with drops of their blood into a concoction that the women are made to drink. (Adaobi, 2018)

The element of control is emphasised through the bodily ritual and reinforced by reference to its symbolic power, which transcends the ritual itself and persists after

the woman has migrated. Another important feature of the *individual control* of women is the handling of women's bodies in ways that separate them from news publics, both symbolically (through, for instance, the juju ritual), and physically (through their confinement in brothels, rental properties, and homes, as noted in other articles). Such stories evoke objectification, not only because of the violence performed through individual control and separation, but also because of the assumed passivity, naivety and controlled sexuality they presuppose in women, reflecting broader trends of representing trafficked women as passive, ideal victims of sex trafficking.

The descriptions of juju rituals and incest as part of the experiences of non-European trafficked women further serves to not only sexualise the trafficked subjects but also to construct them as primitive. This discourse has its origins in nineteenth century colonial associations of black bodies with dirt and primitiveness, as well as with the hypersexualisation of black women's bodies (Ahmed, 2002, pp. 46–57). In evoking the sexualisation of women's bodies which are mistreated by various actors, articles in this cluster also obscure women's subjectivities. Women are constructed in relation to their bodily experiences of trafficking, but their subjective experiences and opinions are not present in these accounts. Thus, the spectacular violence they are subjected to is central to the story, which corresponds to wider trends in news reporting of sexual violence against women, where news reports tend to sensationalise sexual violence (Benedict, 1993; Gill, 2007b, p. 135). Although these articles speak directly about trafficked women, most of them do not use images of the women themselves, and instead show the juju priests, madams, and politicians, which further conceals the women's individuality because it narrates their experiences but fails to individualise them.

Both *institutional* and *individual* control of the female body are thus characterised by internal discursive tensions whereby women's bodies suffer outside control and yet they also speak on their own behalf (in *institutional control*) or suffer violence that sexualises them as sufferers (in *individual control*). In subjecting trafficked women to recording and sorting processes or marking and grooming them for sexual exploitation, trafficked women are here made subjects of dominating and violent control, and thus proposals for compassion are made on their behalf. These forms of control, which are accompanied by suffering and objectification as forms of

embodiment, are also accompanied by the negotiation of these positions. In one article, a trafficked woman is quoted as saying that she wants to be seen as more than "a prostitute and a criminal" in order to "get a second chance in life", as she works with a lawyer to have her criminal record expunged (article by Kelly, 2018). Similarly, the very act of migration and seeking a better life in Europe implies agency and brings women's migration into the political realm (Squire, 2015, pp. 31–33). Additionally, the women who are sexualised in the *individual control* cluster, are associated with primitiveness and hypersexualisation, which is the precise reason why they suffer control. This internal tension within media texts produces representations of trafficked women as ambivalent subjects, characterised by both vulnerability and a limited amount of agency, and therefore occupying a position that no longer conforms to the notion of ideal victimhood. Although this does not mean that these trafficked women are unworthy of public affection – indeed, the stories of their suffering are heart-breaking – the women's vulnerability here co-exists with a degree of agency.

6.3.3. Injured trafficked women

This trope sees trafficked women's bodies as former sites of violence, and now as speaking subjects who expose their injury in public. As in the *deceased trafficked women* trope, bodily injury is here the main thrust which propels trafficked women into public view because injury is emphasised as the reason these women are deserving of public attention and emotion, and it is also framed as the motivation behind their decision to speak. As in the *controlled trafficked women* trope, the subjects of this form of embodiment have agency, and indeed demonstrate more explicit forms of agency and resistance by exposing their injury willingly and on their own terms. They do this by speaking on their own behalf and demanding rights and provisions for themselves and for other women. This trope is in line with the notion of vulnerability as the exposure of injury, which carries the possibility of illustrating one's marginalised position and asserting one's right to a voice (Butler, 2001b; Butler et al., 2016b; Page, 2018). Specifically, the articulation of vulnerability in this case arises from the mobilisation of a particular embodied resource – injury, "in response to particular situated conditions" of sex trafficking (Page, 2018, p. 282). In brief, women expose bodily injury as a particular embodied

experience in order to demonstrate their vulnerability, offer resistance to their conditions, and assert their agency.

In order to demonstrate their vulnerability, trafficked women lay bare the often profound bodily and psychological injury they have been left with after being trafficked. They speak and appear as incarcerated inmates at risk of re-trafficking because of their vulnerability in prison (Kelly & McNamara, 2018), they recount the attacks they have survived and still face because of their activism (Schultz, 2018), they speak of being branded (McMillan, 2018), of suffering from hearing loss, broken teeth and bones from beatings, and of experiencing recurring convulsions and panic attacks (Porter, 2018). The sheer horror and profound injury of the uncommonly cruel violence endured by these women, and an emphasis on the permanence of these injuries, is a key element of this trope, where publics are faced with accounts of bodies which bear permanent physical and psychological marks of trauma. Such accounts include a story about a trafficked woman suffering a panic attack as she recounts seeing a Yazidi girl raped: "her eyes rolled into the back of her sockets, her back arched on the floor and she began to hyperventilate" (Porter, 2018). Another article begins with the following: "Naked and terrified in the sweltering gloom of a Nigerian voodoo shrine, the young woman knelt as a chanting witch doctor slashed her with a razor-sharp blade" (Harvey, 2018). In a different article, Anna (the same Anna whose experiences formed the story behind *Doing Money*, the film analysed in Chapter 4) says: "I was beaten all the time – constantly – and controlled with everything from threats to hunger and to sleep deprivation. I was like a battery hen for these people. I was raped thousands of times" (quoted in Cotter, 2018). Yet another example is a survivor of trafficking who now runs a rehabilitation centre for trafficked women in India:

> Ms. Krishnan said brushes with violence were part of her 'regular existence'. Besides sporadic attacks on the shelters, Ms. Krishnan dodged someone who tried to throw acid on her and witnessed the murder of a staff member by a group of pimps. She said she had been assaulted 17 times. She is just 4 feet 6 inches tall, and her body bears reminders of trauma. She has a bad back and has lost most of her hearing in one ear. But these incidents have only hardened Ms. Krishnan's resolve. (Schultz, 2018)

Later in this article, Krishan states that women at the centre live under constant threat that "people will come with swords to cut us into multiple pieces and throw us into the Musi river" (Krishan quoted in Schultz, 2018). Similarly to the

deceased body trope, these are graphic and difficult experiences to read about and, indeed, accompanying this category are journalists' reflections on the difficulties of listening to women's testimonies, accounts of secondary trauma experienced by a jury who listened to the testimony of a trafficked woman, or those of therapists treating traumatised women. In another article, where trafficking survivor Anna discusses the film *Doing Money*, the journalist observes that "there was only one unbelievable element" of the film – "that it was based on a true story" (Mangan, 2018). Injury is thus constructed in a way that demonstrates that its externalisation has a powerful effect to move those who witness its repercussions. The proposals for feeling are thus illustrated not only through women's accounts, but also by exemplifying the correct proposals for feeling by recounting the reactions of the people who have heard the stories.

To be sure, by emphasising the severity of violence the trope of *injured trafficked women* sensationalises the violence perpetrated against them, positioning the women as ideal subjects of suffering, and they mobilise this bodily condition by speaking on their own behalf and on behalf of others. In this way, they declare resistance to their vulnerability. To demonstrate resistance to their conditions, trafficked women expose their injuries and needs by speaking about them. Such is the aforementioned Ms. Krishan who is reported to have only "hardened" in her resolve to provide services at her shelter and has been recognised for this work by the state of India by being "awarded one of India's highest civilian honors" (Schultz, 2018). Similarly, Anna reflects on her trafficking experience and the future of her activism, saying that: "What happened to me will never leave me, but I can get stronger" (Cotter, 2018). In exposing their injury and mobilising it in this way, trafficked women here claim agency for themselves as they take hold of their narrative. This statement of resilience and willingness to help others makes another proposal for solidarity and care. In this trope some of the women overcome their passive ideal-victim status and demonstrate resilience by emphasising their injury.

Thus, in this trope, injury receives the most emphasis and resilience receives some attention too. This resilient agency, while supporting the ideal victimhood, also somewhat diminishes their recognisability as sufferers in need. Moreover, it carries the potential for the suffering body to be understood as politically, culturally, and historically situated (Ticktin, 2011, p. 260). However, in this case, the nature of the

violence as sexual is obscured and the focus falls instead on the bodily injury incurred. The focus on bodily injury conveys the urgency of the appeal and brings trafficked women into the remit of compassion, but it does not highlight the specifically gendered aspect of the injury. Namely, it leaves trafficked women without perpetrators and it does not turn a critical eye towards the institutional and cultural conditions that have a hand in these women's vulnerability. Ultimately, in spite of the outward orientation of these women's suffering that exposes their injury and shows the resilience of some of them, this trope carries little political potential because it does not mobilise this vulnerability in a way that challenges injustice. As Butler has argued, calling attention to the instruments of power through bodily and agentive performance is an essential element of making encounters transformative because it "open[s] up the possibility of agency" (Butler, 1997, p. 15). In this encounter with the suffering body, this political potential is missed because it exposes injury without making a coherent demand for social and cultural change.

The next three tropes to be discussed (in sections 6.3.4, 6.3.5, and 6.3.6), describe forms of visibility of trafficked women in the press. While in the preceding sections I focus on how trafficked women's experiences are construed through embodiment and agency, in the next three sections I describe the possibilities of meaning of these experiences. Put differently, I focus on how trafficked women appear to publics. These six interrelated tropes represent different visibilities and construe trafficked women's bodies and agency in particular ways, and accordingly, some carry stronger proposals for solidary feelings while others frame trafficked women in more ambivalent ways. Depending on whether and how these tropes are combined in a particular media text, the proposals for feeling shift in relation to the discursive tensions that constellate within it, and so do opportunities for politicising trafficking. In section 6.4. I illustrate how these combinations of tropes result in different proposals for meaning. In the meantime, I now turn to the next three tropes.

6.3.4. Trafficked women as strangers

In this form of visibility trafficked women are constructed as *racialised* or *migrant others* seeking better lives abroad. They are often shown as naïve young women travelling to various European countries, knowingly or unknowingly, willingly or

unwillingly, as irregular migrants. These forms of representation are conveyed through stories of Nigerian women accepting the help of smugglers and traffickers and taking dangerous journeys to Europe across land and sea, frightened into obedience through voodoo rituals (Adaobi, 2018; Freeman, 2018; Harvey, 2018; Johnson, 2018); women tricked by traffickers into thinking they will be working in hospitality or domestic care (Pook & Graham, 2018); and women who are confined to camps or deported to their countries of origin, where poverty, debt and re-trafficking await (Nadeau, 2018; O'Toole, 2018). In this trope, trafficked women are dehumanised and objectified through biopolitical management of border control, and inserted into the bureaucratic machine of the humanitarian border, and hence into an ambivalent space within public imagination, marked by a simultaneous concern for border protection and for the care of vulnerable bodies. Within this trope, it is the identification of trafficked women as *migrants* and as *racialised others* that characterises their appearance.

On the one hand, women are here constructed as *migrants*, that is, as victimised others whose identities are marked by difference from their host societies, and who exhibit a threatening form of agency by seeking better lives in Europe. An instance of this trope is a story of trafficked women whose presence at a migrant reception centre in Italy is recorded for funding purposes, but whose disappearances from camps are ignored. Whether by being "lure[d]… out of the centre on the pretext of shopping trips or other excursions, and deliver[ed]…to the Nigerian women who control forced prostitution rings" or by being instructed to apply for asylum under fake names and wait to be picked up by organised crime gangs (as quoted and explained in the article by Nadeau, 2018), women are subjects of trickery and exploitation. They are simultaneously culpable for irregular migration and false asylum applications, and victimised by unidentified madams and traffickers (Meyers, 2004, p. 112), so the severity of their victimisation is diminished by their implication in smuggling.

The system, in turn, may deal with trafficked women by deportation, where they face further vulnerability (see the article by O'Toole, 2018), or by attempts to provide housing, counselling and trauma care (see Porter, 2018). The trauma of Yazidi women kidnapped and raped by ISIS fighters is reported as proving too much for Canadian government services to handle, as suggested in section *6.3.3 Injured*

trafficked women (Porter, 2018). Indeed, even the therapists tasked with their treatment are reported to have experienced secondary trauma (Porter, 2018). This failure of the systems meant to protect them foregrounds the difference of these gendered subjects. The women, meanwhile, narrate their own experiences of victimhood, and assert their agency by demanding services for themselves or by finding ways to exist outside the host system. In either case, they exist on the margins of host societies, marked by their incompatibility and difference. We can observe this difference in the way trafficked women's experiences are discussed as incompatible with the provisions the host society is prepared or equipped to offer. Whether because of corruption, cultural differences, or legal processes, women here fall into the category of migrant, so the characteristics of their individual identities become mixed with those associated with press coverage of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Thus, at the same time as the severity of their victimisation invokes a sensibility of care and responsibility, their agency invokes fears, anxieties and panic about their arrival. Whether in response to their cultural difference or to their trauma, then, trafficked women here become subjects of ambivalent public care.

On the other hand, in this trope, trafficked women are constructed as *racialised others*. This occurs through the *exoticisation* and *sexualisation* of the bodies and actions of women of colour. These representations originate in colonial constructions of black populations as inherently primitive, uncivilised and inferior to white colonisers (Collins, 2006). The display and sexualisation of black female bodies, as Collins (2006, pp. 128–129) argues, "had a long history in Western societies, from the display of enslaved African women on the auction block under chattel slavery to representations of Black female bodies in contemporary film and music videos". We can observe the *sexualisation* of black female bodies in the multiple references to "sex slavery", and in one article's story of a woman who was trafficked because she "ran away from her crowded home" to "escape her father's incestuous advances" (O'Toole, 2018). More than that, the sexualisation of black women is ever-present in images. Accompanying one article is a night-time scene of four Nigerian women on a street corner, their faces neutral, their bodies shown full length, and wearing pink makeup, revealing tops and mini shorts, soliciting customers (see Nadeau, 2018). Evoking the hyper-sexualisation of black women's bodies in both colonial imagination and popular media, these portrayals emphasise

these women's sexuality even as they speak about their vulnerability to exploitation and forced sex work.

Similarly, we can observe the *exoticisation* of black women's bodies in articles that detail women being subjected to juju rituals, with one article telling a story of a woman who was "bathed in goat's blood, and […] warned that if she ever spoke of the ritual, a thunderbolt would strike her dead" (see article by Freeman, 2018). In this article the journalist also describes a juju king's word as a "witchcraft equivalent of a papal decree" and notes that former UK Prime Minister Theresa May has "made fighting trans-national sex slavery her personal crusade" (see Freeman, 2018). Thus, not only is the black female body marked by voodoo and racial difference, but the white Western politician is positioned as her saviour. In Chapter 4, I describe how the character of Mali, in the film *Trafficked*, similarly evokes ambivalent feelings of care because of her complicity with sex work and her racialised difference. Similarly, in these news stories black women are particularly sexualised and exoticised. "As part of a generalized ideology of domination", Collins asserts, "stereotypical images of Black womanhood take on special meaning" and such images serve to naturalise and maintain intersecting oppressions such as "racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice" (Collins, 2000, p. 69). Black women's difference from other victims of trafficking thus "becomes the point from which other groups define their normality" (Collins, 2000, p. 70), as in the discourse of the white saviour evoked by the former UK Prime Minister's "personal crusade" to rescue trafficked women (Krsmanovic, 2016). In stories about Nigerian women engaging in juju rituals, paying to be smuggled to Europe, or leaving the containment of migrant reception centres, these racialised subjects are constructed in opposition to other trafficked women. Their difference serves to create hierarchical structures of victimhood which intersect with gender and class oppression, framing black female subjects as both more culpable and more naïve than other trafficked women, and accordingly as less deserving of public pity. These subjects, described in terms of difference and racialisation, are constructed as deserving of care and emotion, but they are not redeemed as good victims through the discourses of vulnerability and empowerment which tend to accompany depictions of ideal victims, and which I discuss in section *6.3.6 Trafficked women as survivors*.

Thus, more than in other categories, trafficked women, as depicted in press reports, are characterised as *migrants* and *racialised others* and relatedly – in the context of the media representation of the European migration "crisis" – their presence is associated with humanitarian and securitisation concerns. Although press coverage of the migration "crisis" which began in 2015 has been accompanied by an outpouring of humanitarian discourses, it has equally garnered border and securitisation discourses associated with threats posed by refugees, migrants and asylum seekers arriving on Europe's borders (Abid, Manan, & Rahman, 2017; Bozdag & Smets, 2017; Brouwer, van der Woude, & van der Leun, 2017; Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2017; Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2019; d'Haenens, Joris, & Heinderyckx, 2019; Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2017; Georgiou, 2019; Malafouri, 2015). Merging this desire to help suffering others with fears about the "influx" of migrants gave rise to the idea of the humanitarian border, or of a simultaneous concern for migrants' well-being and anxieties over border protection (Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2019; Squire, 2015; Vaughan-Williams, 2015). As I suggest in relation to controlled trafficked women, such concerns permeate the press coverage of trafficked women too. This form of humanitarian political engagement with migrants in border zones, according to Squire, "implies an engagement of 'the human' as a political stake, and emphasises the ambiguities that emerge from the tensions between inequality and solidarity" (2015, p. 98). Thus, even as such mediated stories of migration have the potential to permeate the public imagination, representations such as the ones analysed here echo anxieties surrounding sex trafficking that give rise to racialisation and othering of migrants through emphasising their difference from European populations.[14] Trafficking and migration scholars have long criticised the conflation of trafficking with smuggling and irregular migration, and the discursive trope of the *trafficked women as strangers* illustrates how difference comes to dominate representations and how this helps to explain the ways in which trafficked women emerge as strange, agentive others and thus as less deserving of

[14] As of 2018, the migration of refugees and asylum seekers into Europe was still an ever-present topic in the press. For instance, *The Guardian* ran over 5,000 stories on migration in 2018. Although numbers have decreased since the 2015 and 2016 highs, Human Rights Watch reports that in 2018, by mid-November, 107,900 arrivals by sea and land were recorded in Europe (Human Rights Watch, 2018), while UNHCR recorded 2,277 deaths, and a total of 141,472 land and sea arrivals to Spain and Greece combined with sea arrivals to Italy, Cyprus, and Malta (UNHCR, 2019).

public pity and empathy (for critical accounts of racialised difference and the strange other see Ahmed, 1998, 2000).

6.3.5. Trafficked women as victims

In this form of visibility, trafficked women are constructed as ideal sufferers whose condition prompts the activity of various actors, including journalists, politicians, filmmakers, formerly trafficked women, and social workers. These actors speak about the experiences of trafficked women, focusing on the *severity of trauma* that they endure, and disclose their reactions to hearing women's stories, thus demonstrating to audiences the correct feeling state that should ensue upon this engagement. In constructing trafficked women as subjects, these actors rely on discourses of ideal victimhood, focusing particularly on women's suffering and vulnerability. This ideal victim image, mobilised by various actors to convey the imperative to public and institutional action, situates these women high on the victim hierarchy.

One example from this category is a story in which a UK Member of Parliament explains how a trafficked woman approached her to ask for help. "She came across as very credible and genuine" (Driscoll, 2018), the MP is quoted as saying, and then continues with a description of her own determination to help: "Her story was so shocking… She said, 'is there anything you can do to break the silence?' Yes, a lot. I can do a lot". This trafficked woman's story, it seems, touched the MP on an emotional level and she was thereby granted a chance to voice her concerns. Her trafficking experience thus became a catalyst for action, but the article itself focuses on the MP's experience and priorities, stressing her interest in addressing the "awful cases of gangs of Asian men preying on vulnerable young white girls" (Driscoll, 2018). The special focus here on the race and gender of the perpetrators as "Asian men" and of the trafficking victims as "young white girls", leads to discourses of "white slavery", that is the phenomenon of virginal white women being duped and exploited by traffickers, which is a racialised discourse harshly criticised by trafficking and migration scholars (see, for instance, Breuil, Siegel, van Reenen, Beijer, & Roos, 2011; Desyllas, 2007; Doezema, 1999; Kempadoo, 2015; Segrave et al., 2018). This account illustrates how a speaker and

actor – in this case a politician – constructs the imperative to act on others' suffering through her own emotional experience and reaction. In another article, a police officer's description of a trafficking victim is paraphrased: "Officers said traffickers were making potentially millions of pounds from sexually exploiting victims who were left 'traumatised' by the experience" (in Cameron, 2018). Elsewhere, an Assistant Chief Constable of police describes the experience of a trafficked woman: "One woman who was trafficked to Scotland and rescued during a police operation in Glasgow, was forced into prostitution and worked seven days a week for at least eight hours a day. Her exploiters charged £120 an hour" (quoted in Cameron, 2018).

Yet another article, written by two "survivor[s] of the sex trade" who are also members of anti-trafficking NGOs, describes their experience of working with trafficked women: "In the past two months, Nikki has seen other women who have been sexually assaulted with crowbars, had their eye-sockets broken and been beaten unconscious. This year alone she has lost seven young women to this life" (in Bell & Hatcher, 2018). In a similar article written by another pair of trafficking survivors who are now anti-trafficking activists, they describe how "For many, the path into pimp-controlled prostitution had started with a need for love and a relationship, which had been twisted through domestic violence, drug use and basic survival into something very different" (Kelly & McNamara, 2018). The focus here is on women's vulnerability, which is associated with abuse and control ("need for love"; "twisted through domestic violence"). This article also includes a short description drawn from an interview with a trafficked woman who "described how in 2014 she was recruited and trafficked out of a state prison by a convicted sex offender" and how she "left one prison for another" and "spent months locked inside [the pimp's] house with a group of other women […] who were being controlled with drugs and violence and forced to prostitute themselves to make him money" (quoted in Kelly & McNamara, 2018). These accounts of trafficked women's individual experiences bring them into visibility through a focus on the traumatic experience of trafficking itself and the severity of abuse (they "were left 'traumatised'", "assaulted with crowbars", "spent months locked inside", "forced to prostitute themselves"). Although their vulnerability is emphasised through references to the individual experiences of particular trafficked women, the focus is on the severity of trauma and the generalisation of suffering, as opposed to the wider socio-political conditions

and identity categories that these women embody. Through this focus on trafficked women's victimhood and vulnerability and the utilisation of ideal victim discourses, trafficked women emerge as ideal suffering subjects deserving of empathy.

Additionally, there is a focus on the speaker/actors' reactions and feelings upon hearing stories about sex trafficking. One pair of activist-journalists reflect directly on their experience of interviewing trafficked women:

> As journalists we are supposed to be impartial, using our skills and our platform to report on what is happening to others. Yet trying to process and comprehend the trauma of those whose lives we were dipping in and out of took a toll on all of us. (Kelly & McNamara, 2018)

By disclosing their own reactions and feelings that resulted from interactions with trafficked women, these writers demonstrate to audiences the correct emotional reactions to hearing these stories: "Her story was so *shocking*"; "she has *lost* seven young women"; "*took a toll* on all of us" (my emphasis). These actors thus demonstrate – through their own example – the imperative to act on the suffering of trafficked women by demonstrating women's vulnerability (through descriptions of the severity of trauma) and then speaking and acting on their behalf and thus showing audiences the morally correct reaction to witnessing the suffering of others. This form of visibility is different from the embodiment of *injured trafficked women*, where trafficked women expose their own injury in public and thus mobilise their own vulnerability to make demands upon the public. The role of media texts as vehicles for moral education and the agency of media texts in making proposals for engagement with the suffering of others has been thoroughly explored by media scholars (see, for example, Chouliaraki, 2008; Cottle, 2009; Silverstone, 2007; Zelizer, 2010). A key characteristic of this form of visibility – through the focus on the severity of trauma and the narrators' own reactions to trafficked women's suffering – is that ideal victimhood mobilises an "ethics of care" that helps readers and viewers to recognise and understand the plight of distant others (Cottle, 2009). In this case, proposals for responsibility for the condition of the other do not result from the appeals of trafficked women themselves, but from the representations of benevolent actors who perform a moral education for audiences in how to feel and act in relation to trafficked women's suffering.

6.3.6. Trafficked women as survivors

This final discursive trope consists of stories of survival through which trafficked women emerge as empowered subjects. Press reports in this category describe survival as a positive trait of ideal victimhood and this is characterised by a distinct framing of the trafficked woman based on the content of her demand and the focus on their self-responsible recovery (Orgad, 2009). The empowered survivor is celebrated in these media texts as a success story of bravery and resilience, and is therefore recognised as a positive example of overcoming vulnerability. However, the agency of the survivor to enact change is limited to the survivor's own recovery and does little to demand change to the social, cultural, and historical factors that contribute to trafficked women's vulnerability.

The empowered survivor represents what the media generally frame as the ideal victim; these are trafficking survivors who "bravely broke free" from traffickers and were "housed in shelters and rehabilitated" (see Rose, 2018), who helped police with prosecutions (see Cotter, 2018; Mangan, 2018), acted as consultants on film sets, and actively fight for the rights of other survivors (see Schultz, 2018) and against the "stigma of victimisation" (see Tomlinson, 2018). These women are framed as empowered survivors who are responsible for their own recovery and who further use their experiences to advocate for the rights and needs of other vulnerable women. This activist work is supported by various institutions (in the examples above, these include NGOs and the police) which illustrates the recognition and legitimation not only of their status as survivors, but also of others' recognition of it. Examples of reports in this category include one featuring an Indian woman, Sunitha Krishan, who was herself victimised by traffickers (her exposure to injury was analysed in section *6.3.3 Injured trafficked women* as exemplifying a resilient voice) and who now runs a large shelter for trafficked women in India. As the article states, she had been assaulted 17 times because of the work she does (Schultz, 2018). In an interview summarised in the article, Krishan asks to be referred to as a survivor because her "healing was self-determined". She was "awarded one of India's highest civilian honours, brushed aside a fatwa issued against her and […] travelled extensively despite threats to her safety", all of which highlights her active role in her own recovery and professional trajectory, as well as her status as an entrepreneurial, active, brave, and selfless survivor. Further, the

article highlights the state's recognition of her work (as a recipient of "India's highest honour") and the embeddedness of that work in an organisation (the NGO which she runs). The trafficked woman is thus here constructed as an empowered, resilient and generous survivor motivated to help others.

A similarly selfless form of survival is presented in another article which relays the experiences of another woman mentioned previously, Anna, a Romanian immigrant in the UK who was kidnapped and trafficked inside the country, and whose experience was the basis of the film *Doing Money*, analysed in Chapter 4. She is reported to have given testimony that helped to bring about the passage of the Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery Act 2015 in Northern Ireland, has written a book about sex trafficking, and works to "bring courage to anyone who needs it" (quoted in Cotter, 2018). In this representation, the brave and selfless woman acknowledges the profound trauma brought on by trafficking and uses it to offer help and understanding. She is quoted as saying: "What has happened to me will never leave me, but I can get stronger" and later adding "I will never be the person I was but I think after all of this I can become a person who does some good in the world" (Cotter, 2018). In a similar line of reasoning to that of the *injured trafficked women* trope, these articles focus on the violence and trauma that forever change their protagonists' lives and that ultimately lead to positive outcomes.

What distinguishes the survivor trope, is the performative aspect of survival that focuses on resilient individualism. Specifically with regard to migrants, Georgiou (2019) argues that optimism and a performance of resilience are important features of survivorship. While refugees' integration into host societies is often seen as positive, according to Georgiou (2019), it is a conditional form of recognition whereby migrants need to prove their worthiness by performing "refugeeness" in a manner compatible with the values of resilient survivorship, thus demonstrating their agentive empowerment. This active and yet non-threatening form of existence within society is what characterises survivor discourse (Jacobsen & Stenvoll, 2010, p. 283). In the articles in this trope, trafficking survivors' agency is framed within a positive orientation towards public good (writing books, helping on film sets, running women's shelters), thus they are not only self-responsible but they also take responsibility towards other trafficked women. However, as Orgad (2009, pp. 143–145) points out, non-threatening agency does not necessarily engender social

transformation. The individual actions of survivors in facilitating their recovery and their actions towards helping other trafficked women – even if they propose empathetic emotions – do not necessarily result in politicising the gendered aspect of women's vulnerability and trafficking exploitation. In particular, this form of survivorship focuses only on those women whose experiences and subjectivities fit into the ideal victim discourse. The survivors who are invisible are those (migrant) women whose survivorship depends on an unacceptable form of agency, that is, one which accepts sex work as a work option and exists within this remit.

Regardless of their post-traumatic needs and past victimisation, survivors are seen as thriving examples of the possibilities that await those who can overcome trauma. These narratives thus represent positive examples that acknowledge those whose injury does not stand in the way of their resilient recovery and engagement with the community of other survivors. But these public articulations of survival which serve to prevent denial by making visible what is otherwise hidden from public view (Orgad, 2009, pp. 142–150), do not necessarily engender change. The interplay of bodily performance and agency, as it relates to ideal victimhood and the possibilities of politicising vulnerability, are the key tensions that play out at the level of media texts. The ways in which trafficked women appear as subjects of public care thus hinge on the discursive ability of media texts not only to make positive proposals for feeling, but also in their ability to enact the political function of pity through a mobilisation of discourses related to women's vulnerability as social subjects.

6.4. Proposals for emotion and pity: Trafficked women's experiences and appearance as ways of expanding the hierarchy of victimhood

The categories of representation that emerge from an analysis of trafficked women in press journalism indicate an open-endedness of media constructions of trafficked women as subjects, which, in turn, expands the hierarchy of victimhood. This hierarchy is most clearly present in the genre of film (as I suggest in Chapter 4) and is destabilised by celebrity advocacy (as I suggest in Chapter 5). The first set of categories in the genre of press journalism reflects how trafficked women appear as subjects, through the categories of embodiment and agency, and how their experiences of sex trafficking bring them into public view (the focus here, I suggest,

is on death, control and injury). The second set of categories reflects how these women appear to audiences (they appear, I suggest, as strangers, victims, and survivors). These six categories co-exist within media texts to different degrees and in different combinations, and they create tensions within the texts themselves. The interrelationship between these tensions, in turn, has an impact on how trafficked women emerge as subjects.

While some women emerge as ideal victims, such as the subjects in the tropes of injury, individual control, and survivorship, others emerge as ambivalent subjects, such as the women whose experiences are characterised through discourses of death, institutional control, and strangeness. Without going into detail about how these discourses interact (since I address this aspect in Chapter 7), it is important to note that the ways in which trafficked women's experiences are construed, and how they appear to audiences, are part of a key process that produces trafficked women as subjects of pity. What is more, the interrelatedness of these discourses expands the hierarchy of victimhood, precisely through the multitude of interrelated stories, voices, and forms of embodiment and agency. In a way that does not occur in film or in celebrity advocacy, the perspectives from which trafficked women's stories are heard are diverse: they speak on their own behalf, but they are also spoken for and about by multiple actors with diverse ideological positions and priorities. Additionally, the tropes that are present in this typology in many cases show how trafficked women are subjects of ambivalent public care. They are usually neither represented as ideal nor bad victims, but are instead here represented on a continuum between good and bad victimhood. What determines their proximity to good victimhood, however, is the degree to which they can be associated either with vulnerability, resilience, and empowerment, while proximity to undeserving victimhood is associated with racialisation and difference.

On the one hand, those trafficked women whose experiences are characterised either by vulnerability, which explains their predicament and "excuses" those agentive moves that could render them less deserving of public care, or by empowerment, which makes them resilient actors who work to help others, brings them closer to ideal victimhood and therefore makes them recognisable as deserving of public care. Women belonging to categories of injury, victimhood, or survival emerge as high on the victimhood hierarchy. Their willing exposure of their own

vulnerability, as feminist scholars argue, carries the possibility of a developing collectivity and of bringing people from the margins to the centre, so it brings trafficked women into the realm of public care (Athanasiou, 2016; Butler, 2016). This focus on injury, coupled with the presence in media texts featuring other actors who exemplify caring feelings towards trafficked women, further gives these constructions the legitimacy of belonging to the ideal victim category. Agency, meanwhile, takes on a positive form whereby trafficked women speak on their own behalf in ways that are in line with the institutional mechanisms in place to help them and, through speaking, expresses their resilience and selfless eagerness to help others. In a way, by expressing a moral imperative to help others, trafficked women not only demonstrate the suffering that acts as a moral imperative, but also instruct audiences on the correct way of feeling towards trafficked women.

On the other hand, those women whose racialisation implies independence and sexual agency, who exist outside the main ideological frames, or whose difference is associated with discourses of securitisation and border protection, are marked by their strangeness and therefore sink lower in the victim hierarchy. These forms of embodiment and agency further push trafficked women away from tender-hearted care because they position viewers as helpless. This is done through a reliance on securitisation discourses which propose feelings of insecurity due to the presence of migrants across state borders, or helplessness in the face of trafficked women's overwhelming trauma. In reports that fall within these categories, women are described through discourses of death, control, and strangeness, and they emerge lower in the victimhood hierarchy. With death as the condition of their appearance in public, trafficked women here have no ability to assert their own voices and other actors thus speak on their behalf. Death, however, is in itself meaningful and the violent trafficking circumstances that surround it mitigate some of the agentive moves (such as migration) that could have made trafficked women a threatening presence. The dehumanisation and objectification of their bodies perpetrated by institutional and individual actors, and framed as results of their own agentive attempts to leave oppressive circumstances and find better lives, similarly bring trafficked women into an ambivalent victimhood, but certainly do not construe them as undeserving victims. Their vulnerability is always clearly visible and their actions always contextualised through their vulnerability. Finally, the form of visibility

where trafficked women appear as lowest in the hierarchy of victimhood is when they are associated with the presence of migrants. The securitisation and border protection discourses that their presence then evokes, coupled with racialised visualities of trafficked women, threatens their positioning as subjects deserving of public emotion. However, even in this category, women's plight is perceptible through their naivety and through rescue discourses, and thus they remain within the remit of public care. So, in spite of some women's positioning as less deserving subjects of care than others, they are nonetheless subjects of some degree of empathetic care. Even those trafficked women whose status as strangers is construed through their association with migrants and racialised others are nonetheless positioned as vulnerable and as victimised at some point in their trafficking experience. More important than this, however, is the presence of a variety of institutional actors who frame trafficked women's experience and instruct audiences on the appropriate reactions to their suffering.

6.5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have analysed how trafficked women emerge as subjects in the genre of press journalism. The analytics of mediation served as a methodological backing and the analytical categories of embodiment and agency helped me to focus on how bodies and actions are discursively mobilised to facilitate trafficked women's emergence as subjects of public emotion. I propose that press journalism represents the most complex of the three genres considered here, because it represents the widest variety of trafficked women's experiences and subjectivities and thus expands the hierarchy of victimhood where ideal victims are at the top and other women positioned as less worthy of compassionate care.

The ways in which trafficked women emerge as subjects in this genre include two clusters of representation. The first three tropes described here reflect how trafficked women arrive in public view as embodied and agentive subjects. The first of these tropes is that of *deceased trafficked women*, where death is the condition of visibility for trafficked women. In this form of embodiment and agency, death is mobilised for the purpose of speakers/actors, while trafficked women become subaltern, that is, their death becomes the condition of their emergence into discourse. Here, trafficked women cannot speak and their actions construe them as

ambivalent subjects: while their vulnerability and the violent coercion they have endured within their oppressive life circumstances is cause for pity, their agentive actions, such as migration and engaging in sex work, move them away from ideal victimhood. The next trope, that of *controlled trafficked women*, is divided into two forms of embodiment and agency, one of which is similar to those in the deceased women trope. The depiction of *institutional control* describes the dehumanisation and objectification of trafficked women and their placement into the bureaucratic machinery of the migrant reception camp, while that of *individual control* describes the condition of being groomed and exploited by traffickers and other actors. While *controlled trafficked women* are constructed as worthy of public care due to their victimisation, their agentive moves of leaving oppressive circumstances allow their vulnerability to co-exist with agency thus mitigating the possibility of care. *Injured trafficked women* represent the form of embodiment and agency that comes closest to ideal victimhood because women here expose their injury in public, and thus ask to be recognised as subjects of collective action.

The next three tropes describe how trafficked women appear in public. *Trafficked women as strangers* represents a form of visuality where the women are described as migrants and as racialised others, and so their embodiment and agency is mobilised to emphasise their difference from the normalised and idealised victim of trafficking. This form of visibility is thus lowest in the hierarchy of victimhood, but nonetheless does not entirely preclude trafficked women from deserving a modest degree of public care. The *trafficked women as victims* is constructed through an emphasis on the severity of trauma they have endured, and their plight is explicitly addressed by other parties who identify the correct emotion for publics to feel towards trafficked women. This is a tender-hearted form of visuality that construes trafficked women as ideal victims of suffering, but in this trope it is mostly other actors who speak for and about trafficked women. It is in the final trope of *trafficked women as survivors* that trafficked women speak for themselves and demonstrate their empowerment and resilience in the face of trauma.

Finally, I suggest that this genre represents an expansion of the victim hierarchy in a way that is more complex than what we see in film or in celebrity advocacy. This complexity stems from the nature of the genre, which includes a multiplicity of voices, perspectives, and institutions and so precludes an easy

placement of trafficked women in a victim hierarchy. Moreover, although most forms of embodiment and agency and some forms of visuality contain internal tensions between ideal victimhood and ambivalence towards trafficked women as subjects, in this genre the role of ambivalence as a versatile orientation becomes most evident. The complexity of the tensions makes it more difficult to place trafficked women in a hierarchy of victimhood, especially because of the presence of other actors whose priorities and ideologies are placed either in support of or in conflict with the experiences and identities of trafficked women. In the next chapter, which concludes the thesis, I summarise my key findings and offer concluding thoughts and some areas of possible further inquiry.

7. Chapter Seven: Findings and Conclusion

7.1. Introduction

The goal of this thesis was to explore the discursive constructions of trafficked women across three media genres. Specifically, I explore media representations of trafficked women as gendered subjects of sex trafficking by analysing depictions of their embodiment and agency, and how these depictions emotionally engage the public with trafficked women. My interest in this issue was sparked by the multitude of studies of sex trafficking which critique the binary of victimhood and agency in depictions of trafficked women as unhelpful in understanding how the media constructs these women's subjectivities. The numerous studies of media representations of trafficked women have analysed disparate media representations and genres, but have not previously traced discourses across media genres. More importantly, research is lacking when it comes to understanding how publics are invited by media representations to feel in relation to trafficked women, despite such depictions being the primary ways of shaping public calls for anti-trafficking action and creating ideas about who trafficked women are as vulnerable subjects.

A review of literature on the depictions of trafficked women in a variety of media genres laid bare some of the main assumptions about these women as gendered subjects, and the main points of contention. First, explorations of the topic by feminist, post-colonial and migration scholars often focus on the conflation of sex trafficking with forced and irregular migration, sex work, and the related problems with terminology such as modern slavery which evokes racialised discourses of slavery, especially with regard to exoticising women of colour. This literature has mostly focused on critiquing this conflation as harmful to policymaking (Papadouka et al., 2016; Segrave et al., 2018; Wijers, 2015) and gender equality (Andrijasevic, 2014; Krsmanovic, 2016). Scholars have also critiqued the ways in which border securitisation (Berman, 2010; Mai, 2014; O'Connell Davidson, 2016; Sharon Pickering, 2011) and discourses about the modern-day enslavement of innocent "girls" (de Villiers, 2016; Kempadoo, 2015; Wijers, 2015) are connected to anti-trafficking efforts. While this critical literature is crucial to pointing out the gendered, racialised and classed exclusions in the media, which act as an excellent conductor and circulator of dominant debates, it does not look comparatively at the genres within which these discourses take shape.

Second, migration and trafficking scholars have cautioned against the tendency of media representations to de-politicise anti-trafficking causes by relying on prevailing discourses of naïve innocence, girlish youth, and ideal victimhood. By infantilising women (Kelly, 2014), essentialising their experiences (Cojocaru, 2015; Desyllas, 2007; Mai, 2013; Szorenyi & Eate, 2014), and relying on images of sexualised, objectified, and passive women (Andrijasevic, 2007; Arthurs, 2012) to illustrate the exploitation inherent in trafficking, these media depictions constrain the field of discourse and reduce the breadth of narratives and subjectivities available to the public imaginary of trafficked women. Most notably, they marginalise the voices of trafficked women who do not fit into this narrow victim category. This literature is critical not only of discourses that construe trafficked women as inherently vulnerable subjects who fit into traditional forms of passive femininity, but also of using gender stereotypes that point to unidentified evil traffickers as the sole perpetrators without acknowledging the systematic oppression and socio-economic factors that contribute to women's decisions to migrate or their vulnerability to exploitation.

Third, literature on trafficking that addresses crime and security narratives has focused on critiquing the overwhelming presence of actors such as policymakers, law enforcement officials, governmental and non-governmental organisation actors, and civil society actors. These voices, the argument goes, not only shift attention from trafficked women's voices and narratives (or mobilise them in ways that favours largely abolitionist narratives) but steer the debate in the direction of policy discussions and law enforcement and rescue tactics, thus treating the symptoms of an inadequate system, as opposed to addressing the root causes of trafficking (Agustín, 2007; Andrijasevic, 2003; Hua & Nigorizawa, 2010; Mai, 2018; O'Brien, Carpenter, et al., 2013; Sharma, 2005). These important studies exploring the mobilisation of the ideal victim discourses point to the social, cultural, and historical issues that are elided in depictions of trafficking, and the moralising and border-security discourses circulated, but their main concern is not what proposals for responsibility these images of trafficked women construct in public discourse.

Finally, trafficking literature also points to the harmful binary inherent in the discourses of good and bad victimhood that dominate media depictions of trafficked women, constructing good victims as a narrow category of innocent, naïve, duped

young women and marginalising other subject identities and experiences (Jacobsen & Skilbrei, 2010; Vance, 2012). These discourses, along with the laws and policies that reinforce, rely on and perpetuate them, have been harshly and consistently criticised as harmful because of their tendency to construct and circulate narratives of ideal victimhood at the expense of marginalising and morally judging those women whose experiences fall outside this narrow definition (Kempadoo, 2015; Weitzer, 2007; Wilson & O'Brien, 2016). The process by which trafficked women are constructed and placed in a hierarchy of victimhood through inclusion and exclusion has previously been explored through textual, ethnographic and other methods (Baker, 2014; Bickford, 2018; de Villiers, 2016; Leser & Pates, 2019; Snajdr, 2013), but I explore how this hierarchy is established in media texts by analysing how representations are arranged in multiple genres.

So, in a media environment where humanitarian and human-rights causes compete for attention and funding, prevailing trafficking discourses operate in the service of constructing women as deserving subjects of public pity and action. But, in seeking to illustrate their vulnerability and exploitation, they rely on racialised, gendered, infantilising and essentialising discourses that de-politicise trafficking narratives and cause harm to those women whose stories of migration, sex work and exploitation do not match the dominant narrative. Many migration and trafficking scholars have argued this point (Andrijasevic, 2007; Arthurs, 2012; Breuil et al., 2011; Mai, 2014), and some have suggested solutions such as collaborations with trafficked people as a way forward (Mai, 2018; Plambech, 2016), but less attention has been paid to how exactly these discursive tensions are differently resolved in media genres.

Rather, therefore, than focusing on critiques of the discursive tensions inherent in media representations and on the harm that the dominant depictions cause by what they include and exclude, my goal was to approach these depictions from the perspective of media discourse as a meaning-making practice that orientates audiences' emotions and provides a moral education. My overarching interest has therefore been in the politics of representation. More specifically, instead of focusing on other actors, my questions pertained specifically to trafficked women as subjects of intersecting oppressions, probing the tensions within media representations that aim to construct them as subjects who deserve public pity and action. I was

interested in recognising, naming, and sorting the tropes that contribute to the discursive emergence of trafficked women in the media, and in mapping their interactions, negotiations, and contradictions within media texts. I do not claim to have constructed an exhaustive collection of tropes, nor to have analysed all possible media depictions of these subjects, but I do offer here a way of analysing the meaning-making process by looking at regularly occurring visual and linguistic patterns in media genres.

In order to analyse this meaning-making process, I look at how trafficked women are *embodied* in media discourse and at what forms of *agency* they are ascribed in media texts. These analytical categories are informed by critical media theory where the body is seen as a site upon which meanings about subjectivities are inscribed, and agency is a key category in understanding who acts upon whom in media texts. This supposes that there is a connection between how the vulnerability of trafficked women is depicted in media texts and what proposals for feeling are offered to publics. In short, I wanted to understand how trafficked women are constituted as subjects in media texts and what proposals for feeling are made on their behalf. This led to my choice of a *politics of pity* as a departure point. Politics of pity describes the notion that pity is a socially constructed principle for organising the social relations of the spectator and sufferer around particular feelings. Although suffering is a key element in the politics of pity and trafficked women are generally represented as vulnerable sufferers, I do not take a deterministic view of trafficked women as always depicted in the media as vulnerable; instead my analysis takes an open view of trafficked women's subjectivities in an attempt to understand what discursive tropes are used to construct them. In short, I accept that trafficked women are represented as subjects of the emotions of pity (for instance as sources of empathy or catalysts for anger) and therefore as causes of humanitarian and human rights action, and thus analyse their appearances in media texts to map these proposals for emotion.

I accept, therefore, that media texts offer different proposals for emotional and moral engagement with trafficked women. Without assuming a causal connection between viewing and acting, but accepting that media discourses are an important dimension in a broader cultural, historical and social environment, media depictions form the site of my analysis. I therefore assume that the media are a

symbolic resource with the power to circulate meanings and to constitute social reality, and are themselves shaped by social relations. In taking this approach, I have followed established views that media texts are vehicles through which discourses are carried to wide audiences and which contribute to shaping their perceptions of trafficked women.

The subjects of suffering who feature in my analysis are women, so I take an intersectional view of gender as a primary identity category, and of race and class as further categories that shape media discourses on trafficked women. Following Foucauldian-inspired feminist theory that centres around a post-structuralist view of women's subjectivity, I understand gender as a socially constructed identity category which carries a multiplicity of assumptions about social placement and status, vulnerability, and social inequality and oppression within global society. My data was produced and situated in a Western context and in the present historical moment, but the critique of gender as an identity category is levelled from a feminist perspective that takes into account the long-term production of gender in society with a history of patriarchal oppression.

The main research question I posed on the basis of this theoretical framework was: how are trafficked women constructed in mediated anti-trafficking discourse? Additionally I posed questions of *embodiment* and *agency*: embodiment as a practice of presenting actors to the world through the body, and agency as a "socio-culturally situated capacity for action" (Mai, 2018, p. xiv) that together create a spectrum of representations. My first supplementary research question therefore is: what forms of embodiment and of agency are employed and challenged? Together, these questions allowed me to analyse media texts for how they construct trafficked women through language and image. Meanwhile, the final supplementary questions probed issues of pity: what are the implications of these discourses for trafficked women as subjects of societal inequalities and oppressions? and how is pity articulated in media discourses? These questions allowed me to: map the different but related discursive tropes used to construct representations of trafficked women; chart the proposals for social relation made by different media genres for spectators' moral engagement with trafficked women; to show what forms of shared moral responsibility these constructions propose; and to examine how they build upon or break with dominant depictions of the subjects of sex trafficking.

To probe these questions, I chose three media genres to investigate. Films are fictional accounts of sex trafficking that often claim to be based on or inspired by real events, but that nonetheless represent a form of media imaginary and a popular form of both entertainment and education. Celebrity advocacy represents a crossover from entertainment to humanitarianism and human-rights advocacy, both in its sensibility and in its performativity. Newspaper journalism, meanwhile, is rooted firmly within a journalistic paradigm and thus represents a genre oriented to truth in news reporting. Together, they represent different institutional logics (entertainment, humanitarianism, and news), different voices, and a variety of assumptions about gender and pity that overlap and borrow linguistic and visual representations from one another, but all with claims to reality, thus allowing me to map how trafficked women emerge across these different depictions.

Mediated *discourse* thus became an important category in the study, and because of the theoretical traditions on which I draw, I took my cue from post-structural epistemology and theorists who see discourse as a social practice which simultaneously subjects people to forms of power and leaves space for agency and possibility for action (Chouliaraki, 2008a, p. 675; Gill, 2000; Rose, 2001). In making this choice, I stayed within the social scientific remit of discourses analysis and the critique of ideology, especially considering the focus on the post-structuralist view of trafficked women's subjectivities, Foucauldian-inflected feminist approach, and a theoretical reliance on media ethics.

As I embarked on an analysis of multiple media genres as semiotic texts, I needed a discourse-based multimodal methodology that could be applied not only to multiple media genres but to the analysis of text, image, and speech. The *analytics of mediation* proved to be the necessary eclectic approach. It allowed me to take media genres as bounded regimes of meaning, to look at disparate texts rather than whole approaches to the media, and to analyse semiotic texts as objects embedded in the power relations of viewing (Chouliaraki, 2006b). I was thus able to analyse two basic categories: embodiment, by looking at how the trafficked woman's body is constructed in language and image, and agency, by looking at how trafficked women are depicted as acting in media texts. Ultimately, relying on this kind of analysis, I was able to determine how various practices of language and image are construed as

a meaningful spectacle for audiences, with proposals for emotion towards trafficked women as subjects (Chouliaraki, 2006b).

I sought to demonstrate the discursive boundaries of what it means to be a trafficked woman and a subject of pity in media texts, and ultimately to point to the implications of these boundaries and the fractures that appear both in these constructions and in the related binaries and hierarchies that permeate media depictions of trafficked women. In deconstructing the process that takes place, I argue that we can say something about the relationship between the discursive tropes used to construct trafficked women and the wider social issues – such as gendered, classed, and racialised oppression and marginalisation – that these tropes circulate and perpetuate, creating hierarchies of victimhood. Taking this point further, the normative argument of this thesis is that, by introducing nuance into the meaning-making process, we can find out what discourses are used, combined, and challenged in order to construct trafficked women's voices and experiences, and what assumptions about self and other should be taken up or abandoned if there is a serious intention to hear the other on their own terms. This is a political question because, as scholarly literature indicates, questions of public morality, funding and women's rights are highly contentious and highly embedded in social and political assumptions about who qualifies as a beneficiary of public emotion and action.

7.2. Key findings

My analysis of media genres serves to demonstrate how these representations contribute to creating a system of meaning through which particular constructions of trafficked women emerge in media discourse as subjects. Specifically, the proximity of individual women to ideal victimhood is denoted through signifiers that locate trafficked women within patriarchal gender norms and notions of ideal victimhood, while signifiers that depart from these constructions are framed ambivalently. In this way, a hierarchy of victimhood emerges, whereby certain trafficked women are constructed as more, while others are depicted as less deserving of sympathetic public emotion. Whether this is a clear victim hierarchy, as seen in films, a destabilised hierarchy, as available in celebrity advocacy, or an expanded hierarchy, as present in press journalism, it is the distinct but interrelated arrangements of

embodiment and agency that contribute to the discursive construction of trafficked women in media discourse. Importantly, recognising and sorting these tropes makes it possible to identify the discourses defining the subjectivities that do and do not fit into notions of ideal victimhood or of survivorship, and thereby remain either within or outside the margins of acceptability into the remit of care. Those who remain outside tend to embody the experiences of many migrant sex workers who are driven to the margins not only of media representations but also of society and humanitarian practice. Films represent a largely unified voice and correspondingly establish the clearest hierarchy of victimhood. Celebrity advocacy depicts celebrities' shifting perceptions of trafficked women, whereby a broader scope of trafficked women becomes accepted into the proposal of care, thus destabilising the hierarchy but not going far enough to politicise trafficked women's experiences. Press journalism moves further and offers the widest range of voices, but still missing an opportunity to politicise trafficked women's vulnerability. These genre-specific differences (afforded in part by the nature of the genres themselves, as I suggest in the analysis) have implications for the ways in which trafficked women are politicised as subjects of pity.

7.2.1. Film: Establishing a hierarchy of victimhood via purity and resilience

The genre of film, which I discuss in Chapter 5 and which depicts heartrending and disturbing stories of sex trafficking of young women, represents the narratives most in line with the dichotomies and victim hierarchies present in the dominant trafficking discourses that, critics argue, appear across many media genres. In these victim hierarchies some subjects are construed as "ideal", using tropes of purity and courage, while concurrently establishing others as ambivalent subjects, through difference and othering. The key consequences of this kind of framing, I therefore argue, are twofold. On the one hand, trafficked women in films are mostly presented as ideal victims, who correspond to the generally established trafficking victim discourses, through an emphasis on their purity and courage. On the other hand, films marginalise other subjectivities and trafficking experiences by positioning some women as ambivalent subjects. They leave out coherent discussions about the conditions contributing to women's oppression or solutions to their situations, thereby de-politicising ambivalent victims and their experiences even if seemingly

appearing to recognise their plight. To explore this media genre I chose two films, *Trafficked* (2017) and *Doing Money* (2018), and used the analytics of mediation as a methodological approach, applying *embodiment* and *agency* as the main analytical categories and exemplifying the representational tropes through character descriptions and excerpts from particularly illustrative scenes.

The three main characters in *Trafficked* and *Doing Money* can be clustered into three pairs, which fall on a continuum between good and ambivalent victimhood and thereby form a victim hierarchy. The protagonists are thus framed as exceptional in their goodness: Ana (*Doing Money*) and Sara (*Trafficked*) are depicted as pure, courageous and resilient sufferers worthy of public pity; Daniela (*Doing Money*) and Amba (*Trafficked*) hover between good and ambivalent victimhood, and their ultimate rejection (Daniela) or acceptance (Amba) of traditional femininity makes the difference to whether or not they are redeemed as good victims. Lily (*Doing Money*) and Mali (*Trafficked*) meanwhile represent ambivalent victims who are excluded from the space of political agency and tender-hearted compassion through othering and difference.

The key findings of Chapter 5 are that the bodies and actions of the three protagonists of *Trafficked* and *Doing Money* are sites of a contestation between purity and lack of chastity that maps onto a binary of idealised and ambivalent victimhood within dominant media discourse on sex trafficking. The depictions of the trio of main characters in each of the two films have distinct similarities, each producing a victim hierarchy where purity, innocence, courage and resilience are coded as attributes of ideal victimhood, while audacity, independence and control of one's own sexuality are coded as attributes leading to ambivalence. Ultimately, belonging to the category of either of the two victim categories depends on a character's acceptance or rejection of traditional gender norms where the feminine belongs in the domestic realm and a woman's sexuality is marked not by bodily autonomy but by virtue and purity.

The purity of the women depicted is shown most clearly through Sara's religious faith and her naivety and innocence at the beginning of *Trafficked,* and in both Sara's and Ana's stubborn refusal to submit to sex work even in the face of drugging, beating and starvation. In *Trafficked*, purity is constructed through the

connotations carried by religious faith – suffering, virtue, hope, and redemption. Sara, whose suffering at the hands of her abusive father, traffickers and clients is given particular prominence, is constructed as particularly worthy of sympathy and pity. In *Doing Money* Ana's purity is shown through her tenacious defiance and her resultant suffering from being starved by Ancuta and repeatedly beaten and raped by traffickers and clients, after which we see her cleaning her body and her cuts and bruises. The innocence of both characters is emphasised through their lack of sexualisation or of any romantic interest in men, in contrast to Mali, Lily, and Daniela, who make their bodies sexually available either out of a need to provide remittances for their children (Mali, Lily) or as a result of emotional manipulation (Daniela).

The discursive constructions of purity and innocence are particularly salient in evoking public pity and tender-hearted compassion for Sara and Ana and they correspond to dominant trafficking narratives about the kidnapping and exploitative sex work of innocent, naïve young women and the need for their rescue (for critiques of these discourses see De Shalit et al., 2014; Desyllas, 2007; Smith, 2010). These narratives activate a form of representation, and specifically media portrayal, that is heavily criticised for failing to problematise issues of labour, migration or sex work in favour of simplistic victimhood narratives (Agustín, 2007; Aradau, 2004; Bernstein, 2012; Cojocaru, 2015; Doezema, 2001; Krsmanovic, 2016; Mai, 2013; Marcus & Snajdr, 2013; O'Connell Davidson, 2014; Sobel, 2014; Soderlund, 2005; van der Pijl, Oude Breuil, & Siegel, 2011; Weitzer, 2015; Wijers, 2015). While Ana and Sara are characterised by purity, Mali and Lily's sexual availability and Daniela's choice to stay at the brothel mark their difference. Mali's acceptance of sex work and her advice to Sara and Amba to endure the exploitation evoke racialised discourses of sexual deviance, and thus position her as impure and an ambivalent victim. Similarly, Lily's defensive attitude and her self-objectification positions her as impure and less worthy of empathetic care, and Daniela's gullible naivety, which leads her to choose sex work, like Mali's and Lily's, is presented as an unacceptable form of agency even in oppressive circumstances (for the notion of agency in oppressie conditions see Madhok, 2013a). Meanwhile, Amba, who initially rejects her father's well-meaning limitation of her freedom of movement (and thus imposition of traditional femininity), along with rejecting the advances of

an aggressive suitor, is depicted as inviting male violence by these emancipated choices. She subsequently feels shame and blames herself for this violence, and accepts traditional femininity, thus falling back in line with patriarchal gender arrangements and redeeming herself as a good victim. These dichotomies between purity and active sexuality, and between passive and active gender performances, work to position Anna, Sara and Amba as good victims. At the same time, the abruptness with which Mali's, Lily's and Daniela's stories end without closure exposes the inequalities and oppressions that results in vulnerability, but ultimately fails to politicise their plight.

Courage and resilience complement purity, and in Sara's case are once again embedded in religious faith. Faith is shown as helping her to mature through the film, to overcome her initial paralysing trauma, and to eventually gather the courage to escape and to rescue others. In contrast, Mali's belief in juju results in crippling fear of retribution, which represents a colonial form of visuality that racialises her and justifies social control over her. Within the narrative Mali's body and actions are controlled by juju, while outside the narrative her racialised body is construed as primitive and thus subject to being controlled for the sake of correcting her "wrong" form of morality. Mali only agrees to attempt an escape, let us remember, because of Sara's faith-inspired persuasiveness, so Christianity serves to bring not only Sara to the "right" path, but the non-Christian Mali as well. Like Sara, Anna experiences psychological collapse as a result of trauma, which leads her to become cold and listless as a way of coping, but she later regains her resolve to escape the brothel and helps police to investigate her traffickers, thus demonstrating resilience despite feeling traumatised and worthless and fearing retribution. This resilience is contrasted with Lily's painful self-objectification and her stoic acceptance of sex work, as well as with Daniela's hopeless naivety, construed as false consciousness, which leads her to accept sex work. The representations in films thus direct audiences' compassionate care towards Anna, Sara, and the redeemed Amba, while placing Mali, Lily and Daniela outside the remit of tender-hearted care and pity.

Sara's and Anna's acquiescence to sex work as a survival mechanism is shown as fully justified, especially since they are proactive in finding a way out and use their courage and intelligence to plot brave escapes that lead to police action and to the demise of the brothels. The heinousness of the treatment Anna and Sara suffer,

their resistance and its cost, their courage to escape and help others, all firmly establish these characters as worthy of tender-hearted compassion and pity. Discourses of purity, resilience, and the desire to exit sex work correspond to neo-abolitionist understandings of trafficking for sexual exploitation and to laws and policies that govern human trafficking in the US and the UK, which match these discourses (as discussed in Chapter 1). Namely, it is only innocent victims who are coerced into sex work and wish to be rescued who are deemed as deserving of public pity. Correspondingly, it is only those trafficked women who cooperate with police that receive their desired outcomes. The topics of individual action and resilience are thus given prominence while systematic intersectional oppression receives little attention or solution. This emphasis on individualism, choice and empowerment could be seen as elements of what Gill (2007b) has argued is a postfeminist sensibility in media culture – that as, a "distinctive contradictory-but-patterned sensibility" (Gill, 2016, p. 610) – or what feminist critics see as popular mediated feminist constructions of gender that locate vulnerability within femininity (Hemmings, 2018) and a focus on individual rather than collective action to resolve complex structural inequalities (Banet-Weiser, 2018). In any case, feminist scholars have levelled criticism against constructions of femininity that locate vulnerability in women's oppression without relating it to intersectionality or masculinity (Hemmings, 2018), because these offer individualistic solutions (self-organised escape from trafficking exploitation and seeking help from police) to systematic issues (gender oppressions, racial bias, inadequate laws, policies, and protections for migrants, sex workers, informal labourers), thus obscuring important elements of culture and society that have a hand in power relations.

I therefore argue that, in spite of construing Mali's, Lily's and Daniela's experiences and choices in terms of vulnerability, the films fail to politicise their experiences. Mali's sexual deviance, as constructed through racialised discourses; Lily's cynical dismissiveness and self-objectification (as "just a hole"); Daniela's naïve trust in her boyfriend and failure to accept rescue: all these frame the women as ambivalent victims who stay in the sex industry even when they are offered seemingly reasonable chances to escape. Meanwhile, the multitude of oppressive life circumstances they have faced and the negotiations of agency they have performed along the way, which render them unable to leave exploitative conditions, inspire

only limited recognition and compassionate care. Almost no space is afforded to exploring the complex socio-economic issues surrounding migrant sex work, and only one solution is apparent to what in the film is referred to as "sex trafficking" – the rescue of the women and the arrest and prosecution of the perpetrators. There is no reference, for instance, to the limited recourse that would be available after rescue to Mali as an irregular migrant (almost certainly involving deportation to Nigeria and a return to joblessness and poverty), to Daniela as a young woman in an abusive and toxic relationship with her boyfriend, or to Lily as an immigrant mother living in poverty. In other words, the discursive tropes employed to construct the narratives of Mali, Lily and Daniela prohibit a view of migration and sex work that is not in line with neo-abolitionist politics of representation. Mali and Lily are punished for their choice to accept sex work as labour and Daniela is abandoned because she is unwilling to help in a police investigation. Indeed, even if the women operate in exploitative conditions, their acceptance of this form of work is not explored and, in this way, sex work as labour (and, by extension, the decriminalisation of sex work) is not proposed as an option. This framing corresponds to feminist abolitionist arguments where all sex work is considered to be exploitative and a violation of women as a gender in favour of maintaining patriarchal social arrangements (see for instance arguments by Barry, 1995, p. 9; MacKinnon, 2011). Likewise, there is no discussion about the type of change to these women's work conditions after leaving the brothels: no explanation of why Mali turns to street sex work and no mention at all of what happens to Daniela and Lily after the traffickers are arrested. The films, therefore, stay within the remit of neo-abolitionist political arguments where Mali and Lily, as migrant sex workers, are construed as ambivalent trafficking victims. What is absent from these depictions is a recognition of their agency in oppressive conditions and any exploration of why they consider sex work to be their best livelihood option, how this relates to migration governance, and why they may not see deportation home as a positive result of rescue (for counter-narratives in film see Plambech, 2016, pp. 184–185). In other words, the complexity of these migrants' lives is evacuated from the films' constructions of trafficked women. This construction is detrimental to the politicisation of different experiences because it legitimates only one form of vulnerability, while the lack of social context in depictions of the other(ed) women's choices fails to acknowledge the validity and political value of their agency.

7.2.2. Celebrity advocacy: Destabilising the hierarchy of victimhood via vulnerability and personification

The genre of celebrity advocacy, which I discuss in Chapter 5, where I analyse the anti-trafficking advocacy of Emma Thompson and Jada Pinkett Smith, gives rise to narratives that destabilise the victim hierarchy. As a departure from the victim hierarchies established in film, where some subjects are construed as ideal victims and others as ambivalent subjects, this genre relies on the performativity of celebrity as an example of the kinds of proposals for emotion and action that can be made on behalf of trafficked women, so it represents a form of moral education for audiences. In providing this education, celebrities rely simultaneously on elements of their own inner morality and of their public personas or, in other words, on personification. The key consequence of how trafficking is framed in their advocacy, I argue, is that they destabilise the hierarchy of victimhood in ways not found in the fully bounded hierarchy represented in film. To explore this media genre I analysed a variety of audio-visual materials related to Thompson's and Pinkett Smith's advocacy: a television interview, a video blog, a music video, public profiles, newspaper and magazine interviews, an art exhibition, and a public service announcement. I analysed these media texts through the categories of *embodiment* and *agency*, and used examples from my data to illustrate the visual and linguistic tropes that characterise their advocacy.

The analysis of each celebrity's performance of anti-trafficking advocacy yielded evidence of their different ways of constructing trafficked women and the moral imperative to act on their suffering. Emma Thompson's advocacy is characterised by a *feminist disposition towards trafficked women*, a *generalisation of suffering*, a practice of *protecting trafficked women by reconfiguring sexualisation*, and a commitment to *utilising celebrity capital to address the public*. Using these forms of visibility, Thompson helps to construct ideals of victimhood which correspond to the generally established discourses about victims of trafficking, but she also questions the logic of this construct by using feminist arguments to challenge women's sexualisation in the media and attempt to re-signify women's sexual objectification in her advocacy projects. Part of Jada Pinkett Smith's celebrity brand, meanwhile, is a personification that is in line with postfeminist sensibility.

The tropes she relies on are a *womanist disposition in the performance of motherhood*, the *embodying of trafficked women through dominant trafficking discourses and the sexualisation of the celebrity body, combining empowerment and motherly care to reflect on social oppression*, and the *utilising of celebrity capital to reflect on social oppressions*. In this way, her advocacy destabilises the hierarchy of victimhood by relating it to race, hence constructing her advocacy – and trafficked women alongside it – in intersectional terms.

The key findings of this chapter point to a destabilisation of the dominant trafficking victim hierarchy through celebrity personifications of suffering. In this hierarchy trafficked women are represented in ways that map onto the hierarchy, but it is the opinions of the celebrities, as they learn and as they reflect on their own advocacy work, that leads them to contradict the dominant constructions that come through in their advocacy, thereby challenging the hierarchies within these constructs. Typifying Thompson's advocacy is a feminist persona, which impacts the way she reflects on her advocacy projects, and this informs how she embodies discourses of suffering and protection. Typifying Pinkett Smith's advocacy – even though she herself has noted that she does not identify as a feminist because the movement has historically paid significantly more attention to white women than to the issues faced by women of colour (echoed in black feminist studies) – is the sensibility of an empowered and empowering mother figure, which informs how she embodies sexualisation and motherhood, and how she performs a community-oriented parental responsibility towards women as a collective. The performances of Thompson and Pinkett Smith take small steps towards politicising trafficking for sexual exploitation and moving away from the dominant trafficking discourses, even if they destabilise their logic through their own personal reflections. The four forms of embodiment and agency that both Thompson and Pinkett Smith deploy can be clustered into four themes which create a narrative arc of anti-trafficking advocacy: asserting the specificity of the trafficking experiences of women as gendered subjects; using women's sexualisation and objectification to construct meanings about women's agency; generalising suffering (Thompson) and reflecting on social oppressions (Pinkett Smith); and utilising celebrity capital to show positive forms of *public morality, feminism* (Thompson) and *empowerment, womanhood and responsibility* (Pinkett Smith).

In order to show an orientation towards issues of women as gendered subjects, the two celebrities employ different discourses to construct representations of trafficked women, even though both actors' projects are aligned with questioning gendered social oppression. Thompson's advocacy is in line with Third Wave feminism in its commitment to showing the causes of trafficked women's vulnerability and pointing to elements of popular culture that impact women's social circumstances. Pinkett Smith's advocacy, she has stated, embraces a womanist perspective, or a view of women as both gendered and racialised subjects, and she embodies this ideal through a performance of caring motherhood and empowered womanhood with a special focus on the politics of race and activism. So, while the two celebrities represent differing political orientations, they both highlight women's social oppression as subjects of patriarchal societies. Both performances, however, are more in line with a postfeminist sensibility in making individuals rather than social institutions responsible for change.

In representations that embody trafficked women, Thompson emphasises the need to show the "brutality" of violence against women in the context of human trafficking, and attempts to re-signify the tropes traditionally associated with sexualised depictions of women in doing so, while Pinkett Smith focuses on dramatised images of trafficked women and on the sexualisation of her own body to demonstrate their powerlessness through her own empowerment. Thompson takes on the role of a witness who sees the effects of trafficking through her conversations and other forms of contact with trafficked women, using her body to perform the violence visited upon trafficked women. In her advocacy violence is also displaced onto an exhibition space populated by the installation's visitors and this is done in a way that suggests the act of bodily violence through the senses. Meanwhile, in Jada Pinkett Smith's activism, sex trafficking is shown as a social problem in a way that emphasises trafficked women's dehumanisation through visualities of sexualisation and bodily objectification. At the same time as her body draws attention to trafficking, it remains beautiful, unharmed, and physically and symbolically separated from harm, while the bodies of female actors in the roles of trafficked women are depicted suffering injury. This form of visuality evokes a postfeminist sexual display familiar in popular culture, that proposes confidence, power, and an assertive female sexuality.

Although trafficked women are constructed in the material of their advocacy projects as ideal victims, both celebrities also destabilise the hierarchy of victimhood when they speak about sex trafficking. Thompson repeatedly stresses the importance of engaging with issues that are "complicated", by speaking with people who have suffered sexual exploitation about their own experiences and vulnerabilities, thus acknowledging women's different life circumstances and subjective experiences. Similarly, Pinkett Smith reflects on the elements of sexualised culture in which women seek empowerment and financial success through means that render them vulnerable to exploitation (though she does not reflect on her own sexual display), and stresses the importance of expanding her own understanding of trafficking. In this way, both celebrities point to the inadequacy of dominant trafficking narratives to account for the full range of experiences and identities that exist within the remit of trafficking. Thompson's and Pinkett Smith's acknowledgement that trafficking for sexual exploitation is more complex than their initial understanding of the issue, and the idea that some women's circumstances cannot be fully addressed by neo-abolitionist interventions is what underlies the discourses that destabilise the victim hierarchy in these advocacy projects. Specifically, when Thompson speaks about sex work, she acknowledges that it is something that cannot be abolished and should therefore be addressed, though she stops short of proposing how this should be done, that is, suggesting some form of decriminalisation of sex work. Similarly, Pinkett Smith reflects on the limits of her knowledge about agency in sex work in the context of exotic dancers who reject the label of trafficked women and instead see sex work as a form of informal labour that exists alongside their official job and allows them to supplement their income. She likewise stops short of mentioning decriminalisation as a solution, but both of the celebrities recognise the limits of the abolitionist narrative which leaves some women on the margins of compassionate care.

In order to show positive forms of public morality, Thompson and Pinkett Smith rely on their celebrity capital, which operates across all other tropes in their advocacy. Using their high media visibility, accrued through regular media appearances (see elaboration in Driessens, 2013), to draw attention to anti-trafficking causes and thus galvanise care and support for trafficked women, Thompson's performances orientate viewers' dispositions around forms of public morality that

question women's sexualisation and objectification in media representations, while Pinkett Smith is focused on orientating audiences' sensibilities around the values of empowerment and parental care. Although the anti-trafficking materials in which they appear repeat a dominant narrative of sex trafficking, their personal reflections on public morality and parental care establish the limits of these dominant discourses. Thompson questions the morality of buying sex and encourages a public discussion about the phenomenon, exhibiting a feminist disposition towards inclusion and equality. Pinkett Smith equally stops short of judging women who sell sex and identifies the intersection of race, socioeconomic status and gender as a condition that constrains women's choices within a sexualised consumer culture. Like Thompson, she relies on (albeit a different performance of) a postfeminist sensibility to locate the solutions to these inequalities in individual people, namely protective parents who should transfer their own empowerment to their children.

Although the performances of the two celebrities negotiate the boundaries of ideal victimhood, neither performance fully mobilises the vulnerabilities that they identify, nor do they reflect on alternatives to the dominant abolitionist discourse within which they operate. By thinking in intersectional terms, as these celebrities do by referring to poverty, age and race as these constellate with gender, they arrive at the edges of dominant trafficking discourse. However, they fail to identify and denounce the broader institutional and social structures that contribute to the social insecurity and inequalities that they discuss as responsible for women's sexualised representations and vulnerabilities. Thus, their advocacy mobilises feelings of compassionate care, but it does not fully activate the political function of pity that would allow trafficked women to achieve political agency as subjects of suffering.

7.2.3. Press journalism: Expanding the hierarchy of victimhood through varied voices

The subject matter of Chapter 7 consists of an analysis of 25 articles from three broadsheet newspapers with high circulation in the US and four from the UK. I suggest that, of the three media genres analysed in this thesis, press journalism offers the highest variety of voices and the most wide-ranging view of structures and systematic oppression that trafficked women face as subjects of exploitation. I therefore propose that the main trait of this genre is that it expands the victim

hierarchy because it offers a multitude of views contributing to the representation of trafficked women across the genre. These tropes, I observe, intertwine more than those in the other genres, for reasons corresponding to the genre itself. The articles often rely on similar visual and linguistic tropes and represent a multitude of stories and voices that draw on and from each other and respond to the events in the historical moment at which they were written. Present in press journalism are the discourses of *death*, *objectification*, *injury*, *strangeness*, *victimisation* and *survivorship*, all of which construct some trafficked women as more and others as less worthy of public pity and thereby potentially bring them into the realm of compassionate care.

However, despite the various voices bringing trafficked women into view, the narratives and identities presented are mobilised for the purposes of those who speak: implementation of policies, news reporting, human rights appeals, and awareness-raising. More importantly, those who speak are located further from or closer to power structures and, depending on this distance, their voices possess more or less legitimacy. More precisely, the voices located closer to the centre of institutional power tend to rely on dominant trafficking discourses, while those located further away are framed as occupying marginal positions. As a result, symbolic and physical exclusions through *difference* and *othering* are accomplished by similar but more explicit moralising arguments to the ones present in films and in celebrity advocacy. Other forms of exclusion, through *racialisation* and *sexualisation*, are also represented here, and they variously depict trafficked women as, on the one hand, emblematic victims of violence and, on the other, ambivalent subjects. This multiplicity of voices supported by news as a genre contributes to expanding the victim hierarchy because, I suggest, the discourses co-exist and intertwine, and therefore work as a whole in ways that are distinctly evocative neither of ideal nor of "bad" victimhood, leaving a larger space for ambivalence.

Ultimately, it is the combination of these elements that determines whether trafficked women are constructed as deserving or undeserving subjects of public pity, or whether they remain in ambivalent positions. I suggest that women emerge as ideal victims in the *victim* trope, and as ambivalent subjects in all the remaining tropes of *death, control, strangeness, injury,* and *survival*. This is because the main descriptive categories – racialisation, difference (associated with ambivalence),

suffering and resilience (associated with ideal victimhood) – are unequally distributed within the tropes. The categories of *racialisation* and *difference* coalesce most clearly around trafficked women in the *stranger* trope, and the category of *suffering* describes women in the *victimhood* trope. The four categories are combined in all the other tropes, thus situating trafficked women on a continuum across the victim hierarchy.

To qualify for the status of good victim, trafficked women need to remain within the remit of vulnerability and empowerment without moving into the territory where their presence might be characterised by discourses of difference or racialisation, or by any of the traits highly associated with ambivalence, such as sexual agency or complicity in migration or sex work. The women whose experiences are described by the trope of *trafficked women as victims* qualify for this category of good victimhood, as do women in the *trafficked women as survivors* trope. In the trope of *trafficked women as victims*, women are associated with the notion of "white slavery", that is the phenomenon of innocent white women being tricked and exploited by traffickers (Breuil et al., 2011; Desyllas, 2007; Doezema, 1999; Kempadoo, 2016). This is a discourse strongly associated with women's vulnerability on the basis of their gender and with their innocence on the basis of youth. Women's voices are not directly heard in this trope, so they do not make demands upon the viewer. Trafficked women, in this trope, are voiceless vulnerable subjects who, precisely because of this silence, qualify for the position of good victims worthy of public care. Within the *trafficked women as survivors* trope, women perform survivorship compatible with notions of resilience and individualism. In order to emerge as ideal victims, then, trafficked women are depicted through embodiment and agency in line with self-responsible survival that does not make proposals for structural change.

Similarly to those of *victimhood*, the tropes of *death*, *control*, and *injury* also position women as vulnerable subjects, but within these categories women are simultaneously depicted through *difference* and through *racialisation*, which detracts from their status as ideal victims and moves these subjects towards an ambivalent space between good and bad victimhood. So, as opposed to being described solely in terms of their vulnerability, in the *deceased trafficked women* trope, women are additionally characterised by difference because of their status as migrants, gaining a

degree of threatening agency. Such agency detracts from the urgent call to pity that might have been associated with their tragic deaths. Within the trope of *controlled trafficked women,* they are similarly characterised by difference, in both *institutional* and *individual* forms of control. In the same way as in *death*, trafficked women's bodily separation into migrant camps as a form of institutional control renders them subjects of biopolitical management and largely (but not completely) excludes them from social and political life and political agency (Georgiou, 2012; Madhok, 2018; Murray, 2008, 2008). In a similar way, bodies that are subject to *individual control* are racialised, while the ability to exert actions upon their bodies rests with other actors. Finally, within the trope of *injured trafficked women,* their status as ideal victims in the face of vulnerability is interrupted by their racialisation, and only partially mitigated by resilience. Thus, it is only through the trope of *trafficked women as victims,* where trafficked women's identities and experiences are characterised by *vulnerability*, that women are allowed to enter fully into the realm of emotive care and pity. Finally, fully ambivalent victimhood is largely related to the themes of *difference* and *racialisation*. In the *trafficked women as strangers* trope women are described almost exclusively in these terms and therefore fall closest to the category of undeserving victimhood because their agency is associated with migration and smuggling. How vulnerability politicises suffering is, therefore, a matter of distance, and distance is determined by how embodiment and agency constellate to construct women as deserving of compassion.

Therefore, in the same manner in which discourses associated with ambivalent subjecthood tend to shift ideal victims towards the territory of ambivalent care, *difference* and *racialisation* are mitigated by *suffering* and *empowerment* and thus shift trafficked women into ambivalent territory. The tropes of *control, injury* and *survivorship* illustrate this ambivalence. Like that of *trafficked women as strangers*, the tropes of *controlled trafficked women, injured trafficked women* and *trafficked women as survivors* also represent racialisation and difference, but *control, injury* and *survivorship* additionally contain the discourses of *vulnerability* and *empowerment*. So trafficked women described by these tropes are not undeserving victims but ambivalent subjects, which indicates that hierarchies of victimhood exist even within particular categories. Meanwhile, the *controlled trafficked women* and *injured trafficked women* tropes, which also serve as examples of ambivalence in

good victimhood, illustrate not only that vulnerability can mitigate the effects of discourses of difference and racialisation, but also that ambivalence is neither good nor bad, but exists in media depictions and impacts meaning-making in various ways.

The implications of this interplay of tropes which coalesce in different combinations within disparate media texts, is that the proposals for feeling and acting on the suffering of others do not necessarily imply that ideal or ambivalent victimhood automatically translates to calls for structural change. Namely, across the genres of film, celebrity advocacy and newspaper journalism, I demonstrate that media texts contain representations of trafficked women that organise the social relations between the spectator and sufferer in different ways. These proposals for emotion are made on behalf of a range of subjects, including ideal victims but also including ambivalent subjects whose inclusion destabilises and expands upon ideal victim discourses. However, these proposals for care do not necessarily succeed in making coherent political proposals that have as their goal the disruption of the dominant social order. In other words, to differing degrees, these genres fail to fully elucidate a coherent and sustained connection between the moral obligation towards trafficked women and the institutional arrangements that keep some trafficked women outside of the remit of care. Thus, although the genres include a range of trafficked women into the remit of care, they do not succeed in fully politicising their suffering.

7.2.4. Vulnerability and ambivalence as productive forces: Towards recognition and collectivity

Vulnerability and agency, the two concepts that I introduce in Chapter 2 as key conditions of trafficked women's visibility as suffering subjects, and as a key discursive tension that exists in media representations of trafficked women, remain relevant throughout my analysis. I initially identified vulnerability as a condition of visibility for trafficked women, meaning that women are generally framed in the media as sufferers and that there are socio-political reasons for the primacy of vulnerability as a descriptor of trafficked women. Agency serves to describe the remit of action that various actors engage in, which is particularly salient in understanding agency in oppressive circumstances. Vulnerability and agency thus

permeate trafficking discourses and underlie a tension on the semiotic level of text, where different meanings engage in power struggles. The analysis I conduct in this study lays bare these tensions between vulnerability and agency, and engages them in order to demonstrate the process by which some trafficked women emerge as subjects who are higher, while others emerge lower, on the victim hierarchy, and accordingly some appear as more, and others as less, deserving subjects of public pity.

Vulnerability helps to explain the gendered logic that underlies the struggle for meaning in media texts about trafficked women and its ultimate consolidation around images of conformity to hegemonic femininity and dominant social arrangements. Meanwhile, ambivalence emerges as an important explanatory category and a productive analytical category. In analytical terms, ambivalence captures a level of complexity signalled by the tensions between vulnerability and agency. In discursive terms, it introduces uncertainty into meanings and therefore accounts for the failure to classify trafficked women into differing categories within the binary of good and bad victimhood. Put differently, ambivalence introduces complexity and nuance into dominant meanings and thereby complicates the hierarchy of victimhood. In this thesis I map how this process takes place within three genres, particularly in their constructions of trafficked women who emerge lower on the victim hierarchy. In film, Mali (*Trafficked*) and Daniela (*Doing Money*) occupy these positions. Daniela is seen rejecting escape and rescue as options and as complicit in exploitative sex work, but her choice can be justified because at the same time as she rejects patriarchal moralities around women's virtue she is also fulfilling her parental obligation to support her child. Mali similarly refers to parental responsibility as her motivation for becoming a migrant sex worker, but is simultaneously exoticised and racialised as a complicit subject. Thus both Daniela and Mali exist at the margins of compassionate care within the film as they quietly disappear without resolution. Nonetheless, the discursive tensions that characterise their appearance in the films position them in an ambivalent space of care; they are not fully deserving subjects, but neither are they rejected as bad victims. These boundary disturbances are symptomatic of a more important shift – one that takes place on the level of subjectivity.

Feminist scholars have long argued for the importance of challenging the social categories of gender (see for instance Butler, 1999), maintaining – via intersectional critiques – that singular identity categories cannot account for people's full subjective experiences in the social world. Reflecting on Spivak's notion of the fractured subject, or on the idea that each subject is "multiple" rather than unitary because of the "diverse set of cultural connections" that each person carries, Butler proposes that encounters with others can and should be transformative. Describing Spivak's point, she asserts:

> We cannot appreciate the oppression that women of color have experienced within the global political and economic framework of First World imperialism without realizing that 'women' as a unitary category cannot hold, cannot describe, that it must undergo crisis and expose its fractures to public discourse. [Spivak] asks, time and again in her work, what does it mean not only to listen to the voices of the disenfranchised, but to 'represent' those voices in one's work? (Butler, 2001a, p. 86)

Butler identifies two crises here: one that pertains to gender – to which other intersectional categories such as race and class can be added – and which, in the context of this study, points to the reason why the current descriptive categories cannot account for the full range of identities and experiences that exist in trafficked women's worlds, and a second that makes a normative move and asks how these marginalised subjects should be represented in the media. This is a statement about subjectivity that questions whose voices are given a platform and what kind of platform it is. It also insists on the importance of hearing voices that speak from the margins. Sobchack makes this point by observing that the material reality of the body consists not only of what is visible; the body is lived dialectically, both as an embodied being that experiences the social world, and as a viewer of the world (Sobchack, 2004, p. 181). These two processes, Sobchack argues, "highlight the way in which the objectively visible stands as only one side of vision and needs to be thickened by the subjective and value-laden side of vision that exceeds and enfolds vision's visible productions" (2004, p. 181).

Exploring the aspect of identity production that has to do with representation, through intersectional categories that contextualise trafficked women's appearance in media texts is the work I undertook for this thesis. The question of how trafficked women are discursively constructed in media texts as subjects of public care through the categories of embodiment and agency, and how different constellations of

identity categories feature in victim hierarchies, is the research question which I attempted to address. Emma Thompson's advocacy, for instance, addresses the question of representation in feminist terms, that is, I address how the process of meaning-making is shaped by constellations of different identity dimensions as they are expressed through trafficked women's bodies and agency. In her anti-trafficking activism, Thompson draws attention to women's sexual objectification in contemporary media culture and conspicuously avoids these kinds of depictions in her advocacy projects, thus her activism simultaneously addresses different forms of women's vulnerability (to trafficking, to the sexualisation of culture) as well as different forms of violence (literal and symbolic), all of which are situated at the level of media texts and engage in discursive struggle. Thompson's advocacy also raises political issues of voice, or who gets to speak in the process of constructing trafficked women as subjects of public care. While she relies on a combination of her celebrity capital, her personal conversations and connections with trafficked women, and her long-term engagement in anti-trafficking work to legitimate her right to speak on behalf of trafficked women, she also replaces their voices and presence with her own. So, at the same time as the celebrity body serves to bring trafficked women and their suffering into co-presence and to position them close to the audiences as subjects deserving of care, Thompson's gender, race and class also carry their own meanings and, just as they render certain categories and experiences visible, so they obscure others.

Thus, when appearing in public, where "being seen derives its significance from the fact that everyone sees and hears from a different position" (Arendt, 1958, p. 57), it is essential to develop what Silverstone calls "proper distance", or the willingness to "recognise the other in her sameness and difference" (2007, p. 119). This is an ethical stance reflected in feminist critiques, where it has been argued that, alongside and beyond exposing vulnerability by working within it to draw attention to social oppression, it is important to contextualise experiences of oppression, which points to the importance of inviting marginalised others to speak on their own terms (Athanasiou, 2016; Butler, 1997; hooks, 2014). In the context of gender and race, hooks similarly asserts that when speaking from the margins, ambivalence needs to be contextualised and explained in ways that normalised meanings do not. In order for marginalised voices to be truly heard and legitimated, she argues, they

need to be afforded space and time to achieve historical, social and political contextualisation (hooks, 2014). In this thesis I suggest that the genre of press journalism, due to its inherent trait of allowing multiple voices to co-create discourse through tensions, carries the greatest potential for leaving ambivalence open and thus expanding the discourses that describe trafficked women. More importantly, this genre also offers the space for contextualising the oppressive circumstances and limited choices available to trafficked women whose complicity in migration and sex work appear in media texts in the context of, for instance, the European migration "crisis" and public moralities around sex work as a choice.

So, taking a step away from ambivalence as a feeling that describes the "undecidables" who, in Bauman's (1990, p. 146) terms, may be nothing or may be all, and away from vulnerability as an exposure of injury and structural oppressions (Athanasiou, 2016; Butler, 1997; Butler & Athanasiou, 2013), it is possible to imagine these as performative acts that foster collectivity and recognition, predicated upon the presence of receptive audiences. Naming these marginalised positions and the power relations that underlie them in media representations makes it possible to rethink and resist gender and other hierarchies that underlie the discursive normativity that establishes a hierarchy of more and less deserving trafficked women. Athanasiou (2016, p. 259) discusses this political performativity of vulnerability both as nonconformity to the established chains of hierarchy and as "noncompliance to the ordinances of gendered and sexualized national intimacy". It is through the voices of the ambivalent subjects of public pity that the performed vulnerability can operate in a positive, or as Athanasiou (2016) calls it, affirmative, way. This form of visibility, which exposes those trafficked women who are othered and whose stories depart from the dominant narratives of victimhood, opens the way to understanding vulnerability as always embedded in historical power relations, but also as political from the outset (Athanasiou, 2016, p. 271). Such performed vulnerability, which is both political and embedded in gendered logics of visibility, can co-exist with agency. The *injured trafficked women* trope comes close to this configuration by simultaneously exposing injury and highlighting resilience, and thereby asserting a trafficked woman's right to voice. Yet it represents a missed opportunity for fully politicising women's suffering because it emphasises the trauma of bodily violence while obscuring its specifically gendered aspect. As such,

this configuration of pity does not look critically in the direction of the institutional and cultural conditions and treats vulnerability in gender-neutral terms, thus diminishing its political potential.

In order to find media texts that problematise and complicate the narratives and subjectivities of those women who are constructed through ambivalence and marginalised in dominant anti-trafficking discourse, it is pertinent to look in the direction of critiques of the politics of representation that dominate media content. Such alternative portrayals, which were not part of this study since this thesis engages as subjects of analysis only prevailing media discourses, can be found in media content produced by sex workers, scholars, filmmakers, artists and others who fall loosely under the umbrella of critical migration studies and support the decriminalisation of sex work. Some of this work and the structural issues it addresses is outlined in section *1.2 Trafficked women in film, celebrity advocacy, and press journalism*. These media texts, which give visibility to migrant sex workers, including trafficked women, address the subjectivities of women such as the characters of Daniela (*Doing Money*) and Mali (*Trafficked*), or the exotic dancers whose experiences of sex work as a viable form of labour confuse Pinkett Smith's conception of a trafficked woman. As it relates to the framework of pity, it is counter-narratives of trafficking that call into question the vulnerabilities and gender hierarchies that are taken for granted in dominant trafficking discourse. By placing marginalised voices into the centre of political context and rendering visible the oppressive conditions that guide people's decisions, counter-narratives seek to embed these conditions into gender hierarchies and power relations. In doing so, these narratives carry more political potential than dominant ones to reveal the negotiations of agency and vulnerability and to legitimate the experiences of trafficked women who have generally been situated lower on the hierarchy of victimhood.

To sum up, a reconfiguring of vulnerability through ambivalence is a way of claiming a voice from the margins and, according to hooks, represents a radical way of bringing attention to oppression and developing a feminist form of collectivity. As she argues, by invoking embodiment "at the margins" (hooks, 2014) and bringing it into the centre, it is possible to reconstitute marginalised subjectivities and to bring about what Butler (2001a) theorises as recognition: a mutual process between self

and other that allows a set of shared characteristics to emerge, resulting in a transformation of both (Butler, 2001b, p. 23). This is the kind of work that, as I demonstrate in this thesis, media texts could do by allowing multiple identities and experiences to enter public discourse, and by framing those voices in ways that are at the very least ambivalent towards difference, but that ultimately expose its underlying conditions and accept it as equal in value. Ambivalence, therefore, is an affective register that can work alongside pity to open new forms of visibility and therefore new possibilities of meaning and of connecting with trafficked women. This could be particularly salient in the theoretical context of this thesis, if such critiques worked to challenge the social arrangements and structures that dictate the possibilities of meaning and feeling towards marginalised groups. Activating ambivalence and vulnerability in ways that open up inclusive spaces of visibility could, in this way, make space for shifts and interruptions in prevailing discourses, and open doors to challenging and negotiating dominant social orders.

7.3. Conclusion

My findings indicate that trafficked women are portrayed in media discourse as subjects of disadvantage, oppression or marginalisation, thereby maintaining a hierarchy of victimhood. This occurs not through outright exclusion of trafficked women who do not conform to the ideal victim discourses, but through their ambivalent positioning as subjects. Ambivalence, as I have argued throughout this thesis based on feminist and media studies, is neutral in itself, but in the context of particular media texts it is mobilised in different ways to construct a hierarchy of victimhood in which ideal victims occupy positions of advantage, while other trafficked women are positioned as less deserving of public care and compassion. This hierarchy, I have suggested, corresponds to dominant trafficking discourses which, in turn, correspond to normalised constructions based on hegemonic femininities and the use of notions such as resilience and empowerment. The data which I examine, including depictions of trafficked women in two films on sex trafficking, the anti-trafficking activism of two celebrities, and newspaper articles on the topic of sex trafficking, all include stories of women who fall outside the remit of ideal victimhood. As such, these media texts indicate that what matters is *how* bodies are demarcated as gendered, raced or classed and how the actions and relationships

of these bodies are invested with meanings that underlie social constructions of these identity categories.

What constitutes the space of ambivalence, then, is the meaning-making process that underlies the representations of trafficked women in a sample of media texts. As many trafficking scholars have noted, some of the most common discourses contributing to the construction of ideal victimhood in media texts concern the innocence and purity of trafficked women. These characteristics of ideal victims are particularly prominent in the genre of film, where the two main characters in the selected films (Sara in *Trafficked*, and Anna in *Doing Money*) attempt to protect their virtue, which places them firmly within the category of innocent victims. Meanwhile, ambivalently represented trafficked women, Mali and Lily, most prominently depart from this construction through their complicity in sex work, and they are infantilised and sexualised in the films. Jada Pinkett Smith's description of "girls" who "fall prey" to trafficking similarly establishes, within the genre of her celebrity advocacy, the ideal trafficking victim as pure and innocent. Her reflection on women who seek to advance their economic situations by means of sex work hints at the false promises of consumer and sexualised culture. In this way, Pinkett Smith makes a move that gestures towards inequality and destabilises the victim hierarchy, showing the shape of women's vulnerabilities, but locating solutions in individual action thus failing to politicise women's vulnerability. Newspaper representations, meanwhile, identify the correct moral disposition towards a broader scope of trafficked women as victims, and recognise their plight as a cause for public compassion. As such, the genre of newspaper journalism represents the most complex image of trafficked women as subjects, and expands the victim hierarchy. Like the other genres, however, it fails to recognise the gendered nature of violence and thus fails to fully politicise vulnerability. Within the three genres, a few common discourses emerge as the most prominent in constructing trafficked women as subjects.

The severity of trauma and violence and the subsequent injury that trafficked women suffer at the hands of perpetrators are repeatedly emphasised as part of the trafficking experience. Neither of the two films shows graphic scenes of violence, but violence is nonetheless strongly suggested. Emma Thompson stages and performs violence in her anti-trafficking project and the women depicted in

newspapers lay bare their physical and psychological injury in public, for audiences to see. The repercussions of trauma and violence tend to constitute trafficked women as deserving of public care, and are only periodically diminished by their complicity in exploitation when combined with the topic of migration. In the face of violence, resilience and courage are constructed as positive and many women, particularly in films and in newspaper journalism, display these traits to demonstrate their empowerment after the trafficking experience. This trope, I suggest, is related to gendered exhortations to empowerment and to the performance of a resilient self, but it is characterised by individualistic agency that locates the responsibility for improving one's circumstances in the individual rather than in structural power imbalances that create and perpetuate women's vulnerabilities. Such a sentiment was prevalent in celebrity advocacy, where both celebrities destabilised the ideal victim hierarchy by pointing to women's vulnerabilities and their relationship to culture, but failed to denounce particular institutional power structures and instead located the responsibility for finding solutions to these problems in individual people and in the awareness of publics about sex trafficking.

A related trope also utilised to demonstrate caring and empowerment is parenthood. Jada Pinkett Smith relied on motherhood to personify an empowered carer, and in so doing, she extended her motherly care from her own family to trafficked women. Her motherhood is also associated with social activism and the politics of race. The racialisation of motherhood is also present in the characters of Mali (from the film *Trafficked*) and of Daniela (from *Doing Money*), whose complicity in sex work is explained by their need to care for their children. However, Lily's motherly care does not extend to anyone else in *Trafficked*, while Mali's motherly care is undermined by her infantilisation and her failure to protect the women from harm. Pinkett Smith's empowered motherhood is thus undermined in the characters of Mali and Daniela, who ultimately became ambivalent trafficking victims because of the unresolved tensions within their characters.

The discursive tropes that carry some of the most negative connotations, and thus result in ambivalence, are those of sexual objectification and racialisation. Emma Thompson harshly criticises the mundane sexualised images of women in the popular media and organises her advocacy around the rejection of this form of visibility, so her activism proposes protective feelings towards trafficked women

(and all other women). Jada Pinkett Smith, on the other hand, relies on an empowered sexual display, which carries connotations of what Gill and Donaghue identify as the sexualisation of culture and the disjunctive relationship between women's empowerment and the harmful and yet commonplace sexualisation of women in popular culture (Gill & Donaghue, 2013). Even so, the most harmful effects of sexual objectification can be observed in the character of Lily (from *Doing Money*), whose cynical outlook and resigned self-objectification combine to firmly establish her as a less than deserving victim in spite of her clear vulnerability caused by poverty and parental responsibility. Racialisation performs a similar purpose, that is, it marks the black bodies of trafficked as hypersexual others. This trope is particularly present with regard to juju curses, which are continually evoked in Mali (from *Trafficked*), and in the genre of press journalism, where some women are exoticised through descriptions of juju rituals. The exoticisation of black bodies demarcates them as different and thus justifies the rescue and paternalistic control. Racialisation is closely related to the equally harmful trope of othering through the association of trafficked women with migrants. Whether placed in migration reception camps or subjected to the biopolitical control of the camp, their bodies are demarcated as a threatening presence, which justifies the presence and practice of humanitarian bordering, that is the simultaneous concern for border protection and humanitarian concern.

One of the outcomes of this thesis, therefore, is that it shows that the dominant trafficking discourses are incapable of proposing compassionate care towards the full range of trafficked women's experiences and subjectivities. Ambivalence demonstrates this, highlighting the vulnerabilities of trafficked women and their at least partial exclusion from the remit of public compassion and empathetic care. The image of the ideal trafficking victim is, as I have suggested, too laden with moralising assumptions about women's virtue and narrow notions of victimhood to meaningfully address the needs and subjectivities of the majority of women whose stories these genres attempt to present to publics. The normative conclusion of the thesis is therefore that, in order to seriously consider giving voice, creating space, and offering help to people involved in migrant sex work, it is essential to first acknowledge that the current media discourse is far from inclusive or sufficient for the task. For this thesis I undertook to map out exactly how this

process takes place and what assumptions are made with regard to trafficked women as subjects. A step in the direction of inclusivity would involve an acceptance without judgment of people whose subjectivities and life experiences are different from those that the dominant discourses would indicate. I have referred to Silverstone's notion of responsibility, and to Butler's focus on vulnerability as ethical calls and productive processes. It follows from the explorations in this thesis that the ways in which the agency and embodiment of trafficked women as subjects are constructed in media texts need to be afforded more political force and complexity.

To that end, one way to complement the research I have conducted in this thesis would be to conduct an analysis of a larger sample of data using critical discourse analysis as a method. CDA could yield a detailed linguistic analysis of data, critically analysing and discussing in depth various elements of style that are within the remit of CDA as an approach to data which offers many different techniques for analysis. For instance, this could entail a look at choice of terminology and phrases used to refer to trafficked women through, for instance, metaphor or semantic analysis. A further study with a wider scope than the present one (which looks only at the proposals for meaning at the level of text as per the framework of pity), could expand the remit of analysis towards audience understandings of media texts. This kind of analysis could provide for a comparative reference for the findings of the original study and could also be used as a reference for a study such as the present one. This could be done if the research aims remained focused on media depictions of women trafficked for sexual exploitation, but if the remit was expanded towards audience studies.

In addition, when it comes to further exploring the research area, a study could be conceived with a similar remit and comparable aims with an expanded qualitative methodology that would include an audience studies perspective. Such a study could seek to understand how audiences perceive trafficked women whose subjectivities and experiences fall high on the victim hierarchy, as well as those who are situated in the space of ambivalence. In this way, the study would probe how wiling audiences are to accept as worthy of public care those women whose negotiations of agency challenge prevailing trafficking discourses, thus demanding a complex view of agency. The study would thus see audiences not as blank slates

upon which meanings are imbued, but as active recipients of information who negotiate, re-appropriate, and challenge meanings (Fiske, 1992, p. 358; Siegesmund, 2008) which would be in line with the view of discourse as subject to constant negotiation, which I also accept in this study. A focus group study could achieve the purpose of probing audience understandings and negotiations of meaning, as well as their attitudes towards the identities of trafficked women, especially those who do not fit the ideal victim status. Similarly, interviews, online questionnaires or reviews could serve a similar purpose, but would offer results that would exclude the group dynamics present in focus groups. In such a study, audiences could be given different kinds of media content to watch, including both media texts that correspond to neo-abolitionist thinking as well as those that represent counter-narratives of trafficking, migration and sex work. In addition, the study could entail audiences from different genders, races, and socioeconomic groups in order to explore the process of audiences' interpretation and contextualisation when it comes to trafficked women as subjects.

Moreover, it would also be pertinent to address some of the theoretical strands that this study attempts to bring together by exploring the construction of subjectivities that rely on trafficked women as survivors and resilient subjects. In the same vein as the exposure of injury brings together vulnerability with visibility, resilience and survival might be productive avenues of theorisation because of their possibilities to offer positive forms of visibility. Within a theoretical approach that examines ambivalence as a productive register and with a critical view of postfeminist sensibility, the mobilisation of survival and resilience may offer ways to challenge dominant trafficking discourses from within. Other avenues of further research would include analyses of additional media genres and examinations of the discourses that contribute to the constructions of trafficked women and how this relates to the possibility of these genres to engage the political potential of the tropes used to construct women's subjectivities. In particular, it would be pertinent to explore how trafficked women appear as gendered subjects in NGO campaigns, and offer normative proposals on the kinds of gendered assumptions and arrangements that should be avoided and highlighted. To that end, collaboration with trafficked women, migrant sex workers, and people of all genders, races, classes, ages, and sexualities would give richness and a valuable perspective to such a study. Much

academic research has so far been dedicated to understanding the perspectives of, in general terms, migrant populations who engage in the sex industry, and combining these perspectives would make for a study oriented both towards the work of media as a vehicle for representing trafficking, with a view to people's lived experiences and complex subjectivities and negotiations of agency and exploitation. Indeed, almost every day, news stories bring to light people's experiences of migration, sex work, survival, resilience, activism, and identity, which points to the persisting need to tell these stories, to critically analyse their assumptions, and to explore the ways in which they can challenge, destabilise, and disrupt established gender orders and hierarchies.

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