Human trafficking and online networks: policy, analysis and ignorance

Abstract

Dominant anti-trafficking policy discourses represent trafficking as an issue of crime, illegal migration, victimhood and humanitarianism. Such a narrow focus is not an adequate response to the interplay between technology, trafficking and anti-trafficking.

This article explores different levels of analysis and the interplay between human trafficking and technology. We argue for a shift from policy discourses with a very limited focus on crime and victimisation to more systemic understandings of trafficking and more robust micro-analyses of trafficking and everyday life. The article calls for an agnotological understanding of policy responses to trafficking and technology: these depend upon the production of ignorance. We critique limitations in policy understandings of trafficking-related aspects of online spaces, and argue for better engagement with online networks. We conclude that there is a need to move beyond a focus on 'new' technology and exceptionalist claims about 'modern slavery' towards greater attention to everyday exploitation within neoliberalism.

Keywords

Agnotology, ignorance, Internet, networks, neoliberalism, technology, trafficking in human beings.

Introduction

In their recent discussion of the nexus between human trafficking and technology, Musto and boyd (2014: 465) issued a call to 'grasp the ways in which technological mediation is changing the terms on which…anti-trafficking interventions are staged'. We argue that, in order to grasp these changes and to offer an effective political response, there needs to be a shift in the level of anti-trafficking analysis and interventions. Most current anti-trafficking policy work focuses on the intermediate level of interventions, which includes the issues of border control, law enforcement and victim support (see, for example, AUTHOR). Some policy work also looks at micro-level interventions, which tend to individualise, infantilise and disempower 'genuine' victims while de-humanising individual criminals assumed to be fully responsible for human trafficking (O'Connell Davidson 2015). However, such an approach effaces more complex ways in which exploitation[1] takes place while also (as Yea (2015) notes in

Singapore) '[r]endering certain types of victims more publicly visible and legitimate'. We therefore argue that there is a need for macro-level analyses and interventions that engage more effectively with the neoliberalism's 'utopia of unlimited exploitation' (Bourdieu 1998), and for more nuanced micro-level analyses to reflect on the role of exploitation in everyday life (see, for example, FRA 2015).

The paper begins by discussing levels of analysis and the interplay between human trafficking and technology in everyday life. It looks at how responses to human trafficking depend upon the production of certain types of ignorance and then moves to consider the online geographies through which trafficking and related activities might take place. The paper draws on several empirical examples to illustrate its case, including the UK's Modern Slavery Act 2015 and associated discussions of 'cyberslavery' (particularly from the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)); attempts in the USA to regulate the Internet; and the work of the European Cybercrime Centre. The paper also refers to the original survey data from (AUTHOR) to illustrate the extent to which the general public in the three countries are aware of human trafficking and associate trafficking in human beings with the Internet.[2] We thus demonstrate that a better engagement with the trafficking-technology nexus will require both more macro-level analyses and a stronger engagement with the way that exploitation is part of everyday life.

Trafficking in Human Beings: a Call for Micro- and Macro-Analyses

This paper explores emerging intersections between today's dominant anti-trafficking discourses and the spaces and technologies of the Internet. A growing body of scholarship has been highlighting the way in which dominant anti-trafficking policy discourses focus primarily on an intermediate level of analysis and action (see Kempadoo 2015; Weitzer 2014). These understandings of policy reduce the scope of discussions to securing national borders and 'clamping down' on trafficking as organised crime (to stop 'criminals and their victims' (UK Government 2011) from crossing 'our' borders) and to providing limited support to narrowly defined 'victims' of human trafficking. Such an approach uses individualised criminal/victim profiles as key elements of anti-trafficking initiatives by giving trafficking a human (in the case of 'victims') or inhuman (in the case of 'criminals') face. Macro-level analysis remains conspicuously absent from current policy discussions, which continue to divert media and public attention from the role of structural factors such as the contribution of state-capital formations to the normalisation of exploitative labour practices. De Genova (2011:106) notes in this respect that 'the state and capital have worked assiduously to

render deportable migrant labour a manageable and tractable object'. With this in mind, we argue that greater attention to macro-level factors is important in order to understand the systemic context in which exploitation takes place. The increasingly normalised exploitation of trafficked, smuggled or outsourced labour should be viewed as a key aspect of 'profit-driven, uncoordinated and uncontrolled globalisation' (Bauman 2011: 4) rather than a stand-alone phenomenon that can be eliminated through time and resource limited policy-based interventions at the intermediate level.

There should also be stronger micro-level analyses in order to move the 'scandal of human trafficking' (Ki-moon 2013) from the domain of sensationalised media reports (O'Brein 2015) and government sponsored anti-immigrant scaremongering campaigns (The Guardian 2013; Liberty 2013) to the activities and spaces of everyday life. When dominant discourses present individual acts of criminality and victimhood as true representations of human trafficking, they sever the link between the crime of human trafficking and the everyday life of the majority (people who are not trafficked, not involved in organised crime, and who do not pay for sexual services from victims of trafficking). However, we follow Presdee (2004: 276) in viewing crime and exploitation as 'if nothing else, a human activity, a human thing, cultural in nature and the product of the social order in which we live at any particular historical moment. In other words it involves the everyday lived experiences and practices of all members of society.'

Micro-level analyses in mainstream discourses do consider how some may participate in exploitation and human trafficking as part of 'deviant' behaviour – for example, after encountering an online advert for someone who has been trafficked for sexual exploitation. There is, though, little consideration of how 'normal' public and private sector employers facilitate and benefit, directly or indirectly, from the exploitation of migrant labour within the context of cross-border movements (Crane 2013; Quayson and Arhin 2012) or non-migrant labour in offshoring (Urry 2014). What remains largely unacknowledged is European consumers' reliance on goods and services that may have been produced with the involvement of exploited labour, and consumers' culpability in 'creating demand (whether for cheap labour, goods and services, or for exploitative sex) and in excluding migrants' (Wylie and McRedmond 2010: 8; FRA 2015). Within this context, we argue that human trafficking, as a symptom of wider labour exploitation, needs to be considered as an intrinsic part of everyday life rather than something that is just relevant for a minority of 'genuine' victims or people acting in 'deviant' ways.

Policies and ignorance production

A focus on an intermediate level of anti-trafficking strategies and a very limited micro-level of individualised interventions allows policymakers to remain ignorant of other aspects of the trafficking-technology interface. This paper arose from a project reviewing the research on human trafficking and online networks; a key finding was how little is known about this.[3] This ignorance, however, does not mean that less is published on, spent on or done about trafficking: if anything, the reverse is the case, and the extensive activity around trafficking helps to maintain a degree of ignorance of the topic. It will therefore be useful to draw on Slater's (2014) work on 'agnotology' (the study of ignorance) in a policy context, to discuss the context for this ignorance. Criticising the CSJ's work on welfare and poverty, Slater (2014) argues that there is an 'urgency in researching how ignorance is made, maintained and manipulated by powerful institutions to suit their own ends, where the guiding research question becomes 'Why don't we know what we don't know?''

Human trafficking continues to receive considerable academic, media and policy attention. What Van der Pijl et al. (2011: 576) describe as 'moral outrage' or the 'self-conscious making of a spectacle' – aimed at attracting 'media attention or funds' – has filled many journal pages and produced a considerable amount of 'grey' literature, including policy reports, briefing papers, guidelines and toolkits. Within this context, however, Zhang (2009, 193) has called for methodological rigour in order to develop 'empirically based rather than ideologically driven' work to address the existing gaps in both assessing and theorising human trafficking. There are even greater gaps in research around trafficking and online networks. While some topics are little known because they are rarely discussed, the use of technology to facilitate human trafficking has attracted increasing attention from anti-trafficking 'stakeholders', including governmental and non-governmental sectors over recent years. The UK's Modern Slavery Act (2015) and attempts in the USA to restrict online expression (by modifying Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act (1999)) will be used (following Slater (2014)) as examples of how ignorance is produced in relation to human trafficking and the Internet.

The CSJ, criticised by Slater (2014) for its work on welfare reform, also played a significant role in the construction of ignorance around trafficking. In March 2013, the CSJ's Slavery Working Group released a prominent report: 'It Happens Here: Equipping the United Kingdom to Fight Modern Slavery' (CSJ 2013), which sought to 'breathe new life into the fight against modern slavery' and noted the role of the Internet in recruiting and 'selling' people into 'modern slavery'. This report was influential in recommending a Modern Slavery Act, which was subsequently adopted by the UK's

Government in March 2015. The CSJ also played an unusual role in organising a number of evidence sessions 'to help shape' the Act at the request of the Home Secretary.

Despite its wide-ranging recommendations, the CSJ report did not engage well with available research on 'modern slavery' in the UK. It largely ignored, for example, the significant body of work by Joseph Rowntree Foundation on forced labour and exploitation in the UK[4], and instead favoured less reliable articles from newspapers, including the UK *Daily Mail* (a right-wing tabloid often taking an anti-immigration stance). The Report focused on the intermediate level of anti-trafficking actions by prioritising law enforcement responses and by evidencing a rather limited interpretation of trafficking as an issue of illegal border crossing with a series of anecdotes rather than looking at questions of systematic exploitation or at more robust micro-level research. For example, the CSJ's (2013: 32) sole reference for its discussion of a complex trafficking case raising questions about psychological control during forced or exploitative labour was a *Mail* article titled 'Horrific case of girl, seven, dubbed the Romanian Cinderella after being trafficked to Britain to work as a slave'. The reliance on weaker evidence in suggesting a series of far-reaching anti-trafficking actions allowed the CSJ to build types of (politically useful) ignorance at the expense of engaging with the complexities of human trafficking and exploitation.

The Draft Modern Slavery Bill, published by the UK Government (2014a) in December 2013, attracted a range of critical responses, including a scathing assessment by the Draft Modern Slavery Bill Joint Committee (UK Parliament 2014) and the Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group's Alternative Modern Slavery Bill (ATMG 2014). Despite criticisms, the Bill has been passed as the Modern Slavery Act 2015. The Act made no mention of the Internet and its use to facilitate human trafficking. However, the Modern Slavery Strategy (2014: 35), which accompanied the Act, focused on 'internet infrastructure used by serious and organised criminal groups' while failing to consider the importance of the Internet in 'normal' life. As well as ignorance having been produced, this ignorance has proved highly productive when embedded in policies, legislation and practice. An Act derived from very weak intermediate- and micro-level analyses has managed to avoid any critical engagement with questions about ways in which exploitation is part of the neoliberal economy or the role of exploitative labour in allowing 'normal' life in the UK to continue.

In April 2015, one month after the adoption of the Modern Slavery Act, the Centre for Social Justice released its second report on 'modern slavery' - 'A Modern Response to Modern Slavery' (CSJ 2015). The report was written by a former special adviser to the

UK Home Secretary who was also a former Sky News journalist (Guardian 2014a) and a lobbyist (Powerbase 2015). The Report was endorsed by Theresa May, the UK Home Secretary, as 'tremendous' and by the Director-General of Europol, who described it as a 'wake-up call' in 'looking objectively at the current situation' (CSJ 2015: 9). The Report starts with a startling and unsubstantiated assertion: claiming that because of the UK's Modern Slavery Act criminals and 'slave traders' 'will move their victims to a country without a Modern Slavery Act' (CSJ 2015: 9). Organised Criminal Groups (OCGs) and 'modern slavery cartels' are represented as the key culprits, with law enforcement having to develop a 'winder understanding of the core DNA of an OCG' (CSJ 2015: 11).

The Report is a strikingly weak piece of (pseudo)research: it is peppered with references to unidentified 'experts' and assertions such as 'this report has heard' and 'we have heard', that are used instead of credible evidence when making sensationalist allegations about 'modern slavery'. Thin on evidence and explanation, the Report warns about 'the growing speed with which OCGs use cyber techniques' and proceeds to offer a series of what appear to be entirely arbitrary definitions, making distinctions between 'cybercrime', 'cyber-enabled crime' and 'cyber slavery', with the latter taking the form of both 'cybercrime' and 'cyber-enabled crime' because 'the internet is used to attack an individual directly'. Ignoring the structural causes of exploitation within the neoliberal state, the report calls upon a 'wider society [to] shout from the roof tops that modern slavery is wrong' and upon 'countries…[not to] work in silos' (CSJ 2015: 89-90). Ignorance, far from acting as a barrier to action, becomes an *enabler* of calls for increasingly radical and widespread actions.

Ignorance also works in powerful ways in US attempts to target human trafficking by regulating and policing the Internet. For example, in 2013 a number of US state attorneys requested a reduction in Section's 230 of the US Communications Decency Act (1996) protection for online speech in the name of combating sex trafficking (EFF 2013a) by citing the use of the classified advertising site Backpage.com to 'sell' trafficked people. Such a sweeping action was justified, in part, as an action against trafficking for sexual exploitation. However, there was considerable uncertainty even as to the scale of the problem and it is highly doubtful that what problems existed were not amenable to more conventional police work: Latonero (2012: 30) reports that 'law enforcement's widely known presence on popular classified ad sites has led some local police and anti-trafficking experts to see these as the 'bottom of the online barrel,' frequented by some of the least technologically savvy trafficker-pimps.' In responding to the proposed changes, the Electronic Frontier Foundation noted (EFF 2013b) that

such legislation 'would effectively make service providers – from Facebook to a solo blogger – responsible for enforcing every relevant state and local criminal law in the country against their users'. This move could also, the EFF argued, have a significant impact on everyday uses of the Internet that have nothing to do with trafficking or sex work: if Internet Service Providers needed to enforce every relevant local law, they would need to become increasingly censorious in problematic ways. The attempt to censor Backpage.com demonstrates how the 'traditional' law enforcement and policy focus on the intermediate level of anti-trafficking activities allows ignorance of both the way in which such sites become part of 'normal' everyday life (and thus the huge disruptions that censorship would entail), and also of the macro-level functioning of the Internet which makes such measures difficult or impossible to implement effectively.

In the context of an ongoing drive for 'pre-emptive' security and greater regulation of the internet (AUTHOR 2012, De Goede 2014, Mitsilegas 2014), efforts are currently underway to enhance the policing cyber-power of the US national law enforcement. In September 2014, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, a division of the US Department of Defense 'charged with pushing technological boundaries and developing breakthrough technologies to support national security' (DARPA 2015), launched its Memex programme to develop advanced online search capabilities software for 'improved content discovery, information extraction, information retrieval, user collaboration, and extension of current search capabilities to the deep web, the dark web, and nontraditional content' (DARPA 2015a). The DARPA identifies 'forums, chats, advertisements, job postings, hidden services' as key online sites, which materialize 'the industry of modern slavery' and, therefore, are in need of policing, identifying and predicting any existing or future risk and dangerousness. Even though processes of deanonymizing, attributing identity to servers or IP addresses and accessing information not intended to be publicly available, have been explicitly excluded from the programme's remit (see DARPA 2015a), a more recent article has reported on the success of one of the Memex's components in 'extracting, aligning, linking and visualising massive amount of domain-specific content' and in 'pull[ing] in live data from the various social media sites, such as Twitter, Instagram, and OpenStreetMaps' (Knoblock and Szekely 2015). Another Memex component, TJBatchExtractor, is available for downloading from the GitHub open-source software development repository (GitHub 2015). It stated purpose is to 'extract domain specific information that may be informative in identifying individuals or groups responsible for each advertisement' on Backpage.com. This shows that there is a public engagement element to these technologies: Memex tools are made available so they can have an impact on everyday lives well beyond the defence and intelligence communities.

However, this focus on concerns about an online phenomenon of 'modern slavery' takes place in a context where there is considerable ignorance around practices of labour exploitation.

Policy ignorance thus produces clear and confident policy recommendations: ranging from a high-profile Act to attempts to rework of the legal framework governing online discussions to wide-ranging data collection and accompanying data analysis. Ignorance of the everyday context of trafficking and exploitation and of systemic aspects of these practices enables approaches that ignore wider social and political issues. Thakor and boyd (2013: 284) suggest 'that anti-trafficking is taking the form of a counternetwork to the sex trafficking it seeks to address' and 'parallel to the trafficking that it seeks to address'. With this in mind, an agnotological understanding of anti-trafficking shows that much anti-trafficking should be seen as networked ignorance that parallels but necessarily fails to engage with important aspects of the networks of exploitation to which it is nominally opposed. Agnotological work might disrupt both of these parallel networks, to open up new questions and possibilities for further micro- and macro-level analyses.

Trafficking, Technology, Policy and Everyday Life

Policy discourses increasingly link trafficking in human beings with the Internet (although the lack of reliable statistical data on the nature and scope of the problem is recognised as a substantial limitation and is an important aspect of policy ignorance) (Weitzer 2011). In 2012, the EU Strategy towards the Eradication of Trafficking in Human Beings 2012–2016 identified 'the recruitment of victims of trafficking in human beings and advertising of their services on the internet' (EC 2012: 10) as an emerging pattern, even though little systematic evidence is available to back up this claim. Similarly, in its 'Strategic Assessment of the Nature and Scale of Human Trafficking in 2013', the UK's National Crime Agency (2014) highlights the use of 'online dating, social media sites and advertising of jobs on the internet to recruit victims' without referencing any data or providing an assessment of how prevalent the use of the Internet to facilitate human trafficking is. CSJ (2015: 36) approvingly quotes a European Police Officer's claim that 'Online dating has replaced streetwalkers and visible prostitution has kind of vanished' without showing any evidence of testing or verifying this improbable claim (although the fact that there are sex workers visibly working on the streets of many European cities might raise questions about it). Such developments, while springing from ignorance, are highly productive: they represent a new phase in the European anti-trafficking regime that fundamentally alters the nature

of spatial relationships between human trafficking, criminals, victims, citizens and governments, and, by doing so, creates new structures of governance, power and control, and new ways of securitisation and biopolitical administration of life. Within this context, Musto and boyd (2014: 462) observe a 'growing, albeit uninterrogated assumption that technologies of the networked, connective, and mobile variety play a central role in facilitating human trafficking'[5]. This assumption highlights the problematic nature of policy interventions at the intermediate level: on the one hand, interventions' focus remains limited to a specific and narrowly defined roles of particular technologies; on the other hand, they fail to take into account broader cultural, economic and social issues associated with the use of these technologies, including the role of technology in everyday life.

With the increasing focus on the Internet, gaps between different geopolitical scales are further collapsed. Threats that might previously have been seen as taking place on other scales are now adjacent to the everyday. The state securitises everyday life in response to the assumed totalising power of the newly identified and omnipresent 'threat' of online trafficking: 'victims' can be bought on the Internet, and 'criminals' are ready to take advantage of our vulnerabilities, kidnap and sell us into 'modern day slavery', or sell 'modern day slaves' or 'cyber slaves' to us. What might previously have been a matter of quite everyday relations within capitalism is now presented as a security matter: states seek to protect 'normal' citizens from the security threat of trafficking, which is conceptualised in such a way as to encompass very diverse aspects of our technologically mediated lives. We thus see a securitization take place which, in Buzan, Waever and Wilde's (1997: 24) terms, presents the trafficking-technology nexus as 'an existential threat requiring emergency measures and justifying actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure'.[6] It is, however, important to challenge this 'linkage between securitization and the politics of exception' (Bigo 2012: 282).

A formerly passive online user, whose online movements and communications are recorded by Internet Service Providers and intercepted on a routine basis by security agencies (Lyon 2015), is now 'continuously encouraged to speak up' as she becomes immersed in 'open' online networks that are increasingly regulated at both technical and political levels (Trottier 2014). An analysis which might challenge this linkage between securitisation of trafficking and exceptional political responses therefore needs to work across the different scales and levels involved here: from systemic geopolitical factors to the securitisation of the everyday.

At the individual scale, the securitisation of online spaces enacts a three-way structure: an (always) aware and concerned user, whose online behaviour is recorded and scrutinised, and who herself is looking out for signs of cybercrime; resourceful and omnipresent cyber-criminals; and naïve, non-suspecting and vulnerable victims (potential or real). Within this context, the extent to which 'ordinary' consumers are aware of 'modern day slavery' and consider it to be relevant to their increasingly mediatised everyday lives provides a starting point for discussing governments' insertion of trafficking as a problem into the everyday of 'ordinary' people. AUTHOR (2014) has recently published original survey research on public understandings of trafficking in Ukraine, Hungary and Great Britain – one of the 'traditional' supply routes of trafficked and smuggled labour from Eastern into Western Europe.[7] Results of this work suggest that a large majority of the general public recognizes human trafficking as a problem in their respective countries (73% of respondents in Ukraine, 64% in Hungary, and 77% in Great Britain) and agrees that the Internet can be used as a tool to recruit victims and to advertise their services (87% of respondents in Ukraine, 83% in Hungary and 83% in Great Britain). The survey data suggest that the policy focus on raising awareness at the individual level may be of limited value (and, indeed, may be based on policymakers' ignorance of the already-high levels of awareness in many populations). The populations surveyed here are already very much aware that human trafficking takes place and that the Internet can be used in this context, but this awareness sits alongside a failure to integrate such knowledge into their everyday life. The majority of respondents do not consider trafficking to be a problem that affects them directly (75% of respondents in Ukraine, 81% in Hungary, and 72% in Great Britain). This finding highlights the fundamental difference and tension between individual knowledge and public acknowledgement – a situation of being simultaneously aware and unaware of something, described by Zerubavel (2006) as 'silent witnessing' or 'conspiracy of silence'.[8]

At an aggregate level, the survey results suggest that public opinion in these countries reflects the dominant policy representations of trafficking as a matter of organized crime and illegal immigration – problems separate from the daily lives of the majority. Such an insertion of the 'threat' of human trafficking as a new Internet-facilitated phenomenon into public imagination reflects the intermediate-level approach of selectively addressing some symptoms of the problem rather its fundamental causes. The extent to which public awareness of the 'online' dimension of trafficking may translate into different online browsing and purchasing behaviours on the part of consumer-citizens is limited by the very context in which human trafficking and exploitation are constructed as something evil happening to the remote, naïve and, at

the same time, threatening 'Others'. The demonization of online spaces by policy-makers in countries of destination for human trafficking and smuggling as heaving with 'criminals' and 'modern slavery cartels' ready to take advantage of innocent and unsuspecting victims is unlikely to fundamentally alter the increasing reliance of many migrants on the Internet as a transnational platform to search for jobs, organise movement across borders (with or without authorisation), and produce new forms of 'transnational habitus' (Nedelcu 2012; Janta and Ladkin 2013)

Online Spaces: Geography, Cybercrime and Sex

The recent policy trend to represent human trafficking as a real and everyday yet intangible threat that lurks behind the screens of our electronic devices and in the ominous 'dark web' (Vance 2015, NCA 2014a; Guardian 2014) is enabled by a focus on the intermediate analysis of spaces in which very specific individualised transactions between two groups – 'criminals' and 'victims' – take place. There is a failure to analyse broader systemic issues around exploitation, inequality and the Internet; for example, to question why exploitative positions advertised online might appear attractive to people Bourdieu (1998: 98) describes as 'a reserve army of labour made docile by insecure employment and the permanent threat of unemployment'. There is also a very partial micro-level analysis in policy discourses of the role of exploited labour in everyday life. In such partial micro-analyses, the use of online networks to facilitate trafficking means that trafficking can now be part of places which might previously have appeared separate from it. There are (poorly-evidenced) claims that online promotion of everyday activities such as online dating may involve 'selling' (the services of) trafficked people (CSJ 2015: 36). Such claims can become even more strongly-stated when anti-trafficking and anti-sex work campaigners argue that the common (but sometimes illegal, and often presented as deviant) use of the internet for advertising, selling and buying sexual services necessarily involves the exploitation of trafficked people. One might note, for example, the US Cook County Sheriff Thomas Dart's argument that online 'adult' advertisements 'make up the foundation of a booming modern sex trafficking industry. It is a violent business that preys on the young and vulnerable, yet one that hides that reality behind a sense of normalcy created by sites like Backpage.com' (Cook County Sheriff 2015). Such campaigns bring trafficking into many new spaces: both adverts (at least potentially, according to anti-trafficking campaigners) 'selling' trafficked people and adverts for anti-trafficking campaigns may appear on smartphones in all kinds of locations, with further implications for policing of online spaces.

However, while there is a focus on some types of online activity – particularly associated with sex work and what is (mis)represented as 'sex trafficking' – other widespread practices are effaced. For example, the discussion of exploitative labour practices in supply chains, which produce devices such as smartphones, remains muted since the disempowered 'Others' exploited for their 'digital labour' (Fuchs 2013) are separated from our everyday lives. Such separation takes place through the physical processes of offshoring, subcontracting and outsourcing, and the accompanying process of evicting the 'Other' from one's universe of moral obligations (Baumann 2000). This separation also allows ignorance about these practices, and their impact on the 'Other', to be maintained.

Graham (2013: 177) argues that 'geographers should take the lead in employing alternate, nuanced and spatially grounded ways of envisioning the myriad ways in which the Internet mediates social, economic and political experiences'. With this in mind, we will follow Graham in challenging conceptions of the Internet as an ethereal cyberspace through which trafficking takes place and argue, instead, for more nuanced and grounded ways of understanding how different online spaces mediate engagements with crime, sex, exploitation, and other aspects of everyday life.

Sex and sexuality

Sexual exploitation has been a prominent issue in discussions about the crime of trafficking and in discussions of online spaces. Although it is not appropriate to conflate trafficking with trafficking for sexual exploitation, nor to conflate sex work with human trafficking, questions of sexual exploitation remain prominent in these discussions. The starting point for any analysis of sex, sexuality and trafficking online should be an awareness that sex and sexuality are significant factors in online spaces - irrespective of human trafficking - and in how these spaces are materialised; this has been the case for some time (boyd and Ellison 2007). Such uses are often positive or benign – for example, users finding welcoming spaces to discuss their sexuality. At the same time, some authors view the Internet as a platform used for diverse types of sexual exploitation (Hughes 1999a; 2000). Others criticise how 'sex slavery' has come to the fore of policy attention, but its opposite in the form of prostitution as work remains largely invisible' (O'Connell Davidson 2006: 16).

While policy discourses often present the trafficking-technology as novel it is important to note that, as in much securitisation, "this story of novelty is an old story" (see Bigo 2012: 278). There is a long history of online spaces being used in order to facilitate sexual abuse of children, with published concerns dating back to the 1990s (Hughes

1999b). More recently, Latonero (2011; 2012) has evidenced the use of computers and mobile technology in what appears to be sexual exploitation; this includes the sexual exploitation of children and young people.

Online networks can play a role in facilitating human trafficking both as part of and outwith sex work – especially given their wide reach (see AUTHORS). Thakor and boyd (2014: 280) argue that 'by altering the flow of information and reworking what is and is not visible, technology is reconfiguring many of the networks that underpin many aspects of human trafficking generally and commercial sexual exploitation of children specifically.' More research is needed to explore the location of different practices on exploitation continuums and within everyday life.

A focus on the intermediate level of analysis of trafficking justifies the increasing securitisation of online spaces and stabilises a set of narrow law enforcement responses to the policy narratives of risk from the threatening deviant 'Other'. Securitisation of online activities around sex and sexuality carries two key dangers. Firstly, whilst some online activities are exploitative, there is no quick and obvious way to distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' use of these technologies. Because of the amount of online sexual content and the intermingling of entirely non-controversial uses of these technologies with more controversial ones, there is no realistic prospect of removing commercial sexual content from the Internet without causing significant disruption to unambiguously positive and benign aspects of everyday life. There is an increasing need for a policy focus on aspects of exploitation ranging from systemic problems to everyday unfairnesses, rather than ignorant, futile and unenforceable attempts to draw a clear line between 'good' and 'bad' online material.

Secondly, the securitisation of the Internet risks creating a binary divide between 'good' and 'bad' users by positioning them as criminals, responsible user-citizens, or (potential) victims. Such an approach depends on ignorance of the complexity of everyday uses of the Internet and feeds into either a punitive approach or the expanding rescue industry. The aforementioned process of constructing "an existential threat requiring emergency measures" through securitisation (see Buzan, Waever and Wilde 1997: 24) mitigates against more nuanced – and potentially more effective – responses to exploitation.

There is a need to focus on the contexts in which online sexual content and work are situated, and to challenge exploitation within these contexts. This macro-level thinking could allow a move beyond the focus on either condemning individual instances of online activity, looking for individual victims or user-citizens, or futile attempts to fully separate 'good' and 'bad' sex-related content on the Internet. It can also enable a focus

on issues such as harm reduction in sex work, where online networks can help construct better environments and opportunities for working (see Cusick 2006) rather than reducing the complexity of sex and sexuality online to individual evil-doing, suffering and rescue (see Agustin 2007).

Geography and cybercrime

Discussions of human trafficking as cybercrime have become prominent over recent years with Interpol, Europol and the European Cybercrime Centre (EC3) all highlighting the link between the use of the Internet, cybercrime and criminal activities in relation to human trafficking (see, for example, Europol 2014). In its first annual report issued in 2013, the European Cybercrime Centre (EC3) described cybercrime as both 'borderless' and with striking 'scalability' (EC3 2013: 26) – taking cybercrime away from ideas of borders and scale that have been key to much work around political geography. This fits in with long-running claims that the Internet and communication technologies constitute a 'death of distance' (Cairncross 2001) and therefore geographical ideas like space and place become less relevant (AUTHOR 2015). However, while the EC3's focus on the intermediate level of analysis and interventions may allow broad claims about borderlessness to seem plausible, more robust macro-level analyses refute this.

Graham (2013: 179) offers a challenge to the concept of cyberspace as 'conceived of as both an ethereal alternate dimension which is simultaneously infinite and everywhere (because everyone with an Internet connection can enter), and as fixed in a distinct location, albeit a non-physical one (because…all willing participants are thought to arrive into the same marketspace…and social space).' Likewise, the use of online networks in human trafficking – which may involve activities that fall under EC3's cybercrime remit – does not fit well with the idea of cybercrime as something ethereal and everywhere. To engage with online aspects of human trafficking we should challenge the ignorant belief that cybercrime is (as the EC3 (2013, 26) argues) '*borderless* [which] makes it possible for anyone to commit crimes against governments, businesses and citizens in the EU from almost anywhere around the globe' and has a radical '*scalability* [which] results from the ease to replicate crimes on a massive scale due to the standardisation of software and the possibility to reach millions of computers without any logistical constraints'.

Despite the EC3's claims about cybercrime, cybercrime does not exist in an ethereal alternate dimension, both everywhere and offering a distinct non-physical location. Instead, as should be apparent from a closer consideration of cybercrime and

scalability, cybercrime augments 'physical' crimes and locations rather than floating free of them. The EC3 is correct to note that computing power and bandwidth have been increasing at an impressive pace. However, this is not a liberation from the logistical constraints of the physical world: the ability to use these resources may be constrained by factors such as the bandwidth and electricity supply available where an actor is; the limited and uneven extent to which the world is connected by wireless networks may also impact upon their reach. With cybercrime, scalability can be constrained by social and political factors, such as the ways in which the government and law enforcement in different places have approached different types of crime. For example, different countries and regions have different laws and law enforcement approaches relating to anabolic steroids. There is therefore a history of organisations based outside the US openly selling anabolic steroids online to US residents (GAO 2005). While there is a significant intra-US drug trade (see, for example, Dolliver 2015), US law enforcement impacts on the ways in which this is done and the opportunities to scale up: for example, illegal businesses may be held back by the need to hide from law enforcement or difficulties in processing payments. One significant limit to the scalability of various types of cybercrime will therefore be the law enforcement responses in different jurisdictions and different areas. Likewise, borders continue to matter. Some types of activities, such as political campaigning online, would be serious crimes in some jurisdictions while protected by law enforcement in others.

In terms of human trafficking, questions of borders and scale remain very important. Online networks might be used to scale up trafficking operations: for example, helping to recruit people for trafficking and to market their 'services'. However, this is a matter of augmenting criminal and exploitative activity rather than cybercrime constituting an ethereal space apart from 'offline' trafficking. Exploitation and 'modern slavery' are nothing new, and the Internet is providing new tools to facilitate and challenge them rather than opening up possibilities that are separate from longer-standing practices.

Cybercrime does not allow human trafficking to become borderless. Online networks do allow borders to be crossed in some novel ways, but borders (and thus border crossings) still remain important. While trafficking can and does take place within state boundaries, an important aspect of much trafficking is for people to cross between states. While the Internet does offer new opportunities for international communication, this should be understood as allowing people to engage with and challenge borders in some new ways rather than as a move to a borderless world.

Graham (2013: 181) emphasises the importance of 'employing more suitable and appropriate ways of talking about, and materialising, the Internet…The Internet is

characterised by complex spatialities which are challenging to understand and study, but that does not give us an excuse to fall back on unhelpful metaphors which ignore the Internet's very real, very material, and very grounded geographies.' Likewise, with cybercrime it is important to find more nuanced ways of understanding the topic, including the very material realities of these crimes. This may make such crime harder to understand than the EC3's (2013) idea of a borderless cyber-criminality that is free from logistical constraints. However, in order to theorise the links between online networks and trafficking, it is important to think through the grounded, material, bordered and scaled geographies of cybercrime. Such an analysis will allow a better engagement with macro- and micro- levels of analysis: considering how the trafficking-technology nexus sits both in the context of neoliberalism today, and the ways in which networked technologies increasingly become part of everyday life.

Materialising Online Spaces

Such work to materialise the Internet is – in the context of human trafficking – not simply an 'abstract' concern. A focus on cybercrime as ethereal and everywhere builds a new relationship between trafficking and everyday life. On the one hand, concerns about the risks of online spaces mean that 'victims' of trafficking and perpetrators are perceived as increasingly close to everyday life – whether through traffickers seeking to recruit vulnerable people online or through websites advertising the services of trafficked people – and that a type of governance develops where citizens are expected to self-regulate their engagement with such risks. Within the context of narrow micro-level analyses, human trafficking in online spaces is associated with 'deviant' behaviours. This means the 'rescue industry' can now move beyond a focus on abuse in particular locales in order to find 'victims' and abusers who are always everywhere. On the other hand, much more 'mundane' and low-tech ways in which trafficking and exploitative labour become part of our everyday lives – for example, the use of exploitative or forced labour in supply chains (FRA 2015; ILO 2012; JRF 2012; Song 2004; Strauss 2012) – are increasingly effaced by an 'emergent' concern and emphasis on trafficking online: for example, one might note CSJ's (2015: 12-13) discussion of 'cyber slavery'. A policy focus on ethereal crimes in the non-places of cyberspace – along with an emphasis on extreme examples of 'modern slavery' – makes it easy to pass over the different types of exploitative labour that take place in diverse places and industries; a very productive ignorance is thus maintained.

While we would argue against a crude focus on cyberspace or cybercrime – which seeks to find intermediate level policies and actions to take through organisations like

EC3 while failing to engage with systemic or everyday aspects of the issue – current communication technologies and online spaces are important. Today's social networks and online classifieds are creating spaces quite different from older newsgroups, and the 'deep web' evolves quickly. There are also questions about how mobile technologies are used to overlay or augment physical locations (e.g. Brown et al. 2013) and about spatial variations in access (Graham 2013). Changing attitudes to surveillance and encryption may also prove significant. However, while recognising the importance of relatively recent developments, one should understand these technologies in the context of much older social and political processes: a focus on online networks, trafficking and 'modern slavery' should not pull us away from considering more everyday exploitation, although there may be new risks and opportunities. It remains important to push forward research on 'old fashioned' questions such as systematic exploitation within neoliberalism and the role of exploitation in everyday life.

Conclusion

The paper has looked at the academic, theoretical and policy contexts of online networks and human trafficking. We also draw on the emerging work on online spaces to challenge conceptualisations of cybercrime as both placeless and yet everywhere, and to challenge a developing spatiality of crime and victimhood where human trafficking becomes both impossibly ethereal and everywhere in the everyday. We argue for a move beyond reductive intermediate-level and very limited micro-level analyses that focus on 'criminals' and their 'victims'. Instead, we propose a shift to a macro level, which could allow better accounts of and responses to the complex ethical, political and social challenges posed by trafficking and online networks. This should be accompanied by stronger micro-level analyses to engage with the role of human trafficking and the Internet in everyday life. Agnotology is also important: to understand trafficking and anti-trafficking discourses today, one should consider both the production of policy ignorance around this and how ignorance can be intensely productive. As well as following Foucault (1988: 94) to consider the interplay between knowledge and power – "the effects of truth…the rules of power and the powers of true discourses" – researchers working on trafficking and exploitation should also consider the important and productive interplay between ignorance and power.

Online networks are changing the ways in which trafficking is organised and create new risks and problems, but a fear focused on a 'modern slavery' or 'cyber slavery' that is somehow always everywhere is not a helpful response. The securitisation associated

with this changes everyday life in potentially harmful ways and is not likely to be an effective response to trafficking or exploitation. Rather than panicked attempts to police online spaces, including attempts to remove or heavily censor much or most sexual content on the Internet, there is a need for more nuanced approaches. Presdee (2004: 283) calls for a criminology that can 'unearth and discuss the 'meanings' of crime.' Research on trafficking and technology needs to move beyond a reductive focus on the intermediate- and micro-level dangers of technology and 'modern slavery', and instead engage with the more complex social meanings of (increasingly technologically-mediated) exploitation and agency. As Musto and boyd (2014: 477) argue, capitalising on the potential benefits of technology 'requires far more low-tech solutions; specifically, political will and agitation for redistributive justice, the hardest assets to find'.

Instead of closing things down with a securitising approach or fearing all new technologies, we should consider how online networks might tell new stories and offer invaluable new tools: as Deleuze (1992: 4) argues, when faced with new technologies '[t]here is no need to fear or hope, but to look for new weapons'. Online spaces offer great potential for organisation and action (see AUTHORS) and may be key sites for the emergence of more progressive futures. Rather than a narrow focus on a spectre of 'modern slavery', it is through challenging the systemic nature of exploitation and also engaging with exploitation in 'normal' everyday lives that we might move beyond exploitation in both online and other spaces. Meaningful anti-trafficking action cannot just be about challenging individual 'deviance' or about states seeking new ways to control target populations. Instead, what is needed is a much broader challenge to the systems and the everyday practices through which exploitation takes place.

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Endnotes

[1] We refer to exploitation as a continuum ranging from decent work to forced labour (Skrivankova 2010; see also McGrath 2012).

[2] While the focus of this paper is on laying out a theoretical and conceptual agenda for work around trafficking and anti-trafficking – and these examples are used as illustrations – we build on empirical aspects of this discussion in other research projects. We have carried out more detailed empirical research on public attitudes to and knowledge of human trafficking, on public ignorance, are currently researching constructions of trafficking in online docudramas, and will subsequently be expanding further on this empirical work (see AUTHORS). We would also argue that this paper should be read in the context of the invaluable empirical work by Musto and boyd (2014), Latonero (2011, 2012), and key critical scholars working in the field of human trafficking (for example, O'Connell Davidson 2015), which is helping to build a counter-network to current policy ignorance.

[3] A desk-based review of the available academic and 'grey' literature published up till July 2013 found that, despite a significant amount of discussion, Zhang's (2009) observations regarding the empirical and conceptual limitations of what has been written on the topic remain largely valid (although we note the stronger literature we did find in the discussion below). More recently Mustow and boyd (2014) find that there is still 'scant' critical research on the interplay between trafficking and technology.

[4] See http://www.jrf.org.uk/topic/forced-labour

[5] See also boyd et al. (2011) on trafficking and technology.

[6] Bigo (2012: 277) presents securitisation as the 'destruction' and 'perversion' of democracy by the neoliberal state. This process today involves the increasing intensity of surveillance measures, but can also go beyond this: for example, some attempts to censor online discussions will go beyond 'just' surveillance and some data analytics and attempts at pre-emption go beyond the frame of 'conventional' surveillance (AUTHOR 2012). While moves to increase surveillance are an important aspect of ignorant responses to the trafficking-technology nexus, securitisation is a more helpful frame for discussion of this topic: incorporating aspects of policy and practice that go beyond surveillance.

[7] Surveys were undertaken within the context of 'ANONYMISED' project. Surveys consisting of representative national samples (N=1,000) in Ukraine (age range 15-59, PAPI), Hungary (age 18 and older, CAPI), and Great Britain (including England,

Scotland and Wales only, age 16 and older, CAPI) were undertaken by market research companies in December 2013 – January 2014 as part of countrywide face-to-face omnibus surveys. Deviations from the target structure were corrected by using a weighting procedure to convert the household representative samples to the population representative samples. To enable cross-national comparison accounting for variation in age across national samples, responses falling within the age range of 18-59 were selected from each of the sample: N=693 out of 693 responses from the sample in Great Britain; N=693 randomly selected out of 719 responses representing the 18-59 age group from the sample in Hungary, and N=693 randomly selected out of 958 responses representing the 18-59 age group from the sample in Ukraine; results reported here are valid at the 95% confidence level to plus or minus 3.7 percentage points. See AUTHOR for further details.

[8] This might also be conceptualised in terms of the construction of selective ignorance, biopolitical management and dissemination of risk and responsibility (Nadesan 2008), or socially organised denial (Norgaard 2011). The broader processes in which ignorance and denial on a collective level occur in response to social circumstances and remain related to political economy are further discussed in (Author 2016).