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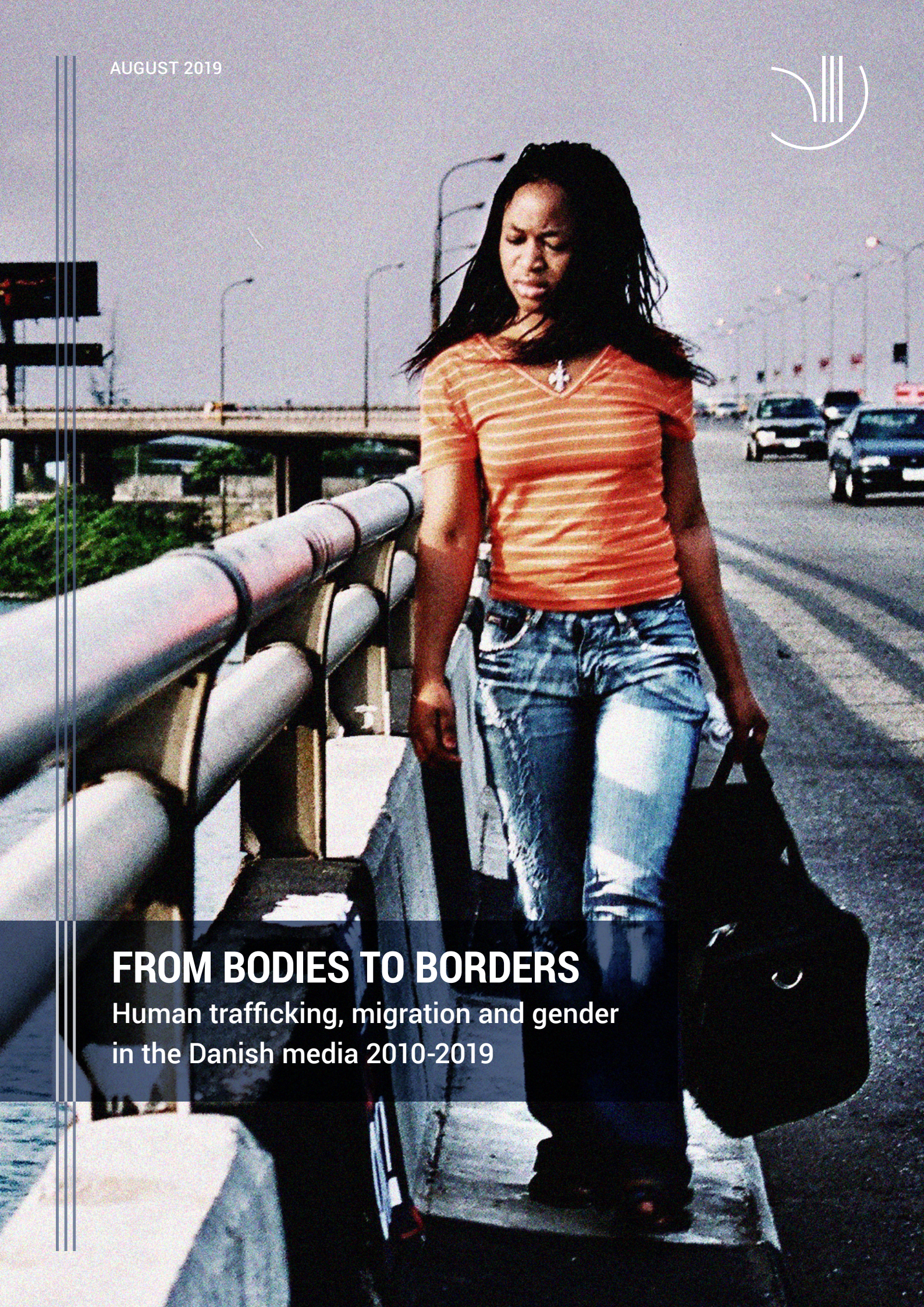

FROM BODIES TO BORDERS

Human trafficking, migration and gender in the Danish media 2010-2019

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Sine Plambech
Senior Researcher, Danish Institute for International Studies
spl@diis.dk

Maria Brus Pedersen
Journalist
mariabrus@gmail.com

DIIS REPORT: FROM BODIES TO BORDERS

DIIS · Danish Institute for International Studies
Østbanegade 117, DK-2100 Copenhagen, Denmark
Tel: +45 32 69 87 87
E-mail: diis@diis.dk
www.diis.dk

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FROM BODIES TO BORDERS

Human trafficking, migration and gender in the Danish media 2010-2019

Sine Plambech

Maria Brus Pedersen

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SUMMARY

In recent decades, news media all over the world have increasingly covered the issue of human trafficking. The point of departure for this report is that the media play an important role in informing and molding public and to some extent political opinion on human trafficking and that therefore how journalists do their job is an important area for research. This report is a review of the way in which human trafficking was framed in the Danish news media in the period 2010-2019, guided by the main research question; How do news media frame human trafficking?

The report is based upon a review of 54 news articles, interviews with five journalists covering human trafficking in the Danish media, three investigative cases of human trafficking and one media campaign. The review has three main findings.

First, the framing of human trafficking in the Danish media has changed significantly over the past decade, from mainly covering human trafficking solely as a matter of prostitution and a human rights issue for women in 2010 to becoming an issue of migration with security and legal implications in 2019. As such there has been a development away from a focus on women's 'bodies' to concentrating instead on 'borders' and migration politics.

'There has been a development from a focus on women's "bodies" to concentrating instead on "borders" and migration politics.'

Secondly, in comparison to 2010, today the media more commonly describe the trafficking of men to forced labor and human trafficking generally to other sectors than prostitution. This reflects an increase in these kinds of cases in Denmark, but it also reflects a more complex understanding of human trafficking as a labor issue. Nonetheless, the framing continues to be significantly gendered. Though identified victims of trafficking in Denmark are most usually migrants, the men are framed primarily as migrant workers in exploitative situations, whereas the women are described as victims of trafficking. This gendered framing is confirmed by the journalists we interviewed and derives primarily from the perspective that prostitution is victimizing by default and is not seen as a kind of work.

Thirdly, despite the more nuanced framing, simplistic portrayals using the language of 'sex slavery', 'the meat market' and 'women selling themselves' still risk dehumanizing and overshadowing the complexity of human trafficking. In particular, this is because it is the media, rather than those who have been identified as victims of trafficking, who use these terms to describe their situation, as some of the journalists we interviewed also confirmed. However, simplistic portrayals and clickbait headings are also entwined with the current working and structural conditions of the media, in which journalists generally face the challenges of short deadlines and a lack of resources.

This report was commissioned by the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), in partnership with the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Its aim is to not only provide insights into the framing of human trafficking in the Danish media, but also to serve as a learning tool for journalists covering human trafficking.

The report has the following suggestions for journalists covering issues of human trafficking:

- Be cautious with language. There is often a difference between the language used by politicians and NGOs and the language used by migrant workers to describe their situations. Sensationalist language like 'prostitutes', 'sex slaves' and 'meat markets' are loaded terms that contribute to marginalization and stigmatization.

- Migrant workers are not only victims of trafficking, they have agency in respect of their own migration trajectories: the one does not exclude the other.

- Human trafficking is a notoriously complex subject involving migration, border politics, gender, consent, agency and morality. Seek to address this complexity.

- Human trafficking can be used as a yardstick for many different political agendas: consider which agendas you might be contributing to.

- Choose carefully the pictures used to illustrate an article: do they contribute to marginalization and stereotypical framings of what a victim of trafficking might look like?

- Consider using counter narratives, activist reporting and investigative journalism as these approaches contribute to expanding our understanding of human trafficking.

INTRODUCTION: HOW DO NEWS MEDIA FRAME HUMAN TRAFFICKING?

In recent decades, news media all over the world have increasingly covered the issue of human trafficking. The point of departure for this report is the significant role of the media in informing and molding both public and to some extent political opinion on human trafficking, making how journalists do their job an important area for research. This report reviews the ways in which human trafficking was framed in the Danish news media in 2010-2019, guided by the main research question: How do news media frame human trafficking?

Understanding the news media's framing of human trafficking was the reason behind a 2009 study of this issue in relation to the US news media. It showed the dynamics between framing by the media, policy interventions, courtroom procedures and the effect on the people involved. This present report draws some of the same insights, although on a smaller scale. To our knowledge an analysis of this type has not been undertaken in Denmark before. It thus provides the reader with new insights into in the evolution of how the Danish media treated human trafficking from 2010 to 2019.

In the 1990s, the US media primarily framed human trafficking as a violation of women's human rights. However, in the wake of the terrorist attacks in the US on September 11th, 2001, human trafficking increasingly came to be viewed as a national security threat, later evolving into being understood within a framework of criminality, that is, as a crime requiring police and border control interventions (Farrell and Fahy, 2009). The reframing of trafficking in the US from a women's human rights issue to a national security issue led to an increased focus on the prosecution of criminals, the disruption of criminal networks and the protection of US borders. The US study also concluded that the underlying root causes of trafficking – poverty, gendered inequality, global economic policies, ethnic conflicts and economic transition – were rarely addressed in the overall framing of trafficking in the US. As a result, US anti-trafficking initiatives ended up potentially undermining the fight against human trafficking instead of supporting it (ibid.).

The US study was published in 2009 in a post-September 11th era that was focused on combating terrorism. This present report focuses on the ten years that came after the US study, a period in which Europe perceived itself to be beset with a significant migration and refugee crisis. This crisis influenced new ways of reporting on migrants and migration, including traffickers and the victims of trafficking. It is therefore important to understand the framing of human trafficking in the Danish media in this light and to show how this might inform

policy interventions. In brief, global events seem to have shaped Danish media framing of human trafficking in the past decade.

As the following chapters will show, as far as the Danish media are concerned, this framing is generally more nuanced today than ten years ago. However, there are still significant challenges. Of the 54 articles analyzed for this report, thirteen used explicit sensationalist language, and nine of the thirteen dealt with trafficking for prostitution. Simplistic, sensational or dehumanizing media framings risk overshadowing the fact that human trafficking is a complicated phenomenon to define, often circling around complex issues of force and consent affected by the contexts of local economies, social status, migrant status and gender. In the worst-case scenario, simplistic media framings shape simple political solutions to the complexity of human trafficking, ending by doing more harm than good.

Methodology: a review of 54 news articles, 2010-2019

The report is based upon an analysis of 54 newspaper articles published in the Danish media between 2010 and May 2019.[1] The sources were selected based on the breadth of their readership and provide broad coverage of events both topically and geographically.[2] The articles cover human trafficking in all sectors and are not limited to the human trafficking of women for prostitution.[3]

A method involving both qualitative and quantitative media analysis was used to collect information on how the Danish media treated human trafficking in this period. Each article was coded based on its content: for example, whether it was inspired by a case study, a piece of legislation or policy, whether it referred to a specific form of human trafficking, whether it mentioned migration, and which source it relied on. Seven of the 54 articles were op-eds, two of them authored by a member of an organization and five by politicians. The remaining 47 articles were written by journalists at various newspapers.

[1] News media are defined here as news articles, commentaries, blogs and interviews. The delivery formats were both hardcopy and digital.

[2] The articles were selected to be as representative as possible, though we accept that a different selection of articles might have provided slightly different insights.

[3] This report uses the term 'victim of human trafficking' and 'human trafficking' when talking about people who have been officially identified as such by the Danish authorities, as well as when these terms are used in political and legal definitions.

In the coding process, the key approach was to further analyze and group how news media items framed human trafficking using the following six pre-selected themes:

- Human rights
- Security
- Prostitution
- Migration
- Crime and prosecution
- Other

To provide empirical insights and background to the ways in which the stories were produced, the report is also based on five qualitative interviews with journalists who cover or have covered human trafficking issues in Denmark. The five journalists were selected so as to represent a broad selection of media outlets in Denmark, from newspapers and TV to investigative journalism, news articles and tabloid journalism.[4]

The report also bases its findings on:

- Three Danish cases of investigative work by journalists that provided the reader and viewer with new insights into human trafficking.
- One example of a focused campaign initiated by a mass-media outlet in collaboration with an NGO.
- Examples of dehumanizing pictures and language supporting stereotypes of human trafficking.

The report provides few statistics or numerical analyses of the media items it reviews. Instead, it combines the qualitative analysis of the news items with insights gained from the secondary literature and the interviews with journalists who had covered human trafficking in the Danish media to reveal the tendencies and developments in Danish media attitudes to human trafficking from 2010 to 2019.

[4] All informants are anonymized in the report. We would like to extend our thanks to the five journalists for providing us with insights into their journalistic procedures.

Human trafficking and the state of the Danish media

According to the World Press Freedom Index, Denmark is among the top five countries globally when it comes to press freedom and independence.[5] However, the Danish media are presented with some of the same challenges of changing consumer habits and falling advertising revenue as those faced by media outlets globally. This affects, for instance, the time allocated for investigative journalism, the time set aside for research, and the demand for sensational headings and clickbaits which attract readers. Nonetheless, a majority of Danes see journalistic news media as contributing to a 'healthy democracy with a strong cohesion', and people in general find 'journalistic news more important than social media in creating and maintaining an enlightened society' (Lehmann and Blach-Ørsten, 2019).

Covering the complexity of human trafficking at a time when the media are under pressure can be challenging. The structural changes in the Danish media landscape result in changing working conditions for journalists, as one of the journalists interviewed for this report pointed out:

'The media is under much more pressure today, and with an issue like human trafficking, that means we only ever scratch the surface. In previous days I would have spent three weeks on a story, but those days are long gone. Ten to fifteen years ago I would have gone to Nigeria to cover the story from there as well, but today there aren't the resources for that.'

These structural changes influence the ways in which global themes like human trafficking are covered and framed. However, it is also evident that Danish journalists have good access to politicians, the police and organizations for purposes of interview. Journalists also have extended access to official court documents and can request access to documents from the public administration under the Access to Public Administrations Files Act,[6] though they do not generally have access to transcriptions of the police wiretaps that are used as evidence in court cases involving human trafficking (Junker, Information, 2015). The fact that journalists generally have access to political, judicial and criminal justice sources allows for a more nuanced reporting on human trafficking.

[5] The organization Reporters without Borders draws up the World Press Freedom Index each year, ranking 180 countries according to their level of press freedom. In 2019, Denmark ranked number 5. https://rsf.org/en/world-press-freedom-index

[6] The Access to Public Administration Files Act was changed in 2013. The new Act has been criticized by the Danish Union of Journalists for making it harder for journalists to get access to files.

Photo 1. Danish Broadcast, DR1- HORISONT in Italy, documenting the situation of Nigerian migrant women in the program 'The sex slaves of Europe'. © Søren Moon.

WOMEN ARE VICTIMS, MEN ARE WORKERS

The articles reviewed for this report document the existence of a significant gendered dimension to the framing of human trafficking. Since 2010 the media has increasingly focused on the trafficking of men for forced labor and human trafficking in sectors other than prostitution, reflecting a more complex understanding of the issue of human trafficking as a labor issue. Yet, though identified victims of trafficking in Denmark are migrants, men are seen primarily as migrant workers in exploitative situations, whereas the women are described as victims of trafficking. This gendered framing is confirmed by the journalists we interviewed and derives primarily from the perspective that prostitution is seen as victimizing by default and not as a kind of work.

For example, in most of the articles about Nigerian migrant women in Denmark who are labelled as having been "trafficked", very little attention is paid to the women's motives for migrating, while this is more often the case for the male interviewees. Often the women are described as having been tricked or sold into prostitution (Jørgensen, *BT*, 2012). The selling of sex frames them as victims above all else, including in cases where the Danish authorities have not in fact identified them as victims of human trafficking. One Danish journalist, working on a tabloid newspaper on a series of articles, described it as follows when asked if he and his colleagues considered that the women had chosen to migrate and had known they were going to be selling sex:

'We didn't really go into that. Of course we talked about it, but I think we chose not to explore it further because that was not important. Even if they (the women) had known they were coming here to work on the streets as prostitutes, I don't think it would have mattered to us because it was about how they were treated, the conditions they were living under and the exploitation of their situation.'

Research shows that many of the women who are identified as victims of trafficking began their journeys with an aspiration to be labor migrants. As they enter Europe irregularly without access to the formal labor market, they have little choice but to work in informal sectors such as sex work to repay their often overwhelming debts to those who have facilitated their journeys to Europe (Plambech, 2018). When the media do not give attention to women's motives for migrating, seeking a better life, building a future, earning money, finding employment and repaying their debts, they contribute to the portrayal of migrant women as less capable of making their own decisions and as childlike and naïve in comparison to their male counterparts.

The terminology used in this context might sometimes contribute to this framing. 'Selling their bodies' (Skjoldager and Eskesen, *Politiken*, 2011) 'selling themselves'

(Holst, *Berlingske*, 2017) and 'sex slaves' (Lauridtsen and Voergaard, *BT*, 2011), the latter term in particular conjuring up images of the transatlantic slave trade, of people in shackles stacked away in large ships to be sold, are examples of simplistic terms generally rejected by researchers and some NGOs because they are not considered representative of what contemporary migration and trafficking looks like, nor does this acknowledge that most women who are victims of human trafficking are also labor migrants.

In contrast, men who are identified as victims of trafficking are primarily seen as exploited workers. The trafficking of men for purposes of forced labor is mainly construed as a human rights issue, as well as a workers' rights issue. The articles on the trafficking of men almost solely contains stories of men trafficked from East European countries such as Romania to work in Denmark. One investigative story not included in the 54 articles involved men from Pakistan who had taken out loans to come to Denmark to work (Langhorn, *dr.dk*, 2019), while one case involved Filipino truck-drivers in Denmark who were registered with a Polish transportation company (Eriksen and Halskov, *3F*, 2018). The Romanian men, and sometimes also the women, were promised jobs in Denmark but ended up working for long hours with little to no pay and living in run-down houses, basements, sheds and on balconies (Larsen, *dr.dk*, 2014).

'Human trafficking is not just about people trafficked into prostitution'

One journalist explained the difference between covering male and female victims of trafficking as follows:

'I think, when you work on a story as a journalist, you also work on the story as a normal person. And in my universe, trafficking for prostitution is worse than trafficking for forced labor. There is no doubt that men trafficked for forced labor are exploited, but mentally, I don't think they leave the situation as scarred as the women trafficked for prostitution…but my original impression of human trafficking, before I really researched it, was that it concerned women who were practically sold into the sex industry. That is the cliché image. But I think it's important that we open our eyes to the fact that human trafficking is not just about people trafficked into prostitution, but that was also news to me.'

The tendency to see female migrants in the sex industry as primarily victims and male migrants in other sectors as primarily workers risks both overlooking the fact that male workers are trafficked, and erasing the agency and migration aspects of female sex-workers, who are also trapped in exploitative situations. Such media images shape public perceptions of what a victim of trafficking looks like and

might influence convictions in court as well (Skaaning, Frandsen and Gertsen, *dr.dk*, 2019). From 2009 to 2018, according to the Danish Center against Human Trafficking, 74 people were trafficked for forced labor in Denmark, but there have still been no convictions (Skaaning, Frandsen and Gertsen, *dr.dk*, 2019). This stands in stark contrast to the statements of international organizations that this form of trafficking is increasing (Rodgers, Information, 2011). In 2014, when a Romanian man was found not guilty of trafficking four fellow Romanians who had been living on his balcony, politicians criticized the law on trafficking for being hard to use and not designed for cases of trafficking for purposes of forced labor (Gustavsen, *Jyllands-Posten*, 2014).

FROM PROSTITUTION TO MIGRATION

As already noted, the framing of human trafficking in the Danish news media has changed from covering human trafficking as solely an issue of prostitution and women's human rights to increasingly seeing it as an issue of migration with security and legal implications. As such there has been a development in media from a focus on "bodies", that is, women's bodies, to concentrating on "borders" and migration politics. This development is similarly reflected in the ways in which NGOs frame their work and in how the police make interventions, as well as representing a significant change in respect of which government institutions had human trafficking as their area of intervention.

In 2008 the Copenhagen police created their first special unit to focus solely on human trafficking in women (the so-called Kvindehandels-gruppen), which was renamed the Section for the Investigation of Homicide and Human Trafficking for Prostitution (Sektionen for efterforskning af Drab og Menneskehandel til Prostitution) when it moved in 2014.

In 2018 all sections were renamed, the section dealing with trafficking becoming **the** Section for Homicide and Human Trafficking (Sektionen for drab og menneskehandel) to better reflect the fact that it deals with human trafficking in all sectors, not just prostitution. Likewise, the leading Danish NGO assisting victims of trafficking was previously called 'The Nest – Stop Human Trafficking in Women', but it changed its organizational name in 2007/2008 to The Nest International, reflecting its awareness that human trafficking was not just a matter of the trafficking of women for prostitution.[7]

The understanding and framing of human trafficking as not being only about women in prostitution is likewise reflected in Danish policy documents. Since 2002 the Danish government has drawn up a series of 'action plans' to combat human trafficking. The first action plan, the 'Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Women,' was in force from 2002 to 2006 and had a clear focus on prostitution and women's human rights. It was published and signed off only by the Ministry of Equality and Social Affairs.

However, the following Action Plan, covering 2007 to 2010, focused on both human trafficking in general and prostitution and was called the 'Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings'. This shift from 'woman' to 'human' now had four ministries as signatories, reflecting a change in political awareness of the complexity of human trafficking. The four ministries were those of Equality,

[7] Source: Leader of The Nest International, Kira West.

Refugees, Immigrants and Integration, Foreign Affairs and Justice. In 2011 even more ministries signed yet another Action Plan (2011-2014), including the Ministries of Finance, Social Affairs, Interior Affairs and Health, and Employment.

Acknowledging that trafficking exists within many sectors, against the background of the 2011-2014 Action Plan, the Danish Tax Agency trained a thousand of their employees to spot signs of human trafficking for purposes of forced labor in 2012. Prior to this, the Danish Tax Agency had also mainly focused on human trafficking connected with prostitution (Halskov and Højgaard, *3F*, 2012).

The 2015-2018 Action Plan also had the Ministry of Trade and Development as a signatory. The current action plan (2019-2021) has been published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This reflects the fact that the Minister for Equality, who has the responsibility for coordinating this area of activity organizationally, is part of this ministry. However, the action plan has also been signed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs. This implies a shift in the political framing of human trafficking from a women's issue to a labor, foreign policy and global issue. These different shifts are also reflected in the media framing.

Human trafficking as a labor issue

In 2010, when human trafficking was almost solely treated as a prostitution issue, it was commonly referred to in the media as 'trafficking in women' (*kvindehandel*). However, this term was slowly phased out and rarely appears in articles after 2012.[8] Media coverage of human trafficking likewise changed and started covering human trafficking in other sectors, such as construction, cleaning, agriculture and transportation, as well as au pairs and adults and children trafficked for crime.

However, when certain articles treated human trafficking as something other than prostitution, such as forced labor, it was done with the clear intention of providing a counter-narrative (Rodgers, *Information*, 2011; Matzen, *Weekendavisen*, 2011) or in niche media like 'The Worker' (*Arbejderen*), a paper published by the Danish Communist Party (*Arbejderen*, 2010, 2012). Most media coverage was focused on Nigerian women who were labeled victims of trafficking for prostitution to Europe (Johansen and Søgaard, *Ekstra Bladet*, 2010), but in 2010 there was also a significant case of six Romanian men and three women being convicted of trafficking Romanian women for prostitution in Copenhagen (Skjoldager, *Politiken*, 2010).

[8] Except when the special police unit targeting the human trafficking of women is mentioned.

In 2013 and 2014, stories of East European men and women being trafficked as forced labor in Denmark emerged (Halskov, *3F*, 2013), including a number of significant cases of Romanians working in the cleaning industry in Denmark. In a series called The dirty cleaning (*Den beskidte rengøring*), the trade journal *3F* and the newspaper *Politiken* collaborated in uncovering a number of cases of Romanians being exploited in the Danish cleaning industry. The cases were named after where the various Romanian workers had been living: the Balcony Case (*Altansagen*), the Basement Case (*Kældersagen*) and the Garage Case (*Garagesagen*). In none of these cases were the accused traffickers convicted of trafficking for purposes of forced labor (Skaaning, Frandsen and Gertsen, *dr.dk*, 2019). Nonetheless they all received massive media attention, increasing the focus on crime and prosecution. The lack of convictions caused experts and prosecutors to question whether the law on human trafficking was actually useful for prosecuting perpetrators of other kinds of human trafficking than for prostitution.

Human trafficking and the 'migration crisis'

As the European migration crisis unfolded, an increasing number of articles on human trafficking mention migration and migrants.[9] From 2010 to 2014, prior to the crisis, only six articles mentioned migration and migrants. Three of these articles had a clear counter-narrative purpose, trying from the outset to go beyond dominant narratives to improve understanding of the complexities and experiences of human trafficking (Rodgers, *Information*, 2011; Matzen, *Weekendavisen*, 2011) (Søndergaard, *Kristeligt Dagblad*, 2012). From 2015 to 2019, during and in the aftermath of the migration crisis fourteen articles mentioned migration, indicating a clear shift in framing.

The media also began to focus on how and why people from Eastern European countries and Nigeria, for instance, embark on the journey to Western Europe and ultimately end up in exploitative and indebted situations (Matzen, *Weekendavisen*, 2016) (Santos, *Information*, 2016) (Vilsbøll, *Politiken*, 2017), and it is clear that it became increasingly hard for journalists to differentiate between refugees, migrants, victims of human trafficking and traffickers. More attention was paid to the traffickers and their involvement, backgrounds and motivations for facilitating migration. Stories like 'At home with the traffickers' (Villesen, *Information*, 2015) and 'The female organizers of prostitution' (Funch, *Information*, 2015) challenged the stereotypical narrative of the exploitative trafficker and the victimized women.

[9] The articles contained one or more of the words 'migrant', 'migrants' and 'migration'.

Another tendency was for human trafficking to be used as a lever for arguments opposing immigration (Kongstad, *Jyllands-Posten*, 2013) (Ahrendtsen, *Kristeligt Dagblad*, 2017). This is similar to the previously mentioned US study, which concluded that the reframing of human trafficking as an issue of migration and crime '*tapped into a strong anti-immigration sentiment supported by the media that illegal migration of people opens the door to a host of other transnational crime, including organized crime'* (Farrell and Fahy, 2009). There is an increasing focus on EU politics, border politics and migration in media coverage of human trafficking from 2016 onwards, a focus that has since become somewhat ingrained in the coverage of human trafficking.

Photo 2. A Romanian construction worker: 'We have no contract, we work illegally every day'. Screen shot from the TV documentary: 'The slaves of the construction industry' (Langhorn, DR, 2019).

HUMAN TRAFFICKING ACROSS POLITICAL AGENDAS

The fight against human trafficking fuels multiple political interventions and opinions across the political landscape, left, center and right. When politicians speak out against human trafficking in an argument for specific interventions, they commonly draw on a powerful language of exploitation, drawing, like the media, on rather stereotypical ideas of what human trafficking consists of. When trafficking is used as a lever for political arguments, it rarely allows complex structural questions on the politics of migration, global inequalities and border politics. Rather, to get the message across and invoke readers' emotions, these stories commonly rely on dichotomies between victim and trafficker in which the victim is most commonly a woman in prostitution. In 2016, on EU's Anti-trafficking Day, the Danish Minister of Equality, Ellen Trane Nørby, wrote an op-ed in the newspaper *Kristeligt Dagblad*, arguing that '*It is our duty to turn the spotlight on prosecuting more traffickers for their inhuman actions. Human trafficking is a violent and rough violation of human rights.*' The op-ed came in the wake of what was known as the Wasp's Nest Case, where Romanian citizens were brought to Denmark and had their identities abused for criminal purposes, yet the Minister was quick to direct the conversation to girls being trafficked for prostitution (Nørby, *Kristeligt Dagblad*, 2016). '*In The Wasp's Nest Case, 79 people testified against their traffickers in court, and this helped bring them down. But in far too few cases, victims of, for example, trafficking for prostitution chose to testify against their traffickers'* (ibid.).

Playing the trafficking card

Human trafficking is therefore often invoked across the political spectrum, despite the argument from researchers that the term in and of itself has lost much of its meaning by having been collapsed into the same categories as prostitution, smuggling and migration. Yet, 'playing the trafficking card' is politically effective, as Sine Plambech, co-author of this report and migration researcher argued in an op-ed in the Danish newspaper *Information*:

'"Trafficking" causes panic and calls for political intervention. The "Trafficking Card" is notoriously played when other terms are no longer powerful enough to gain attention. Today, the word "trafficking" causes strong images of people in chains, gruesome criminals and sex slavery. Who wouldn't want to eradicate that?'[10]

In the following, a few articles show how playing the trafficking card leads to often opposing and conflicting arguments. In an article from 2010, one police officer remarked that the open borders of the EU meant that Denmark was being *overrun* by 'criminal Romanians' (Blok Thomsen and Maltesen, *Politiken*, 2010). The Romanian migrants were described as *'multi-criminal human traffickers, completely unscrupulous and with little regard for human life'*. Fueled by the freedom of movement for workers within the EU, it was now possible for Romanian traffickers to enter Denmark freely. Trafficking was here framed as a security issue. In 2013, trafficking was used as an argument for excluding Bulgaria and Romania from the Schengen agreement (Kongstad, *Jyllands-Posten*, 2013). Here, trafficking was also treated as a security problem, and an MEP for Venstre, Jens Rohde, recommended that Denmark back Germany, Finland and the Netherlands in vetoing Romanian and Bulgarian membership of Schengen. Here trafficking is used as a lever to argue against countries becoming part of Schengen.

In 2015, in the lead up to the EU referendum, almost the opposite argument was made, namely that we should give up our EU opt-out and participate more in European collaboration aimed at helping victims of trafficking and combating human trafficking (Kongstad, *Jyllands-Posten*, 2015). In the previous examples, the EU and the free movement of labor were seen as problematic because of human trafficking. Yet in this article 'more EU' was the suggested remedy in the fight against human trafficking. A spokesperson from the anti-trafficking organization Hope Now argued in the article that:

'Halfhearted participation in EU police cooperation will seriously weaken our ability to gather information on trafficking.' The article went on to argue that '*Human trafficking, which has become a billion kroner industry for organized gangs, is often seen as modern day slavery, where criminals recruit, transfer, sell or receive women, men and*

[10] Plambech, Information 2016. This op-ed by co-author Sine Plambech is not included in the 54 articles analyzed for this report.

children through force with the aim of exploiting them for prostitution, forced labor, begging or organ donation.'

Here trafficking is framed as a security and immigration problem requiring Denmark's full participation in the EU.

The same pro-EU argument was made in 2019 in the wake of the exposure of horrendous living and working conditions for Filipino truck-drivers in Denmark. An MEP for the Social Democratic Party, Christel Schaldemose, wrote an op-ed in *Jyllands-Posten* arguing that Denmark needed more EU collaboration, not less. She acknowledged that the free movement of labor within the EU had created issues with underpaid workers in Denmark, but she also argued that this problem must be solved at the EU level. She saw the solution as being a new, joint European Employment Office (Schaldemose, *Jyllands-Posten*, 2019).

In 2017, human trafficking was again used as an argument for the exact opposite: more Danish sovereignty (Ahrendtsen, *Kristeligt Dagblad*, 2017). Alex Ahrendtsen, MP for the Danish People's Party, wrote an op-ed arguing for less European cooperation and suggesting that Denmark should leave the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Prior to this, four Romanian men were convicted of human trafficking, but the men could not be deported to Romania to serve their prison sentences there, as the Romanian prison cells were too small according to the ECHR. The conventions, in Ahrendtsen's opinion, were not made to protect law-abiding citizens, as they made it impossible to deport criminals. He argued that the issue with 'the criminal gypsies', as he referred to these Romanian men, exposed 'the ECHR for the circus that it really was.' In his opinion the reasonable thing to do would be for Denmark to leave the conventions. Human trafficking was framed as a crime requiring prosecution and therefore more Danish sovereignty as well.

In another case from 2013, the human trafficking card was played in a different way, to gain attention and enhance the possibilities of a Nigerian woman called Omo Amenagawon obtaining a Danish residence permit (Gertsen and Bannor-Kristensen, *dr.dk*, 2013). Omo had aided the police in the prosecution of her traffickers, since she had received threats from her traffickers' network in Nigeria. Although she was recognized as a victim of trafficking by the Danish Center Against Human Trafficking and the Refugee Appeals Board, her plea for asylum was denied, and she was to be returned to Nigeria. Politicians from the left and right came to Omo's defense and demanded that the Minister of Justice let her stay in Denmark (Henriksen, dr.dk, 2013) (Sæhl, *Politiken*, 2013) (Albæk, *dr.dr*, 2013) Amnesty International even organized a petition to gain Omo residency in Denmark.

However, the newspaper *Politiken* revealed that Omo's traffickers had not been convicted of trafficking, and the Refugee Appeals Board could not prove that Omo would be in danger if she returned to Nigeria (Skjoldager and Sæhl, *Politiken*, 2013). One of the accused traffickers had been cleared of all charges and received compensation, while another was convicted of pimping. Zenia Stampe, MP for the Danish Social Liberal Party, wrote an op-ed criticizing the Danish Broadcasting Corporation's (DR) coverage for 'leaving out important parts of the story' to make it seem more serious and provoke stronger reactions from the public (Stampe, *Politiken*, 2013). She argued that, had the DR told Omo's story in a more 'truthful, loyal and nuanced way', it would not have taken over the media agenda the way it did. Later, the DR acknowledged the criticism, saying that they should have mentioned that the accused traffickers had been acquitted of charges of trafficking (Mollerup, *dr.dk*, 2013).

Invoking 'the trafficking card' can therefore support an argument for either more EU cooperation or for more Danish sovereignty and border controls. It can also be used as an argument for why certain countries should not participate in the Schengen agreement and as an argument for granting asylum to 'good victims' who aid in the prosecution of their traffickers.

Figure 1. Playing the 'trafficking card' in the media as a lever for political agendas.

- More EU cooperation – less EU cooperation
- More Danish sovereignty – less Danish sovereignty
- More border control – less border control

JOURNALISM, ACTIVISM AND COUNTER-NARRATIVES

On the one hand the media coverage of the past decade reveals the greater complexities involved in accounting for human trafficking, while on the other hand the media are coming under greater pressure themselves. This dilemma was significant for the Danish journalists we interviewed about their work on human trafficking and is reflected in their coverage of the issue.

Covering human trafficking often involves working in environment where access is limited. Migrant workers and victims of human trafficking working and living in Denmark irregularly are not necessarily interested in telling their stories to journalists. This makes finding cases time-consuming. One journalist on a tight deadline knew that they had to spend a whole night in the red-light district before they could record anything. '*Luckily our editors were fine with that, even though we are insanely understaffed.*' For some journalists, having a case would determine whether or not they had a story: '*In our world, you have to have cases to move on. Previously we might have had more cases, more angles to the story, but here I had to take what I could get. Today we cannot afford to drop a story.*' For some journalists, this means that they had to collaborate with anti-trafficking NGOs, who then selected and supplied their cases for them.

Another journalist, working in television, emphasized the importance of finding cases that '*were good on TV*'. Some journalists we interviewed talked about the importance and the challenge of documenting stories of human trafficking. One had difficulties accessing police and court files on cases, which made it harder to document the number of convictions. They found the police somewhat uncooperative in granting access. Another journalist was not able to document the promises that the migrant workers had been made in their countries of origin.

Types of coverage

Overall the coverage can be grouped as in the following typology, which reveals six types of coverage of human trafficking:

- **Case stories** that revolve around a case, often person focused, illustrating a problem or tendency.
- **Crime stories** that revolve around the arrest, imprisonment, court case or sentence of someone accused of human trafficking.
- **'A night in the red-light district' stories** where the reporter has been to Copenhagen's red-light district at night and interviewed migrant sex-workers. These stories are often illustrated with dark pictures showing red lights and women with either blurred faces or with their backs to the camera.

- **Investigative stories:** coverage over longer periods of time seeking to reveal a network, crime or example of government neglect within the realm of human trafficking, as well as publishing in-depth knowledge of the issue.
- **Background stories** that are published after a court case and that put the story into a broader context of migration and global relations. Background stories are often also counter-narrative stories.
- **Counter-narratives** stories challenging common perceptions of human trafficking and migration, for example, that migrant sex workers are inherently victims of human trafficking.

The counter-narrative is a specific genre of the coverage of trafficking which often seeks to explore complex concepts of consent and force, economy and power, through personal stories in feature-length articles. These stories often challenge Western perspectives of perpetrator and victim, exploring instead the role of poverty and unemployment as drivers for migration and trafficking. Without disregarding the exploitation and violence that victims of trafficking may face, these stories typically seek to include interviews with researchers commonly emphasizing the agency of the migrants and their motivations for migrating. However, researchers are interviewed and appear in articles throughout the different categories, and not only in counter-narratives. The article 'At home with the traffickers' (Villesen, *Information*, 2015) presents a more nuanced picture of Romanian traffickers as young boys from poor backgrounds who could not even afford to buy gasoline for their car. In an interview in the article in *Information*, the anthropologist Trine Mygind Korsby uses the term 'transnational pimping' to describe the way these men related to the women they traffic to Western Europe. The article also challenges perceptions of victims of trafficking, stating that they often see themselves as entrepreneurial business women traveling to Europe to make money.

The article 'An untrustworthy woman' (Junker, *Information*, 2015) revolves around a 2014 case of fourteen Romanian men and two women being convicted of trafficking nine Romanian women for prostitution. Many of the women were in relationships with their traffickers, and the article portrays the often intimate relationship between those who are labelled traffickers by the media, lawmakers and the criminal justice system and those labelled victims of trafficking. One of the women, Ramona, did not see herself as a victim of trafficking, but saw selling sex in Europe as a way to support her family. Such articles provide the reader with insights into why migrant women sell sex and show that often it is the only work available to them. Likewise the story 'The female organizers of prostitution' (Funch, *Information*, 2015) provides a counter-narrative regarding who the

traffickers are and shows that those who are seen as traffickers by the media and the authorities are often migrant women who facilitate and profit from other migrant women's sex work in Europe. This provides new insights into both the role of the trafficker, who may well have been a migrant sex-worker herself, and the profile of the trafficker as a woman.

Throughout the different types of coverage, views regarding the victimization of migrant workers and victims of trafficking differ among the journalists we interviewed. In some reporting on human trafficking there is a tendency to use language that victimizes migrant workers, including generalizations across larger groups of people (Skjoldager, *Politiken*, 2010) (Jørgensen, *BT*, 2012). Phrases such as 'sex slaves', 'slaves' and 'meat market' are used to describe migrant workers selling sex or working under hard conditions with little or no pay (Ruus, *Ekstra Bladet*, 2019; Johansen and Søndergaard, *Ekstra Bladet*, 2010). Some of the journalists we interviewed felt strongly that the people they were reporting on were victims of trafficking or 'slaves' because of the exploitative nature of their situation, even though they have not always been identified as victims of trafficking by the relevant authorities. It was mentioned that describing migrant sex-workers in exploitative situations as 'slaves' is simply 'telling it as it is', a way of catching readers' and viewers' attention. One journalist used terms like 'slaves' and 'sex slaves' when reporting some ten years ago, even though it was seen as controversial at the time:

'We all agreed that of course we should use the term (sex slaves), because that was what they (the women) were. They were being exploited sexually, so therefore they were sex slaves. I never thought of it as dehumanizing. We wanted to do the opposite – we wanted to put a face to these women and tell their stories.'

A recurring argument was that, although the migrant workers they interviewed were not slaves in what they considered to be the original meaning of the word, they were still the closest thing to slaves in Denmark. Invoking language such as 'slaves' or 'slavery' has been criticized by international scholars such as Julia O'Connell Davidson, who researches migration, trafficking and the new anti-slavery movement. In an interview, she argues that using terms like 'slavery' erases the motivation and agency of migrants who end up in exploitative situations (Martins, 2016).

However, other journalists also felt that the language of victimization is something journalists should be cautious about because it risks using a Western or Eurocentric and simplified language to describe complex situations. This perspective was especially reflected in the attitude of one of the journalists, who strongly opposed a language describing migrant workers and the victims of

trafficking as 'slaves' because it is not how these people would describe themselves.

'I tried very hard to focus on the things that made these women human and not just victims of trafficking. The main reason I did this was that it makes it easy for the reader to identify with the women. It makes us see the person and not just the stigma.'

A common thread among the journalists, whether they worked on tabloid newspapers, TV or long features, was that they saw their role as somewhat like that of an activist. By this they meant that, because they were working with marginalized and very vulnerable people, it was sometimes necessary to step out of the role of the objective reporter and assist migrant workers and victims in navigating the Danish system and understanding their rights. One journalist argued further that reporting on human trafficking meant reporting on 'the little man' against the system – and in a globalized world, the little man was often the migrant worker. *'I think it is refreshing that you as a journalist can work on a story, be enraged and take action – as long as it happens on an informed basis, and as long as there is documentation.'* One journalist covering trafficking for a couple of months on a tabloid newspaper who wanted to reveal bad conditions as well as changes to the law also saw this as a form of activism: '*It was a very activist project, and we had very noble and clear mission statements. Journalistically, we wanted to reveal the conditions of these women in Denmark, and we wanted to be critical of the authorities. When you are a journalist, you are critical of the authorities by default.'*

Campaigns and investigative cases

Like counter-narratives and activist reporting, investigative journalism contributes to expanding our understanding of human trafficking. For the purposes of this report we looked at three examples of investigative journalism, as well as one example of a campaign against human trafficking in which the media and NGOs worked together. The documentary *The slaves of the construction industry* exposed how Romanian and Pakistani workers were being exploited by Danish contractors, and it documented the working and living conditions that migrant workers faced in Denmark (Langhorn, *DR*, 2019). It gave insights into the vulnerability of migrant workers in other sectors than prostitution, some of whom also take out loans in order to migrate for work in a Western European country. In *A home no one wants to return to*, journalist Susanne Junker (Junker, *Information*, 2014) documented the situations of women in Nigeria who had sold sex in Denmark but had been repatriated to Nigeria by the Danish government. The

story provided insights into the often complex nature of assistance to victims of human trafficking who return to Nigeria. Junker travelled to Nigeria and interviewed a woman who had been repatriated but still wanted to return to Denmark. The article questioned whether repatriation was actually what victims of trafficking needed and wanted.

In *Slaves of the highway*, the trade journal *3F* uncovered a camp in Denmark where Filipino and Sri Lankan drivers were living and working for the Danish transportation company Kurt Beier Transport A/S (Eriksen and Halskov, *3F*, 2018). They were living in containers and earned as little as 15 kroners an hour. *3F* covered the case closely in almost a hundred articles, and the story was picked up by many Danish media outlets. The articles called for political action and raised a debate about social dumping and human trafficking for purposes of forced labor. In the wake of the revelations by *3F*, the Ministry of Transportation and Labor formed a committee (*Padborgudvalget*) tasked with investigating the number of underpaid, foreign truck-drivers working in Denmark and making recommendations to prevent similar cases from occurring in the future.

The Padborg Committee recommended that, going forward, transportation companies operating in Denmark must prove that they are paying their employees wages corresponding to Danish wages and that non-compliant employers will be liable to fines (Dansk Industri, 2019). The recommendations have yet to be written into law, which will likely happen in the fall of 2019.

Finally, the Danish tabloid newspaper *BT* ran a campaign against human trafficking entitled 'Slave in Denmark' over the course of several months in 2008. This was a collaboration between *BT*, the anti-trafficking NGO New Lives and three celebrities: singer Rasmus Nøhr, actor Robert Hansen and model Oliver Bjerrehus. The three celebrities wrote columns about human trafficking (Nøhr et al., *BT*, 2008), and a team of journalists and photographers reported on human trafficking for prostitution in Denmark. The whole campaign had a focus on prostitution, and the slavery rhetoric was used throughout: '*Virtually all foreign prostitutes on Vesterbro in Copenhagen are living like slaves in Denmark'; 'Every day we walk past the slaves in Denmark'* (Jørgensen et al., *BT*, 2008). The campaign had multiple aims:

- Raising money for a safe house for victims of trafficking through the selling of aid bracelets (Jørgensen and Seeberg, *BT*, 2008). A support concert (BT, 2008) and a poker tournament (Walch, *BT*, 2008). The campaign raised half a million Danish kroner (Nøhr et al., *BT*, 2008).
- Changing the law so that victims of trafficking could obtain residents' permits. The law was not changed.

The campaign reflects the changes that have taken place over the past decade in terms of time and resources. In 2008 six journalists spent over two months reporting on human trafficking, whereas in 2019 one of the journalists we interviewed only had resources for two weeks for an investigative project on Nigerian women. Thus, short deadlines, limited resources and a need for individual cases are increasingly challenging journalists covering human trafficking, as they are having to report on the complexity of human trafficking in a media world that is itself under pressure.

CONCLUSIONS

This report has reviewed the ways in which human trafficking was framed in the Danish news media in 2010-2019, guided by a main research question: How do news media frame human trafficking? Overall it shows that the framing of human trafficking has changed over the course of the past ten years, resulting in more complex coverage that includes a focus on migrant's agency and global politics. Some of this was due to the 2015 European migration and refugee crisis, which challenged previous simplistic portrayals of migration. An increased focus on migration also meant a concentration on the motivations for migrating, as well as on the politics that challenge migrants and leave them vulnerable to exploitation and human trafficking.

The report has three main findings. *First*, the framing of human trafficking changed in the period under review, 2010-2019, from primarily seeing trafficking as a matter of prostitution and human rights for women to a matter of migration with security and legal implications. As such there has been a development from a focus on women's 'bodies' to concentrating on 'borders' and migration politics. However, over the years human trafficking has been used as a lever for multiple, and often opposing, political arguments.

Second, in comparison to 2010, the media tend to focus more on the trafficking of men as forced labor and on human trafficking in sectors other than prostitution. This illustrates both the increase in cases in Denmark within this realm of human trafficking and the more complex understanding of human trafficking as a labor issue that has arisen since. Nonetheless the framing continues to be significantly gendered. This is despite the fact that all identified victims of trafficking in Denmark are exploited migrants, the men being seen primarily as migrant workers in exploitative situations, whereas the women are described as victims of trafficking. This gendered framing is confirmed by the journalists we interviewed and derives primarily from the perspective that prostitution is victimizing by default and is not seen as a kind of work.

Thirdly, despite the more nuanced framing simplistic portrayals and the language of 'sex slavery', 'meat market' and 'women selling themselves' still risk dehumanizing and overshadowing the complexities of human trafficking. In particular, this is because it is often the media, rather than those who are the victims of trafficking, who use these terms to describe the latter's situation. However, simplistic portrayals and clickbaits are also entwined with the current working and structural conditions in the media in which journalists generally face the challenges of deadlines and a lack of resources.

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