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We are delighted to present the first edition of – TOR: The Open Review for the Social Sciences

- an open access journal led by students, for students at the South West Doctoral Training Centre (SWDTC) comprising the University of Bath, the University of Bristol and the University of Exeter. The journal supports students looking to publish their work, provides editorial experience to students who help run the journal, and establishes a cross-institutional network for peer review training and professional development.

This journal began its journey to publication in 2014. As volunteer editors we hoped that an open access journal could provide fellow students a valuable resource for those critical academic activities, publishing and peer reviewing. We agreed that a student led journal could offer a supportive, collegiate framework for students new to the process of publication and peer review. Since then, and with the support of the SWDTC, we are excited to have overseen the production of this, the first issue of the journal.

As an editoral board we would like to extend our thanks to Sonja Ho, Molly Conisbee and Joanna Williams as well as the academic staff at the SWDTC for supporting our endeavour. We would like to thank our colleagues who attended peer review training and submitted articles for publication, and to Susan Milner, Rajiv Sarin, Susan Kelly and Sue Timmis for leading p

peer review workshops over the course of the year. We would also like to thank Mairi McLellan for her contribution to the design of the journal. Finally, we hope you will enjoy this first issue of the journal, and we all look forward to future editions and to watching the journal grow under students, present and future, at the SWDTC.

With our best wishes,

Benjamin Bowman, Katherine Evans, Harry Pitts, Ioannis Costas and Gwilym Owen,

Editors
Tor: The Open Review for the Social Sciences, SWDTC

'Child trafficking' moral panic: blame, disrepute and loss

Alinka Gearon

My background is in UK child protection social work practice in the statutory sector and working as an independent social work consultant. I am currently finishing my PhD at the University of Bath, exploring the experiences of young people who have been trafficked. My research interests lie in qualitative and child-focused research exploring children's worlds, child protection and children's rights. I am exploring how research which engages children directly can be integrated into social work education, social policy and practice. My PhD research methods have incorporated dynamic group work, arts-based methods, music and dance, to engage young people to express their voice.

Abstract

'Child trafficking' has recently been critically positioned within moral panic theory by authors such as Westwood (2010) and Cree et al. (2014) making links between historical and present day presentations of this social issue. This paper contributes to this discussion but is distinct in its central concern; how separated and moving children and young people experience the present UK 'child trafficking' framework, in the midst of moral panic. Moral panics create conditions of blame, disrepute and loss, which this paper explores in relation to 'child trafficking' policy and practice and considers the implications for trafficked children. (Non-)contemporary concepts of childhood underpinning the 'child trafficking' framework are examined, which posit children and childhood dichotomously as either innocent and lost, passive to abuse and wholly dependent on adult protection or as complicit, undeserving threats. In 'child trafficking' policy and practice, these constructs variably punish or 'protect' children, failing to address this group of children's needs.

In the current climate of moral panics about social phenomena that seemingly threaten our social fabric and moral order (Critcher, 2009) through 'enacted melodramas' (Wright, 2015), social work research needs to critically engage with 'claims-makers' (Clapton et al., 2013) and present alternative renderings of social problems. This paper argues that social work research is well placed to redress moral panics through its activity in engaging ethically with people who are marginalised with difficult social problems, without a voice, as the subjects of moral panics.

Keywords: Child trafficking, moral panic, children, childhood.

Introduction

The interest in 'child trafficking' has grown globally since the first international convention to define trafficking in persons was established by the United Nations (UN) in 2000 in the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons. In a highly emotive and morally entrepreneurial fashion, member states were called into action as trafficking was presented as

"One of the most egregious violations of human rights that the United Nations now confronts. It is widespread and growing...The fate of these most vulnerable people in our world is an affront to human dignity and a challenge to every State, every people and every community" (Kofi Annan, UN, 2004, p. iv).

Since the ratification of the protocol in the UK in 2006, 'child trafficking' has increasingly been exposed as a growing phenomenon, requiring a legal, policy, and practice response to the third most lucrative illicit trans-national industry (Haken, 2011) estimated at $32 billion (ILO, 2005). 'Child trafficking' is a complex social issue with crosscutting policy contexts of economic and social policy, child protection, migration, human rights, internal security and crime-prevention (Craig et al., 2007; Glind & Kooijmans, 2008).

This paper asserts that the growing attention to 'child trafficking' and policy responses display many features of moral panics as defined by Cohen (1972) and developed further in its relevance to modern society by authors such as Goode and Ben-Yehuda (2009) and Tyler (2013). A key facet of moral panics is the hasty judgements of its subjects, as to who is moral and therefore 'deserving' or immoral and 'underserving'. Such 'oppositional categorising' (Fook, 2013) creates a form of 'othering', by invoking judgements on who is to blame or praise, who gains or loses, who seeks fame or is held in disrepute? (Bodhi, 2005). This paper explores the conditions of blame, disrepute and loss in relation to 'child trafficking' policy and practice, examines the underlying constructs of childhood underpinning these conditions and considers the implications for this group of children.

This paper, which critically analyses the 'child trafficking' policy and practice framework, draws upon my PhD research which explores young people's experiences of 'child trafficking'. Currently, no peer-reviewed empirical studies in the UK give voice to trafficked children. My research aims to address this gap in the literature. The subjects of 'child trafficking' as well as separated and moving children are the focus of this paper, specifically in how they experience the UK 'child trafficking' policy and practice framework.

Modern Slavery

The present attention and interest in 'child trafficking' displays many features of a moral panic, which Cohen (1972) in his seminal work defined as

"A threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylised and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people" (p. 9).

Current media amplification of 'modern slavery' and rescue stories echo 19th century social purity campaigns to end the 'white slave trade' (Westwood, 2010; Cree et al., 2014). The immorality of 'child trafficking' is often sensationalised by foregrounding sex trafficking in campaigning activities (O'Connell Davidson, 2011) and moral outrage is amplified through extensive media coverage of 'child sex gangs', as in the recent investigations in Telford, Rochdale and Oxford. Moral entrepreneurs (Cohen, 1972) or the 'claims-makers' (Clapton et al., 2013) fuelling moral panics estimate the enormous scale of trafficking; 'tips of icebergs' are often quoted by 'anti'-trafficking agencies; and both government and NGO's are keen to convey that figures of known trafficking cases are likely to be far higher (UNICEF, 2007; SOCA, 2012; IDMG, 2012; ATMG, 2012).

Trafficking press releases attract the public's awareness, the media, and consequently funding for various programmes. As O'Connell Davidson and Anderson (2006) critically observe, 'trafficking' has become 'big business' for middle class professionals, including researchers, politicians and lobbyists. The present 'modern slavery' moral panic appears to be driven by middle strata interest groups (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 2009), appropriating the issue for its own purposes. But who are the emerging 'folk devils' (Cohen, 1972) or 'revolting subjects' (Tyler, 2013) in the 'child trafficking' moral panic? Beyond the obvious abhorrent actions of "extreme depravity" (BBC, 2013) of traffickers in abusing children, this paper considers through the themes of blame, disrepute and loss that the subjects, children and young people who cross social and physical borders, are cast as a threat to the moral order and scapegoated as "national abjects" (Tyler, 2013, p. 9).

Blame

The UK 'child trafficking' framework has two main approaches in policy and practice. The welfare approach aims to protect children referred to or defined as 'trafficked' and the criminal justice approach focuses on immigration and criminal processes. In the UK, the predominant model adopted is the criminal justice approach due to policy-makers interpreting trafficking through criminal, immigration, and economic discourses. The Home Office has lead responsibility for 'anti-trafficking' policy; the UK Human Trafficking Centre is situated under the National Crime Agency (whose main concern is organised immigration crime), and the UK Border Agency is the main agency dealing with referrals of 'trafficking victims'. These immigration agencies make decisions if individuals referred to them are a 'victim of trafficking' and accord them a formal label, presenting a clear conflict of interests.

The criminal justice approach to trafficking with the rhetoric of prosecution to 'combat' the crime of trafficking is questionable given the extremely low numbers of traffickers actually prosecuted. Only 8 convictions were secured in England and Wales for 2011 "on a principal offence basis" (IDMG, 2012, p. 4). The structure and orientation of 'child trafficking' policy from a criminal and immigration lens has been problematized, objections have been raised about the Home Office not being the appropriate body to address the issue of children's rights to protection who have been trafficked (ATMG, 2010; Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2013). The construction of the UK 'child trafficking' framework within 'illegal migration' discourse can be seen as serving a justification by the state to control increasing migration with tightening of border controls rather than addressing the protection and needs of people who have been trafficked.

The welfare approach in the UK 'child trafficking' framework focuses on protecting 'victims of trafficking' within the existing system of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children under the Children Acts 1989 and 2004. However, social workers working with potential child victims of trafficking are required to work closely with various agencies under a criminal justice approach where greater emphasis is placed on prosecution and punishment of associated crimes within 'child trafficking'. Social workers have additional roles to their statutory duties under the Children Acts 1989 and 2004, including referrals to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM)[1], age assessments and assisting children with their immigration claims. The expectations of social workers to work closely with Home Office agencies raises the issue of complicity of social work practice with immigration policy (Humphries, 2004) and presents tensions in practice between the duty to provide protection and the requirements of prosecution of crimes against the state, such as illegal immigration (Wade et al., 2005).

The outcomes for children and young people are that very few are formally accepted as having been trafficked

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[1] The ascension of the Modern Slavery Bill now includes a new statutory duty to refer to the NRM, despite objections being raised by various child agencies about its function not serving the child's bests interests (for example Office of the Children's Commissioner's response to the Modern Slavery Bill Evidence Review, 2013).

through the criminal justice model. At a national level 372 children and young people were referred to the NRM in 2012 (UKHTC, 2012), but only 31% of children's cases referred to NRM to date have been accepted and defined as formally 'trafficked' (ATMG, 2014), despite referring practitioners suspecting trafficking has taken place. Statistically, therefore, children suspected of having been trafficked are more likely to be treated punitively through an approach which places greater emphasis on immigration matters over child protection concerns. The focus on crimes against the state over and above the potential crimes committed against children can lead to a lack of protection and denial to access services to prevent trafficking.

The concern for this group of children and young people is that the present construction of the UK 'child trafficking' framework invokes in practice a dichotomous approach of passive, deserving 'victim of trafficking' or a complicit, undeserving threat. Trafficked persons are constructed as involuntary 'victims' who have been coerced in some way and smuggled migrants are constructed as voluntarily 'consenting' to their migration. In practice, if a child is identified as having been trafficked (and statistically very few are), they are accorded special 'victim' status and can access specialist support and protection. A smuggled child migrant, in practice termed an 'unaccompanied asylum seeker,' is likely to be seen as complicit and assigned responsibility for their situation. 'Consenting' children are thus attributed blame for their circumstance and this moral stance determines a child's legal category, asylum status, a lack of potential protection required in exploitative situations and subsequent access to specialist support. Children who are migrating alone, separated from their carers, are processed through the criminal justice model. They are fingerprinted, forensically interviewed and detained by immigration officials (11 Million, 2008), as criminals in "violation of state sovereignty" (UKBA, 2013, p.7) they are treated punitively through detention, imprisonment or deportation. When 'smuggled illegals' are treated as "culpable and complicit actors" (Bhabha & Zard, 2006, p. 6) both trafficking situations and addressing the abuse children experience may be overlooked.

The demarcation of coercion and consent, as a key determinant between 'trafficking' and 'smuggling' highlights an oversimplified and false division within children's complex migration experiences. Attributing choice and complicity to 'smuggled' children in the decisions to migrate can be contested. A common theme emerging in research with separated children is that young people have a lack of choice or awareness when they were sent abroad, they are not given a choice about whether to leave their families, and many do not know where they are going (Wirtz, 2009; Crawley, 2010a). 'Consent' is attributed to children as a punitive approach to being complicit in illegal immigration and yet the notion of consent may not be a reliable indicator of the child's circumstances. Consent and coercion can overlap, as can smuggling and trafficking experiences, so the axis of involuntary-victim and voluntary-threat is an oversimplified and false dichotomy.

Disrepute

Failings of the welfare approach in protecting children from exploitation have been highlighted in the 'child sex grooming gangs' in Rochdale, Telford, Derby and Oxford (BBC, 2012). Alexi Jay's (2014) independent inquiry into child sexual exploitation was significant in making explicit links between the organised sexual exploitation of children and 'child trafficking' in the UK. Jay's (2014) inquiry highlighted how the welfare approach failed to protect children who were treated with contempt across agencies, by the police, lawyers and social workers, in some cases exploitation continuing for many years. The Rochdale trafficking cases highlighted welfare practitioners inappropriately attributing 'consent' to a 'lifestyle choice':

"social work practitioners and managers wholly overestimated the extent to which Suzie could legally or psychologically consent to the sexual violence being perpetrated against her" (Rochdale Borough Safeguarding Children's Board, 2012, p. 19).

In Operation Retriever in Derby, victims of sexual exploitation were treated as 'rebellious adolescents' (Derby Safeguarding Children Board, 2010). Attributing consent to young people in exploitative situations is problematic in practice in both the welfare and the criminal justice approaches within the UK 'child trafficking' framework.

Children's own accounts of what is happening to them are held in disrepute, there is a 'culture of disbelief' cast upon children's migration accounts (Children's Society, 2012) with an over-focus by immigration staff in assessing the 'credibility' and consistency of children's claims (Crawley, 2010b). The Office of the Children's Commissioner's enquiry into sexual exploitation by gangs If only someone had listened (Berelowitz et al., 2013) highlights the plight of young people not being helped, listened to or taking actions necessary to meet their needs. This can result in children experiencing trafficking being re-victimised by state policy and state actors through punitive treatment or inaction leading to further exploitation. In the recent trial of seven traffickers in Oxford, one of the several victims giving testimony stated,

"Stop blaming the girls, that's the easy thing to do. It's harder to accept what's going on and do something about it" (Meachin, 2013, p. 31).

Loss

In the 'child trafficking' framework, the process of being recognized as a 'victim' is central in accessing support and assistance. 'Child trafficking' campaigning materials and the media often draw our attention to the plight of 'trafficked children' as defenceless, innocent, weak and biddable, abused by adult authority and force. The child protection response to trafficked 'victims' recognises trafficking as child abuse. Child abuse, however, is often presented as a 'violation of childhood' or 'lost childhood', which reinforces an assertion of what childhood should be, as a time of innocence, "an asexual and peaceful

existence within the protective bosom of the family" (Kitzinger, 2004, p.166). The concept of childhood innocence in the construction of child abuse can stigmatise the 'knowing child', as the romanticization of childhood "excludes those who do not conform to the ideal" (Kitzinger, 2004, p. 168). Both victimhood and child abuse narratives draw upon the romanticized child concept of innocence coupled with children viewed as innately passive, thus requiring adult protection.

The child protection response to 'child trafficking' can be contested as capable of dealing with the complexities of separated children's experiences. The focus on the vulnerability and passivity of children within protectionist discourses reinforces the perception of children's naivety and dependency (Westwood, 2010). Kitzinger (2004) rightly observes a lack of addressing resilience and vulnerability, successful coping strategies and resistance to abuse. The concept of innocence also denies children access to knowledge and power, in turn actually increasing their vulnerability to abuse (Kitzinger, 2004). Young people can experience protectionism within 'child trafficking' support services as infantilising (Mai, 2011) and socially excluding where they are subjected to increased surveillance under the guise of protection. The most commonly identified ages of children defined as 'trafficked' to the UK are 16 and 17 (Bokhari, 2008) but within the current framework these young people are assumed to be "asexual and apolitical beings" (Crawley, 2011, p. 1171) with no agency. Adolescent separated and moving young people therefore, appear to be approached in policy and practice through a conceptual understanding of childhood that excludes adolescence.

Discussion

The discourse of risk in 'child trafficking' has been shaped historically by moral panic as highlighted in the 19th century purity campaigns in defence of innocence and girls' virginity (Westwood, 2010) and continues today, with child protection's (and social work's) preoccupation with risk, measured against normalised standards of behaviour (Parton, 1998). Deviation from these norms poses problems for this group of children, particularly older children's agency being misrepresented and instead being labelled and blamed as 'deviant' and 'immoral'. Separated young people who move across physical and social borders can find themselves as 'not fitting' into social, cultural, legal, political, and moral norms and categories within the present construction of 'child trafficking'. As Cohen (1972) observes, transcending norms can be viewed as a threat to societal values and interests, invoking an approach that seeks to increase regulation and control, or to punish those that threaten the moral order. 'Child trafficking' discourses underpinned by concepts of passive victimhood, culturally patterned norms of the industrialised North, and children perceived as biddable and therefore needing to be measured and controlled against risks, shape 'anti-trafficking' policy and influence practice. This constructs a framework that can punish or 'protect' this group of children, through a relationship with state actors typified by

marginalisation, paternalism, protection(ism) and institutionalisation (Qvortup, 1994).

Vulnerable groups emerging as 'folk devils' threatening societal values are "social types" that serve as "visible reminders of what we should not be" (Cohen 1972, p.10). Hayle (2013) argues that the concept of Cohen's 'folk devils' often becomes conflated with 'deviants', 'risk subjects' and the socially marginalized. Hayle (2013) posits that only a portion of these 'deviants' will go on to being labelled as "evil" (p.1131). The predominant criminal justice approach in the UK 'child trafficking' framework can treat children punitively through criminalising 'victims'. Accounts of separated and moving children being imprisoned, rather than being afforded protection as 'victims in exploitative situations', were actively debated in the House of Lords in 2010 (Butler-Sloss, 2010). Romanian children have been convicted and sentenced to prison who had been forced by a violent gang into a brothel, children caught offending as part of pick-pocketing gangs have been prosecuted, Vietnamese children have been imprisoned for cannabis cultivation in cannabis factories and children detained for holding false identity documents, are all examples of 'victims' of trafficking being criminalised (CEOP, 2009; Butler-Sloss, 2010; ATMG, 2010). The criminalization of separated and moving children and young people is underpinned by objectification of the child's 'criminal' behaviour into further re-victimisation by the state. In terms of the conceptual rendering of childhood underpinning this punitive treatment, one can link it to Puritanical perceptions of children as innately evil requiring discipline and punishment (James et al., 1998).

'Popular punitivism' is viewed by Monterosso (2009) as a vehicle that allows the criminalization of the 'other', scapegoating welfare recipients, immigrants and other vulnerable targets (p. 17) and can be related to Cohen's (1972) concept of 'folk devils' in moral panic. Popular punitivism and the 'criminalization of social policy' (Rodger, 2008) explicitly link key social policy agendas with those of criminal justice, such as family, educational, and youth policy (p. 19). This is also reflected in 'child trafficking', refugee studies (Morrison, 2001) and in debates about children involved in prostitution (Crowley & Patel, 1996):

"The transgression of the idealised construction of what adults want to believe is 'childhood', has serious consequences for young people. Benevolence is translated (via the need to 'protect' children) into punishment" (p. 125).

As Muncie (2009) notes, in criminology and the associated linkages to social policy areas, children and young people remain an absent 'victim' voice. However, there is a general paucity of research with separated and moving children and young people, and even less empirical work addressing children's agency within this group. There remains a distinct gap in understanding or representing the subjective experiences of children and young people who have experienced trafficking. A more nuanced understanding is needed of children and young

people who move across not only geographical borders, but also who move across adult-defined social borders and cross morally defined social norms. What is absent is knowledge about the context of children's social movement, changing social roles, and the social mobility of children through their lived experiences.

Conclusion

Blame, disrepute and loss have been considered as moral conditions featuring in the construction of the UK 'child trafficking' framework. These conditions have been explored as manifestations of morality/immorality in the policy and practice framework that serve to increase moral regulation and control. Moral panic, anxiety and fear can further victimise and criminalise marginalised groups, especially those without voice who become defined as a threat to societal values, leading to reactionary and harmful policy and practice responses.

The moral role of social work and research is considered to be well placed to challenge the anxiety and fear stirred up by moral panics. Social work research is underpinned by values towards social justice, but is also simultaneously politically engaged and offers a means of bringing to light "subjected knowledges" (Humphries, 2005, p.284). The subjects of moral panics are not named as the claims-makers, the moral entrepreneurs or the moral crusaders; their voice is largely absent, especially children and young people. Since the establishment of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989) listening to the voices of children has become a "powerful and pervasive mantra for activists and policy makers world-wide" (James, 2007, cited by Goździak, 2008) however, many social science researchers have omitted children as active participants informing knowledge and theory. This is particularly evident in 'child trafficking' research. Children's experiences are notably not represented, an issue my PhD research aims to address. My research with young people explores their lived experiences as children, of separation, of being on the move and 'child trafficking'. Focusing on listening to and hearing how children and young people experience their situation, young people voice how they have encountered the 'child trafficking' policy and practice framework. Social research that accepts children and young people as competent social actors in their own right accepts that their voices are reflective of their selves. This provides not only a space but also a vehicle to represent alternative renderings of social issues.

Social work research is well placed to redress moral panics through its activity in not only engaging ethically with those marginalised with difficult social problems, but also to challenge the assumptions underpinning our understanding of children, young people, childhood, and adolescence. Hasty moral judgements can lead to naming and labelling subjects of moral panics all too easily as victims/threats or heroes/folk devils. However, ethical discernment in social work research allows for the discrimination of the conditions of moral panics. Within moral panic the dichotomous conditions of praise/blame, fame/disrepute, gain/loss can be exposed and challenged, offering a more nuanced and balanced understanding of social problems.

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