

A VISUAL NARRATIVE IN WHTV PROJECT

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The paper embraces semiotic and cognitive peculiarities of media coverage of human trafficking situation and possible development of the instruments to influence on target audiences through deliberate use of sensorial language. The study focuses on potential to use a narrative technique for warning about a dangerous scenario played by vulnerable categories of society.

What is a WHTV Project? Standing for “Warn Human Trafficking Victim”, the WHTV is an umbrella title for a series of interdisciplinary studies aimed at developing efficient verbal strategies for their usage in anti-trafficking social campaigns.

A Visual Narrative. The strategy involves narrative framing, with stories told by the human trafficking victims. Focalizing (Langacker 1987) on a victim’s account from 1st person, so-called “story of the self” (Mills 2006: 36), can provide an impressive textual close-up shot.

A Cobweb Technique. The groundwork (Paliichuk 2011) provides for possibility to use an iconic image of “cobweb” for triggering a victim’s experience and communicate warning messages to the audience. The image of the victim is placed in the center of the construct, with other participants’ actions directed thereto and being interrelated through stable links.

A Narrative Turning into a Visual. Personal narratives provide as-if-unbiased depiction of the situation. Yet, what has not been said by a journalist would be possible said by a witness of an event in her personal account, – vividly, emotionally, attitudinally. Avoiding direct viewpoints, media would resort to subtle mechanisms of shaping public opinion, with storytelling being among them. The typified stories are used as scenarios for showing the peripetia of illegal transporting of migrants, travelers, men, women and children sold into slavery, etc., as it is shown on the figure below.

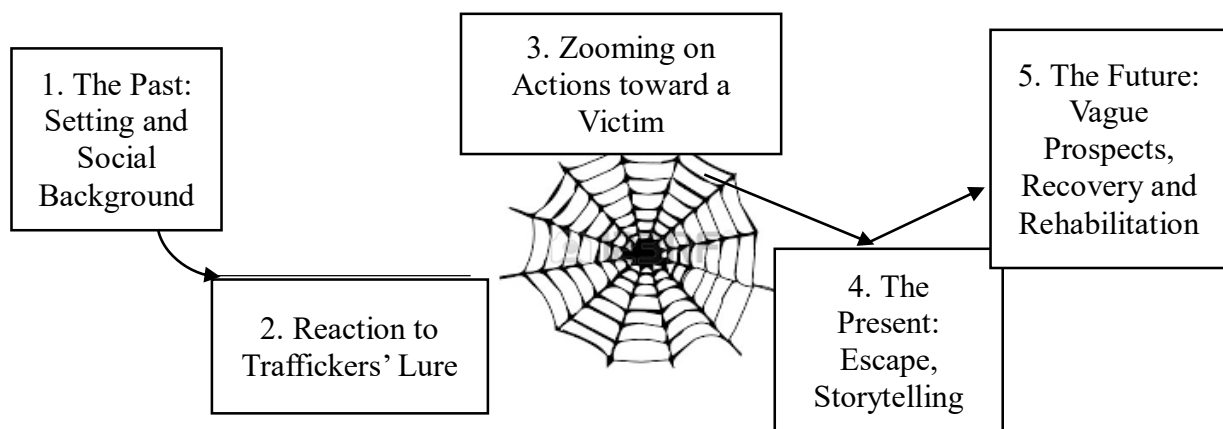


Figure 1. *Cobweb Narrative Framing*

hdimagelib.com/cobwebs+vector?image=480738091

This scenario includes: 1) description of settings and social background, circumstances and causes of the possible catch in the human trafficking net; 2) the offer made by a trafficker and a reaction thereto; 3) getting into a trafficking scheme: illegal transportation, loss of documents, loss of rights, illegal migration, forgery, deception, coercion, labour exploitation, sex exploitation, etc.; the actions made with a victim are zoomed, her feelings are brought to light (rendering of aural and tactile senses is enhanced); 4) possible escape, stories told by victims; 5) the future is rather vague.

The flow of events resembles *cobweb* construct at particular stages, with the image of victim depicted as a generalized character, translating emotional patterns to the audiences at risk due to its front line presentation. The analysis of the survivor stories at the *Equality Now* website (EN) proves the existence of the cobweb-like plot components in a subjectivized narration:

1.1. Settings. Poor economic or political conditions, domestic or social violence, be it in a rural or urban location, running from poverty or war – these are elements of the beginning of a story: *My*

family's home was located in Unyama, a village outside of Gulu, in northern Uganda ... Lowyal was 13 years old when kids started bullying her everyday at school. ... Eventually, her "friends" introduced her to "the game" and started walking the stroll under the constant threat of pimps and johns (EN).

1.2. A Turning Point. The action starts as soon as a potential victim reacts to a lure. *She* would receive a prospective offer from a trafficker, or her relatives would be promised certain amount for her being sold. *Victim's* initial actions are shown scarcely. The image is static, *she* is a vulnerable, unprotected and helpless person, whereas the trafficker's is dynamic. Pretending to be friends, facilitators, agents, *the perpetrators of human trafficking work like spiders, preparing a cobweb and trying to lure victims* (Wisniewski, 2010: 73). As soon as a victim contacts a trafficker, she finds herself in slavery conditions, – forced, coerced, and exploited.

1.3. Zooming on Victim's Passiveness. At this stage, passive condition of a victim is zoomed through depiction of selling, transporting, and exploiting procedures. When lured into a trafficking scheme, *she* becomes *deprived of her documents, enslaved, and forced* to work as a prostitute. *Losing identity, she* becomes an object undergoing all the actants' actions. Her passive role is magnified in a story due to tactile and sound images: *I've been tortured and abused ... cried, screamed...* (EN).

1.4. Survival Storytelling. A narrative has no climax, with a fact of breaking free just being stated. The accent is shifted to denouement: *She ran away and was picked up Today, she's a brilliant poet and spoken word artist who dreams of one day becoming an architect and building schools for children in Africa* (EN). A victim's life is broken into past and present, with her future being vague: *"In my eyes, everything was ruined and just burning." Today, Lowyal is back at school..." She wants to be a nurse or a doctor. She says, "Now I put my family first."*(EN).

Outcomes. A typical human trafficking plot is visualized in media by means of a circular cobweb-like construct. It is a scenario told by real victims after their escape. The results of a detailed interpretative analysis of its elements, and preliminary conceptual analysis of the trafficking situation in media, allow for possible employing of such construct in anti-trafficking campaigns.

References:

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