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Cautionary note: The terms 'child prostitution' and 'prostituted children' are used in this text to denote children that are sexually exploited and sexually trafficked. The connotative manner in which these definitions are perceived and analyzed may differ due to linguistic, cultural, and perceptual differences.

DISCOURSE SURROUNDING PROSTITUTIONAL PROPAGANDA ONLINE: AN ANALYSIS

Pro-prostitution discourse has invaded the worldwide media. The objective is to mask the reality of sexual exploitation under an illusion of normalcy, even modernity: exploited persons become “sex workers,” prostitution becomes an emancipating “job” for women and a form of alternative consensual sexuality at the forefront of the 21st century! Thus, by surfing on liberal thought and populist rhetoric, this movement manages to spread lies as unassailable facts and to lock in the debate. It is a well-rehearsed propaganda that must be fought.

The war in Syria has led to the displacement of more than 4.8 million people (*Le Monde*, March 15, 2016). Fatima is one of these refugees. Interviewed by the *BBC*, she recounted her journey. Living in Turkey for 18 months, she begged during the day and had relations with two or three men per night, for less than 1 euro (EUR) (USD 1.12) per encounter, in order to feed her family. Fatima says she is strong and independent: after calculating the costs and benefits, she concluded that it is more advantageous to “work” for less than EUR 1 (USD 1.12) per man than to stay in Syria. She accepts to allow these men to carry out their fantasies on her body. Fatima is a migrant “sex worker.”

For many decades, pro-prostitution groups have been pretending to break the chains of millions of exploited women by playing a simple lexical game. The expression “sex worker” was launched during the 1970s by Priscilla Alexander of the *Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics* (COYOTE) Collective. Today, this discourse favorable to prostitution has developed,

and pro-prostitution activism has replaced the traditional indifference towards the subject.

The foundations of the pro-prostitution rhetoric (arguments, methods, forums) merits an analysis if one wants to successfully deconstruct it. Its success arises from its use of the ambient political discourse in Europe and North America. Over the course of recent years, new political cleavages have appeared on the sides of traditional right/left rivalries: those of the opening forces of liberal inclination, and those of the closing forces of populist inclination (*Ricolfi*, 2017). In this context, the dominant discourse can be seen as a reaction to the diffusion of the neo-abolitionist model of penalizing the “sex buyers of prostituted persons”.

Populism and Prostitution

Languages reflect and perpetuate cultures. Reality and words are intertwined and strengthen each other, forming mental shackles that are difficult to escape. And while words facilitate expression, they can also become coercive. Languages can thus

also be used to manipulate for political purposes. Joseph Goebbels, minister of propaganda under the Nazi regime, said: "Through repetition and a good knowledge of the psyche of those involved, it should be entirely possible to prove that a square is in fact a circle. Because, after all, (...) words can be shaped to make the ideas they convey unrecognizable." In his novel *1984*, George Orwell speaks of "newspeak," which is capable of transforming war into peace.

Propaganda in favor of prostitution does the same in involving itself in the populist rhetoric, which is in full expansion throughout Europe and the United States. Populism is characterized by its Durkheimian vision of social life, according to which society, "the people," form a coherent and organic group supporting positive values, but is soiled by parasitic elements, "the elite" (Ricolfi, 2017). Among the ingredients for populist success adapted to pro-prostitution discourse, we note: the creation of distinctive signs, the role of the media, critique of experts and anti-system discourse.

Like Donald Trump's cult formula, "Make America Great Again," the slogan of prostitution propagandists, "Sex work is work," is omnipresent. Repeated on a loop, this phrase has taken another dimension: it has become a mantra. Originating from Sanskrit, the word "mantra" means "instrument of thought" and is defined as a "magic formula whose effectiveness does not depend on the inner participation of the said subject." The word propaganda also has a religious origin, and means "the propagation of faith." One does not have to think, but to believe. Blindly.

Symbols are just as important, and if Donald Trump's red hat is the most visible sign of his politics, it is the red umbrella that takes this function for prostitution. The symbol of the umbrella was adopted in

June 2001 during the Venice Biennale from the creation of the "Prostitutes' Pavilion" of Tadej Pogachar (ICRSE).

Pro-prostitution activists complain to the media that they are ignored by the same media they are speaking with. However, from the *New Yorker* to *The Guardian*, the expression "sex worker" prevails. Similarly, in a long report published by the *New York Times Magazine*, the journalist did not interview anyone except those in favor of prostitution, or those who were openly activists for it, without ever specifying this fact (*The New York Times Magazine*, May 5, 2016). An article on the effects of tobacco which does not interview anyone except for employees for the industry would never be taken seriously. However, on the subject of prostitution, subjective opinions are presented as impartial.

To ensure that partisan positions disguised as the truth are not revealed for what they are, groups in favor of prostitution attempt to discredit experts and research that do not work in their favor. They shout at "fake news" while diffusing "alternative facts." The willingness to make experts lose all credibility affects all those who want to put an end to sexual exploitation. To describe their adversaries, the prostitutional language, eager for neologism, has invented a term "SWE(R)F" for "Sex Work/Worker Exclusionary (Radical) Feminist." Feminists denouncing prostitution thus become anti-women.

In addition, in applying the lexical field of the professional world, upholders of prostitution avoid naming it for what it is: a form of masculine violence. In 2016, the photojournalist Sandra Hoyn was visiting Kandapara, the largest and oldest open-air brothel in Bangladesh. In her report, she relays the stories of women and young girls sold or born within the brothel, where they are prostituted as early as at the age of 12 years old. However, the words

“violence,” “pedo-criminality” and “misogyny” (boys born within the brothel are never prostituted) are absent. For the journalist, these young girls raped by adult men are “sex workers” (*Cosmopolitan*, June 23, 2016). A coerced sexual encounter is rape, not work. The erasure of the word “rape” takes other forms. It is often replaced by the euphemism “non-consensual sexual relation.” To speak of consensual sex is redundant, and to speak of non-consensual sex is nonsensical. One risks ending up looking at rape as a simple alternative form of sex.

Liberalism and prostitution

Liberals weigh on the political English speaking world. In the face of the closing forces of populist inclination, they carry values of individualism and tolerance. The liberal culture “describes the universe of the progressive parts: equality, tolerance, openness, individual rights” (*Ricolfi*, 2017). Young generations approve this current: thus, during Brexit, the youngest people voted to stay in the European Union, contrary to their elders. To this youth, called to weigh on the political balance, pro-prostitution advocates prepared an adapted prostitutional propaganda, founded on liberal values and the forums they use.

“Selling sex is a choice” titles a newspaper (*The Guardian*, September 11, 2007). To demonstrate this, they reclaim the traditional distinction between “free prostitution” and “forced prostitution.” “Trafficking means the person is working under force, fraud, or coercion, while sex work is something someone chooses to do,” they explain (*Vice*, March 30, 2012). The use of the reasoning “prostitution is chosen since it is not coerced” is a way to bypass all reflection on the true position of “choice.” The most important is to underline the individuality of implicated persons.

Liberal principles indeed impose the respect of the life decisions of others. It would thus be necessary to tolerate prostitution in the name of guaranteeing individual liberties.

However, one element calls into question the idea of choice in prostitution: the overwhelming majority of prostituted persons are women. To respond to this abnormality, this *feminine* reality has been transformed into a *feminist* reality. Organizers of the *Women’s March*, for example, a protest born following the election of Donald Trump, officially support “sex work” (*The Wrap*, April 9, 2018).

The current inflation of the term “feminism” is comparable to the “meaningless words” that George Orwell speaks of. These are poorly defined concepts, used excessively and with the objective to inform someone on the desirability of something (*Horizon*, 1946). “Feminism” becomes a selling point. It is increasingly associated with words such as “agency” and “empowerment,” both of which are tied to individual choice. Consequently, the apparent guarantee of individual liberty of some should exclude the necessity for collective liberties for all women. The minority is defended to the detriment of the majority.

The question of minorities, in particular sexual minorities, widely promoted by celebrities and politicians such as the liberal Hillary Clinton, is at the heart of the debate. The semantic field of the rights of sexual minorities is mixed with the semantic field of prostitution. The procurer Douglas Fox explains: “*It is no coincidence that whores and gays equally have (...) been the scapegoats for a society that enforced prescribed and rigid gender roles that severely constricted sexuality.[...] Whores and gays challenge the hierarchal hegemony that equally stifles individualism while fearing uncontrolled sensuality*” (*International Union*

of Sex Workers, October 20, 2010). We have it all: “scapegoats” to describe societal oppressions, “rigid gender roles” to evoke feminism, “whores and gays” side by side, the repression of “individualism” to petrify with fear liberals, “sexuality” and “uncontrolled sensuality” to legitimize prostitution as sexuality... So, all critiques of prostitution are associated with “whorephobia,” modeled after “homophobia.” The semantic mixture meets two associated requirements:

- to present prostitution as a type of sexual orientation conforming to queer theory: one is prostituted in the same way that one is homosexual. Here, the person is prostituted in the sense where their essence is defined by prostitution; it is not an activity that one is subjected to.
- the belief that it is societal rejection that makes these self-proclaimed forms of sexuality “bad,” not prostitution itself.

The question of identity is central to understanding the success of this liberal discourse. By locking prostituted women into the identity of “sex workers,” upholders of prostitution apply the individual dissociation observed in prostitution to the population as a whole. This is what Kajsa Ekis Ekman highlights when analyzing this psychological phenomenon of the prostituted person’s split personality in the face of the pain that affects them (Ekman, 2013). This dissociation operates also among prostituted women: for example, a prostituted woman, interviewed by the BBC, explained that she did not need help leaving prostitution, unlike victims of trafficking (Resources Prostitution, March 28, 2017). The reality of the conditions of thousands of women and young girls is so heavy that we would prefer to detach ourselves from it. This dissociation then expands to all women. During a protest in favor of prostitution, a flier was posted saying: “strippers and women unite.” As if

strippers were not already women! One thus finds prostitution to be a dividing force between women: prostitution exists in order to stigmatize. It is male sex buyers who, through their testimonies, establish a distinction between “prostituted women” and “normal women” (Bouamama, Legardinier, 2006). The pro-prostitution discourse reclaims this division to take control.

Prostitution and Multiculturalism

The multicultural current of liberalism offers differentiated rights to various communities to maintain their identity and lifestyles distinct from the majority (Shorten, 2014). Italian researcher and founder of relational sociology Pierpaolo Donati analyses the limits of this multicultural thought (Donati, 2008). According to him, faced with the diversity of cultural values, the individual adopts an intellectual shortcut which is ethical indifference. It would be pointless to put oneself in relation with the person who appears to us as different, as there exists no common ground upon which to construct a societal “ideal.” For example, when one says: “He eats this because it is his culture,” one demonstrates that they do not want to have a relationship with this person. When one says: “That woman is a ‘sex worker’ because it is her choice,” the same mechanism is applied. It is no longer “me and her,” rather it is “me and this.” One becomes *the* “sex worker”: the individuality we claimed to give is denied. A human being, in all its complexity, is reduced to an inseparable identity label. Consequently, there is a category, a “community” of “sex workers” distinct from the rest of women, who are deprived from the citizen rights that are owed to them. “Chosen” prostitution would therefore not be problematic because our only common value would be respect for personal choices.

Women in prostitution are crystallized in their timeless role as “sex workers.” Dehumanized yet again. Hence the interest in talking about *prostituted women* as a reminder that there is a woman before “the prostitute” or “the sex worker.” Because it is indeed women that are prostituted and men that are sex buyers. The word “man” is essentially eradicated in pro-prostitution discourse. However, some activities only make sense in a duo: for example, teacher-student. In the case of prostitution, one wants to ignore this. Yet, without the binary of male sex buyer and prostituted woman, there is no prostitution. Prostitution is created by a relation and not by individual willingness.

Vice, BuzzFeed, Cut... relays of the propaganda

Once the individualistic message is constructed, it must be spread. The website *Vice*, which is available in several countries and directly targets younger people, broadly relays the myth of “sex work.” *Buzzfeed, Cut* and the *BBC* are also active, most notably on YouTube and through the diffusion of a trivial outlook on prostitution (one video from the *Cut* is titled: “Guess who’s a sex worker”). Video is the format of preference because it does not require the active participation of those who watch it. The viewer can remain passive and absorb the message, all the more so if it is transmitted when it is least expected. For example, in a number of episodes of the *BBC* series *Uncle*, the main character, a teenager, corrects those who don’t use the expression “sex worker.” This effectively summarizes pro-prostitution tactics. Anyone who is not convinced by this message is doomed to be silenced. In British universities, a wave of “no-platforming” – literally “deprived of forum,” some can see it as a euphemism for “censure” – affects people who could “upset” students.

Abolitionists have been “deprived of forums” and even threatened (*The Guardian*, October 9, 2015). Melissa Gira Grant, a pro-prostitution activist, said, in relation to the debates on the subject: “sex work itself, and, inseparable from it, the lives of sex workers are not up for debate” (*The Guardian*, March 15, 2014). Here we see the whole interest in essentializing prostitution: making people believe that any criticism of the activity is discrimination against those involved. It is better to shut up than to be accused of “whorephobia.”

The New Zealander Dream: “start-up nation” for self-employed procurers

The supporters – journalists, politicians, activists, anonymous, etc. – of prostitution use these linguistic games to advance their objective: the decriminalization of prostitution.

The discourse of Juno Mac, member of the *English Collective of Prostitutes*, for the filmed *TED* conferences entitled “What sex workers want” is emblematic of the adaption of the political discourse to the pro-prostitution discourse. J. Mac begins with a personal anecdote. While sharing an apartment with her friend, who was also being prostituted, a male sex buyer became violent. J. Mac threatened to call the police, however the man retorted that she could not, as two women prostituting themselves in an apartment is against the law. It is interesting to see that sex buyers are conscious of these legislations. Even more interesting, the manner in which J. Mac explains that it is not the man who is responsible, but rather the ineffective law. Without explicitly saying it, she makes a reference to another popular slogan: “no bad whores only bad laws.” And since laws are bad, one must specify which ones. Unsurprisingly, it is the Nordic model, renamed “prohibitionist” by J. Mac, that is

criticized: even though it is the male sex buyers that are criminalized, it is in fact prostituted women that suffer from the law.

“I am going to tell you what sex workers want,” continues J. Mac, switching from the liberal “I” to the collective “we”: the decriminalization of prostitution like what New Zealand did following the *Prostitution Reform Act* (PRA) of 2003¹. In 2008, a governmental committee, in collaboration with the *New Zealand Collective of Prostitutes* (NZCP), a collective of defense for “sex workers,” assessed this law in a report undermined by contradictions and omissions (*Report of the Prostitution Law Review Committee on the Operation of the Prostitution Reform Act 2003*). According to this assessment, the number of prostituted persons did not go down, and might even have increased. The report stipulates that the numbers, which demonstrate a decrease in prostitution (from 5,932 prostituted persons in 2005 to 2,332 in 2005), are to be attributed to an improvement in counting techniques. The report shows an increase in the number of prostituted persons on the street between 2006 and 2007 in Auckland (from 106 to 230) and in Christchurch (from 100 to 121). Despite this data, the committee concluded that the 2003 law has had no impact on the number of people involved in prostitution.

In the section addressing the well-being of prostituted persons, the report assesses the state of affairs of violence (rape, physical violence, theft, sequestration, moral harassment...). Out of 792 people interviewed, fewer than 25% estimated that the conditions were better with the new law, while 3 people out of 4 considered the law to not be able to reduce the seemingly inevitable violence.

The only positive aspect of the law appears to be the fact that in 2008, 60% of prostituted persons considered

themselves to be in a better position to refuse a sex buyer. However, 35.2% had to accept a relation that they did not want. Contrary to the common preconception of a certain security, prostituted persons in brothels are under more pressure (37.5% of persons were coerced into having an unwanted sexual encounter) and less often refuse sex buyers (61.3% versus 85.5% of prostituted persons on the streets). Their testimonies describe sexual aggressions and the intimidating ambiance of brothels (*Newshub*, January 31, 2014). 3% of prostituted persons questioned claimed to have had been raped by a sex buyer. This data, far beneath the national averages, can be explained by the difference in the understanding of rape according to the non-prostituted population: in a country that decriminalizes prostitution, undesired sexual relations become a bad “commercial interaction.”

Among the report’s omissions, we remark the absence of a census of murders of prostituted persons. Between 1993 and 2002, 4 prostituted persons were killed, and 7 between 2005 and 2016. Between 2006 and 2014, 7 cases of extreme violence were reported (5 between 2003 and 2008) towards prostituted persons during their activity, of which 4 were within brothels and one was attempted murder (*Sex Industry Kills*, 2018).

In addition, the report brings force evidence of the existence of exploitation of children in prostitution in New Zealand. More than half of the prostituted persons interviewed, all of whom were prostituted on the streets, claimed to have begun before the age of 18 years old (56%). 9.6% of them were prostituted at that time in a brothel managed by a procurer and 15.9% of them in “self-managed” brothels. Among the 772 people interviewed, 41 were prostituted before the age of 18 years old after the passage of the PRA

in 2003. This law has made it more complex for law enforcement to gain a census of people involved, as they no longer have the right to verify the ages of prostituted persons, nor can they enter a brothel without an appropriate warrant. Owners of brothels are neither obligated to inform themselves of, nor to communicate the age of the people they prostitute. These changes were suggested by the NZCP, despite the contrary opinion of prostituted persons who the group is supposed to be representing.

Finally, the report does not say that Maori women and girls, discriminated against for employment, access to care and education (*Minority Rights*, January 2018), are twice as likely to be sexually assaulted and overrepresented in prostitution.

When the greatest benefit from prostitution is that 87.9% of prostituted persons surveyed have “survived,” when an Aboriginal minority population is overrepresented in a violent system, when children are abused without the possibility of intervention, promoting New Zealand as an example to be followed around the world is promoting racism and sexism.

“Prostitution is dead, long live ‘sex work!’”

The populist discourse has made prostitution a job, while liberal discourse has made it a form of sexuality. If prostitution is a job, then the State is under the obligation of intervening, because it must regulate this profession like any other. And if it is a matter of sexuality, then it should not imply money. But prostitution cannot be one or the other.

A job against women

Some say that every form of job is prostitution, namely exploitation. Such an affirmation masks the reality of prostitutorial activities (*Ekman*, 2013). Not

all jobs imply sexual touching or sexual acts. A job, even one that is trying, is not comparable to repeated sexual relations, to a violation of intimacy (*Martine*, 2013).

Others affirm that prostitution is a job like any other. The assumption of “sex work” ignores the difference between selling one’s work, and selling access to one’s body. “A builder or a plumber labours with his or her body, she sells her labour which is a product of her physicality, including her mind (...) Goods are produced by labourers through the labouring of their body – their body is not the good” (*Feminist Current*, June 24, 2013). Sexual “service” is wrongly considered to determine the selling price: there are different rates for oral sex, vaginal penetration, etc., but these actions cannot be carried out without gaining access to a person’s body. In the pricing of an hour’s work, the product of the work is paid. In the pricing of an hour of prostitution, it is the duration of access to a woman’s body that is paid for. Substantially, prostitution gives access to the body of another person, and not to the work produced by their body.

What good or service does one buy from prostitution? Sex, say some. “Sex” describes the biological aspect, as well as the relational aspect. In both cases, the purchase is impossible. In the first case, one cannot buy someone’s genitals, neither legally or technically. In the second case, the relational nature of the act contradicts the implicit materialization of “sex work.” In both cases, the alienation of body from spirit is necessary.

Can one access the body without accessing the being? Kajsa Ekis Ekman explains: “*Presupposing the possibility to sell one’s body without selling one’s Self requires a Cartesian-type dualism. In a phrase such as ‘I choose to sell my vagina,’ there are two levels: the Self and the vagina. The Self is*

presented as an active subject who chooses to sell something: it is a dynamic entrepreneur, who has found a good product. On the other side, the vagina does not seem to be a part of the active Self, it is not an entrepreneur, it is merchandise” (Ekman, 2013). However, in reality, “we do not have a body, we are a body. ‘My body is me.’ Not an object, an instrument separated from my being, which can be sold, rented or kept to itself, but the being itself. We don’t belong to it, we are it” (Ekman, 2013). To access sex, one accesses the body and thus the person. At the core of the prostitutional exchange is the human being: the prostituted person herself becomes merchandise.

If the mantra “Sex work is work” is applied, prostitution, with a probability of dying by being killed forty times higher than the rest of the Canadian population, is thus the most dangerous job in the world (*Psychiatric Times*, October 1, 2004). “*What legitimizes an activity, even no matter how painful or dangerous, is that it is more useful than it is harmful” (Martine, 2013). Some say that prostitution has a utility, that it reduces sexual violence. This statement does not reflect reality and assumes that sexual violence experienced by women in prostitution does not count. Prostitution is also supposed to be useful because it creates pleasure. Some people take pleasure in torture. Do we legitimize torture? Desires are not rights.*

Despite the inutility and dangers of prostitution, let us imagine it becomes a profession in its own right. It would thus be impossible to protect people from sexual harassment. Degrading comments to force a person to a sexual act would become professional orders. “Sex work” would transform sexual acts into professional missions. “Sex work,” in addition to being more dangerous than any other job, would also be the most discriminating, as an entire category of women would no longer be

protected by the law. Accepting prostitution as a job thus would make laws against sexual harassment in the work place nullified.

Rape accusations by a number of actresses against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein provoked the #MeToo movement. Weinstein attempted to defend himself by saying: “Yes, like the rest of the world, I offered work in exchange for sex” (*Le Matin*, July 16, 2018). If sex is a job like any other, Harvey Weinstein’s approach shouldn’t be considered blackmail or an abuse of power. Thus, he would be able to say: “I offered work to many women.”

And if, in a moment of panic, a “sex worker” threw herself out of a window, should this be treated as violence or as a job accident? This scenario is inspired from a real event that happened in Hamburg. A young student migrated to Europe following an announcement of “sex work” published in Germany, where prostitution is regulated. Her employer imposed “supplementary hours” upon her, which meant “working” 24 hours a day. Faced with this situation, she did not see any other way to exit than to jump out of a third story window. A judiciary decision demanded that the “employer” simply cover the health care costs of his “employee” (*Abolition2014 (blog)*, August 20, 2016). In conclusion, the application of prostitution as “sex work” demonstrates how the most basic laws to protect physical and sexual integrity can become impractical.

“Consensual sex between adults”

The “sex” in “sex work” corresponds to “consensual sex between adults,” implying a relationship of exchange between two people at the same level. Yet, prostitution is a hierarchical structure where one person prostitutes another. This hierarchy is exacerbated by age gaps: millions of children are prostituted throughout the

world. Prostitution is thus not “between adults.”

Does one choose prostitution? Poverty is a determining factor for the entry into prostitution, as demonstrated by the overrepresentation of foreigners from poor countries and, especially, women, who are most affected by insecurity. In addition, the majority of studies state that 60 to 90% of prostituted persons were victims of sexual abuse during childhood or adolescence (Poulin, 2005). If prostitution is really a question of individual free choice, there would be as many Italian prostituted men in the streets of Benin City in Nigeria as there are Nigerian prostituted women on the sidewalks of Turin in Italy. “Sex work” would be the only occupation where being a black, poor and abused woman would multiply your chances of being hired.

Making “choice” the axis of prostitution, distinguishing “sex work” and sex trafficking, removes constraints. Does this mean that young girls and women trapped in cages in Thailand or Albanian slaughter camps could escape at any time? Speaking of choice oppresses prostituted persons by implying that they have complete responsibility over their situations, and supposes that it is up to them whether they enter or exist. Finally, speaking of prostituted women’s choices allows to turn the attention away from those who really have the choice: male sex buyers. To pay or not pay a woman or child for a sexual encounter is a choice. To survive or die is not one.

Considering the constraining conditions of entering prostitution, what value can be given to the consent in “sexual consent between adults?” One can legitimately think that a psychological process could affect the consent of a person in situation of prostitution. How can one refuse a male sex buyer who, by definition, she only agrees to have sex in exchange for money?

Yet, “without the possibility of a no, a yes signifies nothing but resignation” (Fabre-Magnan, 2018). The establishment of consent as criteria for autonomy presupposes ignorance of “the influence of material and psychological conditions” (Marzano, 2006). “I consent because I have to”: the conditions of giving consent are sufficient enough to invalidate it.

In the French sailing vocabulary, the verb “to consent” has a revealing meaning when used in association with the mast: a ‘mast consents’ when it gives way under effort. Consent is fundamentally passive, thus reproducing sexist patterns. Why then focus so much on a notion that nullifies the argument of empowerment? Acceptance cannot form the basis of the law, nor define what is permissible and what is not permissible (Marzano, 2006). Consent can neither justify nor legitimize the act.

This supposed legitimacy is further undermined if it is based on a purchasing power differential between men and women, which allows the former to buy the latter’s consent (Martine, 2010). If, at the end of a sexual encounter, a male sex buyer does not pay the prostituted woman, is it rape or robbery (*The Guardian*, April 30, 2018). If it is robbery, then the logic of prostitution is accepted and human existence is reduced to an affair of private property (Martine, 2013). If it is rape, then the definition of rape becomes the absence of payment (MacKinnon, 2017). The criteria of constraint, surprise or threats that characterize rape under the French law are no longer appropriate. In the case of Dominique Strauss-Kahn (or the Sofitel case), following a rape accusation by Nafissatou Diallo, the case concluded, after a long trial, with a “financial agreement.” Dominique Strauss-Kahn thus did not rape Nafissatou Diallo, it was all simply a “delayed payment for a job done in the past.” This last statement is not the result of

bad faith: it is simply the “sex work” logic carried out to the end. If it is possible to “consent” to a sexual act in exchange for money, that money thus becomes the “bandage” for all pleas of sexual violence. And if there was no money, would the sexual act have taken place? *“Without money, there is not sexual relation; thus it wasn’t desired in the first place [...] proof that economic need acts as a force, constituting a determining constraint for the prostituted person”* (Ressources Prostitution, October 24, 2016).

In prostitution, money is the determining factor for the sexual act, while for a sexual relation, it is desire. In pretending that sex and prostitution are interchangeable, one tries to forget the inalienable financial nature of prostitution. It is because there is no consent in prostitution that there is money. Taking away payment causes the consent to disappear into thin air. What then remains? Rape.

“Prostitution is (...) a sexual act imposed under constraint: one of money, which makes it a category of rape as penetration under economic constraint, (...). What the sex buyer purchases, is the possibility to, without the consent of the other, penetrate him or her sexually as he pleases in a unilateral and asymmetrical relationship where the latter is at the mercy of the one who pays” (Ressources Prostitution, October 24, 2016). Joël Martine rightfully calls prostitution “rape-rental” (Martine, 2013): a constrained sexual act, a rape, which is compensated by monetary payment.

It is thanks to the imperceptible subterfuge of the crystallization of prostituted persons in the role of “sex workers” that the danger of this approach to prostitution is undetectable. We must fundamentally transform our erroneous view of prostitution. We must see the purchase of consent, rape-rental, as a

specific form of rape, with its own modalities and dangers. Prostitution must no longer be perceived as paid sex but as paid rape, no longer as a choice but as a constraint, and no longer as selling sex but as renting human beings.

In conclusion, the assimilation to populist rhetoric allows to discredit the opposition, to occupy the media and to diffuse messages that are renamed as facts: the largest lie being that prostitution is a job. This allows for the erasure of all terms describing the violence of this system, and thus rejects all opposition. The use of liberal thought allows to endorse “choice” and essentialize prostitution in a feminine identity, thus rendering it unassailable.

To accept “sex work” is to retreat from human rights by promoting the wishes of a few. Prostitution is neither work nor sex. It is the commodification of the human body, the masculine objectification of women and the transformation of a human life into private property. Prostitution is a form of rape covered by money, which masks its nature to the eyes of society.

Abolitionism is not the result of trends. It is a defense of humanity and a vision of an ideal society. Urgency and hope form an unbreakable force of willingness. The path is dotted with sophisticated obstacles such as this well-rehearsed prostitution propaganda. Taking the time to respond by restoring truth through logic is a duty to take the abolitionist project ever further.

¹ See chapter “New Zealand”, in: Fondation Scelles, Charpenel Y. (under the Direction of), *Prostitution – Exploitation, Persecution, Repression (4th Global Report)*, Ed. Economica, Paris, 2016.

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The Global Report is produced by the International Observatory on Sexual Exploitation, in collaboration with internal and external experts (magistrates, lawyers, social workers, NGO leaders...), and the support of local NGO correspondents or international researchers.



The **Fondation Jean et Jeanne Scelles**, recognized as a public utility since 1994 and as a consultative status with ECOSOC, is an independent, non-profit organization based in Paris (France) dedicated to fight the system of prostitution and the exploitation of prostituted persons, through information, analysis, advocacy, trainings, awareness initiatives and legal actions. The **Fondation Jean et Jeanne Scelles** is a co-founding member of the Coalition for the Abolition of Prostitution (CAP International) which was launched in 2013 and today brings together 28 abolitionist NGOs from 22 countries.

The **International Observatory on Sexual Exploitation** is a worldwide hub which allows for information exchange on the system of prostitution. The hub is regularly consulted by French and foreign experts including NGOs, institutions, journalists, lawyers, researchers and those involved in the defense of human rights. The goals of the **International Observatory on Sexual Exploitation** are:

- to analyze all the aspects of the phenomenon: prostitution, sex tourism, procurement, child pornography, sex buyers, human trafficking for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation...
- to encourage reflection and to take a stand
- to inform the public who are interested in these issues

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