

Editorial

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Prostitution and mass media: from the controversy to the social innovation

Prostitución y medios de comunicación: de la controversia a la innovación social

Prostitution is a controversial public issue, a point of contention in the public sphere and a matter of control and regulation by international, state or local institutions. It is currently a space of confrontation in which power struggles among actors with diverse perspectives are at stake. The international feminist movement has been a key actor in delimiting the contours of the debate on prostitution since its inception. This debate has produced deep divisions between the different currents of thought existing within feminism with regards to the sex market, which manifest themselves on the reductionist polarization between the abolitionist and the regulationist perspectives, posed as opposed and irreconcilable.

The controversy over prostitution has been staged in various increasingly complex discursive genres and platforms involving a greater degree of social participation. It is in the different scenarios of this mediated public space where we not only articulate the norms and principles that guide the discussion and collective investigation in order to find shared consensus positions, but also settle the frameworks of social intelligibility of the subjects, practices and relationships involved in the sex trade.

The Spanish Ministry of Labor, Migration and Social Security unexpected official approval of OTRAS Union (Sex Workers' Organization), published in the Official State Gazette dated August 4, 2018 and subsequently revoked, can be used as an example. This event reinstated the debate within the traditional antagonistic framework, although it gave greater visibility to the leaders of the "pro-rights" movement of sex workers in Spain. This case also shows the way in which controversial positions mutate over time in the mediated public sphere. The hegemony that the abolitionist position has sustained for several years, especially since the adoption of the anti-trafficking discourse, is being currently questioned by the appropriation that the organizations of sex workers have made of the axes of the contemporary feminist movement.

The aim of this monograph is to contribute to the reconstruction of the current public debate on prostitution through the reflection and analysis of the mediatizations that characterize the development of the controversy. This volume includes articles whose theoretical approaches try to overcome dichotomies and polarizations, as well as case studies that show the different dimensions and the multiplicity of actors, perspectives and media strategies that sustain this public controversy. These contributions observe the mediatization of prostitution in relation to the configuration of sociosexual imaginaries that exceed the practice of commercial sex and are oriented towards the construction of sexual, affective or economic regulations; they also inquiry into the controversy from an intersectional perspective in different social, cultural, geographical (Spain, Argentina, Ecuador) and communicational contexts (social networks, cinema, informative discourses, photojournalism, experts).

The opening work - *Mediation of public controversies: about the prostitution campaign Hola Putero*, by Vanesa Saiz Echezarreta, University of Castilla-La Mancha - can be thought of as a sign of the times in that it addresses the processes of mediatization that define the controversy through the case study of a viral

campaign against trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation that brings to light the argumentative nuclei of the dispute about the sex market.

Focused on the relationship between media discourse and the actors involved, the article *Views and discourses: from the media standpoint to the voices of prostitution in Ecuador*, by Belén Puñal and Ana Tamarit Rodríguez, University of Milagro, presents the results of participatory methodology in critical reading circles in which Ecuadorian sex workers along with the researchers analyze the media representations that seek to describe their experiences.

From a methodological approach focused on the analysis and reflection of communication as an instance of mediation, in *The information on prostitution and trafficking as a scenario of dispute: perceptions of enunciative strategies from the actors involved*, Diana Fernández Romero, Rey Juan Carlos University and the journalist Patricia Simón, present the results of a series of discussion groups with the main actors of the debate (women who practice prostitution, representatives of organizations of the sector and journalists) on the media treatment of the topic and of its controversy.

The discourses on prostitution are subject to changes, due to their historical nature as well as to the dynamics of mediatization, which make the development of public issues and their controversies be determined by the intersection of media agents with political, legislative or economic institutions. In this sense, *The institutional transition of regulationism to abolitionism in the graphic press of Río Gallegos 2009-2013*, by Romina Alejandra Behrens, National University of Southern Patagonia, shows how in an Argentine peripheral region which has been historically regulating regarding prostitution, the adoption of national laws in relation to trafficking with a clear abolitionist bias, that is, a hierarchical institutional change, has generated a new discourse on the body of women that is evident in the diachronic analysis of the journalistic treatment of the issue.

On the other hand, in this same line but from a Bourdian perspective on the intersection of fields, in the article *An adulterated debate: distribution of symbolic power in feminist disputes around prostitution*, Paula Sánchez-Perera, Carlos III University, delves into the theory of fields, power struggles and the linguistic market to explain how these occur in the clash of discursive strategies to dominate the debate.

As a closure, in line with our desire to expand the restrictive and stereotyped approach on prostitution, and extending the term to that of prostitutions, we have included the text *Die chapero Permanence of stereotypes of the sex worker on the global screen*, by Eladio Mateos-Miera, University of Granada, which presents the outcomes of an investigation that analyzes the representation of the male sex worker as a guilty and ill-adjusted victim in film productions from 1957 to 2017.

We do hope that the disparate academic and investigative voices here collected will shed some light on the complexities and nuances surrounding the mediated controversy over prostitution, and guide us in understanding the current state of the debate based on the destabilization of their automatisms and the enhancement of its symbolic diversity.

