Delocalized prostitution: Occultation of the new modalities of violence.

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Abstract

In the last five years an important transformation is taking place on the demand and offer forms of paid sexual services. The key factor is the introduction of the communication technologies, especially 3G mobiles and diverse Internet services (web, video-chat, email). There’s a part of the prostitution consumption related with technologies that have enabled for the face-to-face relationship between who demands and who offers to be substituted at least partially. The implications are many: loss of control by all the involved, easiness to wide persons involved (negotiators-procurers, women and men offering services, clients), change in the forms of sexual relations (through images, no personal contacts, etc.); etc. According to the characteristics of those technologies the concept of “delocalized” prostitution arises, as the prostitution based in a contact in which the spatial dimension of the relation is not clearly determinable. Our research (GIFES-UIB) has allowed to better understand the reality of this transformation. A summary of the main results is presented, as well as the debates and conclusion from the study

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1. Introduction

The great technological innovation and the legal void that characterise the cyberspace have created, partly, the ideal conditions for the rise of new forms of prostitution; furthermore those two facts – paired with the characteristics of the business of prostitution in itself – have opened the possibility of new channels for the recruitment on clients and the observation of the offer (Ballester, March, Orte, 2006).

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In this paper we aim to throw some light into a field that is scarcely observed and described; especially in a context such as Spain where there is no rigorous work on the topic. Not even the best studies have paid attention to it. This can be explained by the novelty of the phenomenon, the difficulty to research this field and a certain taboo that always seem to surround prostitution. It is not until 2003, with a report from the Council of Europe (Hughes, 2003), that a more rigorous research is initiated in the field.

On the one side we try to dimension the patent relation between the sex industry in general —within which the prostitution has a relevant specific weight— and the development and evolution of the World Wide Web in the last years. Secondly we try to clarify the main characteristics, conditions and circumstances in which prostitution is developed in the cyberspace.

Internet is changing the modes of interpersonal communication and the social conventions of the current society (Castell, 2004). According to the Danish sociologist Mansson, one of the human realities that have been more dramatically affected by the Internet is the sexuality (Mansson, 2001).

The business of prostitution have adopted, adapted and in some cases even created —or at least improved—, the technologies and resources characteristics of the known as “knowledge and information society” with a double finality: a) ease the access of the clients to the services and increase in this way its business potential; and b) offer new services through the use of new technologies. The prostitution industry has used and uses the majority of possibilities of the new technologies, but its worth pointing out that the most used resource is the World Wide Web.

The characteristics of the Internet: world wide reach; technical impossibility to control all the pages; great communication possibilities (bi-directionality and interactivity, images, sounds, etc.); very diverse social networks; multimedia advertising with real time distribution and easy interaction; geographical delocalization; freedom of schedules (worldwide presence 24h a day 365 days a year), easy access to great amounts of related information (infinity of diverse alternatives for each type of information); low costs of offer; etc. very clearly increase the potential to do business. In addition, we can speak from the client’s perspective, the Net has several added advantages, especially valued in the field: CONFIDENTIALITY. Keeps their anonymity and the client can contact women offering sexual services from the most absolute privacy. CONTROL. Easiness of access to the offers, producing sensation of complete control of a wide “catalogue of services”. LOW PRICE. Possibility of finding low-cost offers, adapted to all types of clients. In occasions the same add generates a strong attraction, even if the services it offers are not consumed.

The first two characteristics (confidentiality and control) are imaginary. As it is obvious, there is no such confidentiality. Everything that enters the web or another electronic channel (for example, mobile technology) stays there forever and with all detail. As to the control, this is also an illusion, as the client is controlled after with selected publicity, depending on the preferences that the client has shown. The third characteristic, low price, is disastrous for the women, as it forces them to compete offering lower prices or practices with a higher risk for their health.

The Internet is even transforming into a new media where the first contact with this activity happen. Which is to say a radical and deep renovation of the sex industry takes place. In general terms we can identify as the main advantages that the Internet introduces in the prostitution business or industry: it facilitates new channels of access to the market. It enlarges the international visibility of the business. It multiplies the offer of services creating new uses. It globalizes and delocalises its offers and its business base (¿where is this supposed business based?). Supposedly it protects the privacy of the client. It facilitates and “improves” the contact between women working in prostitution and the client (more information, less “annoyances” for the women, more warranties to find clients, etc.) etc. Anyhow, the public policy developed by the Spanish state have still not reacted to those changes and new realities related to the delocalized prostitution (Brufau, 2011).

2. Development

2.1. Mobile technology and web pages as a media for contact in context of prostitution

The prominence of the mobile technology has materialized in the last years in the field of prostitution; as well as visualized the change in the classified contact adds in the newspapers. Its use to create contacts (consults without compromise), as well as the apparent liberalization for the women that use it to offer services (they don’t have to be hours waiting for a client), seem two immediate advantages. However the inconveniences and the negative
consequences are also evident: the quasi-prostitution increases, based in young women, or not, that occasionally act
to increase their resources; with the distance contact women don’t see their clients until they meet them in their flat or
car, therefore the possibility of refusal is less. For this reason, women have had to accept more dangerous clients or
clients that demand high-risk services that wouldn’t accept in other conditions, when women working together had
more ability to defend themselves. Apparition of mediators (diverse forms of procurers) that can hide women kept in
situation of semi-slavery; register of phone number of those who call, creating agendas of potential clients; apparition
of other forms of offer: pornographic images obtained illegally, furtive videos, etc.

The connection between those mobile technology services and the Internet are very intense. Several recent studies
show that in any chat room open to the public one can find proposed as the following made by a 14 years old girl
known by Dina: “Hello everyone. I do sexphone with the camera of the mobile phone, but only if you charge my
credit”.

“There are 14 years old girls that give striptease and masturbation sessions with camera web or mobile for people
don’t know in exchange for 10 Euros of phone credit“ according to Montalvo and Monteiro (2007), authors of
the reference study of the use Young people make of the internet based in Portugal.

After the initial contact on the chat the payment is completed on the Internet and when the minor receives the
message that her credit was increased for the negotiated amount the virtual relations starts, although in some occasions
a brief preview is demanded as guarantee.

The existence of technologies is not the only cause of the development of delocalization. One of the causes that
must be acknowledged is the constant harassment of the women working on prostitution on the street and the extreme
exploitation in the clubs. Those factors have impulse the increase of Internet adds as well as the flats in the outskirts
of big cities where women work accepting contacts through mobiles or Internet adds. Social workers also face more
difficulties to contact those women that use delocalized modalities.

The current offer in the Net is immense, practically impossible to know given the characteristics mentioned before
(international character, easiness to offer, great business opportunities, etc.) nevertheless it seems that (for the general
public) the offers based in traditional web pages are still dominant.

In reference to the webs aimed to publicise the prostitution business 4 great categories can be identified.

In first place one face the club pages, massage houses and brothels, etc. Generally those are pages in which one can
find the basic information regarding the brothel (address, installations, atmosphere, facilities, etc.). Often the pages
also include information on the services offered, the girls that work there or the prices for each service. Those are
pages only marginally oriented to the interaction between the service givers and the clients; those are mainly esthetical
websites with a low level of interactions.

In second place one can fin company webs that offer contact with women, whether in the location of the business
– flat, apartment, house…- or in a place agreed with the client. Those are the services known as “escorts” or company
girls. Those webs are generally more elaborated than the previous category. The webs usually include detailed
information on the girls working there (physical characteristics, personality, cultural level, interests, etc.). Many webs
offer access to several images of the girls or even videos. In many cases information and prices for services is offered.
Those are quite interactive webs and aim to be a channel of contact with the client to capture him. In some cases the
client can make an “online reservation” of the girl they want to meet.

The third category is formed by the “personal pages”. Those are webs in which one or several women advertise
their services in the Internet. They tend to be well developed were the women introduces herself – usually with photos
– and explains her services and prices. Usually include the possibility to contact through an email. Those pages, as
well as the personal Internet adds, often include side by side with the photos a reference to the novelty, usually linked
to the novelty (“new in Palma”, “just arrived”, “only for a few days”) or the amateur status. With this mobility the
women try to avoid the “burn out”, which means that the woman is very well known by the regular clients in those
areas and can’t compete.

Finally, the last category is referred to portals that include individual adds, clubs and brothel adds, massage houses,
“escorts”, men offering sexual services, bars o centres of liberal atmosphere, etc. In a few words those are a kind of
“Yellow pages” or sex guide of an area, region or country. They have proliferated significantly in a very short period
of time.
The offer of the sites can be analysed in different ways, however the diversity of page types can be reduced to the 4 identified types. The future evolution, in the next years, will depend upon different variables: available technologies, restrictive legislation, etc.

After completion a review of 64 web pages of those four types, with offers for the Balearic Islands, the following conclusions can be reached:

First, the minimum age of women advertising on those pages is 18 years, the legal minimum; while the maximum ages is 65 years old, though the most common profiles range between 18 and 35 years old. The adds include women of different nationalities: European (Bulgarian, Russian, Romanian, Italian and Spanish), Latin-American (Colombian, Cuban, Brazilian and Dominican) and Asian (specially Japanese and some Chinese). In those pages there almost aren’t any African women; neither from the Maghreb (probably due to the prosecution that they could face in origin), nor from Sub-Saharan women (probably due to their presence in the street and with less exposition due to their irregular situation, among other reasons). There are diverse pages of high cost and complexity, with more than 80 different levels (for example the Globo Rojo website), alongside low-cost and more modest means webpages. Those webpages are focused on facilitating new contacts through other websites or throughout Europe, with an important capacity to contact women situated in different countries. Some webpages allow the selection of women with the identification of their characteristics (Studies, languages, physical appearance, “services” that she’s willing to perform). This open offer induces to think on very flexible means of capitation, with an important capacity to contact with women situated in different places within the country or Europe. In the Internet the body images is more important, as the selection of women is based on images. The naked body or dressed with few very seductive clothes is the first reclaim for potential clients. The client does not meet the women face-to-face and there is no face-to-face communication. The main mean to capture the client, alongside the written information (referring to body measures, sexual services and condition on time and price) is the body images. The importance of the image increases when trying to avoiding the burn-out effect; women have to renew their image, changing the online images every certain time and renovating their pictures to show some change on the web. The prostitution on the Internet is an industry in development that is usually linked to business based in diverse types of violence (extreme necessity leads to a covered violence similar to open violence), the sexual exploitation and other forms of duress, induction and stimulus to prostitution, sexual tourism and conversion of people into goods. In this industry not only two persons interact, there are many more agents: • The producers of the web pages; • The intermediaries (business owners or different kinds of mediators); • The web promoters and distributers (web pages servers); • The occasional consumers of the offered images (including minors), • The consumers of the end product (the clients) and, of course, • The women that offer or are offered as goods. The use of the Internet in the field of prostitution is not the same in all the levels of the business. The split that separates the women that prostitute on the street of any city and the high-class women that prostitute replicates in the cyberspace. For the first, the best publicity strategy is based on finding the best street or public space to capture potential clients – their body as advertising -. In the second case the access to the market and offer of their product is very different and quite more sophisticated.

In many cases they have changed from advertising in the contact adds on the newspapers to the Internet were they have elaborated websites with significant quality. It seems evident that Internet hasn’t penetrated in the same way on all the types of prostitution: the technological differences and other types of differences are important, although it is a tool used by almost all those that control this industry sector.

The development of the distribution procedures of videos, particularly the streaming of videos has facilitated the consumption of free pornography of all sexual practices and great quantities, as it is a worldwide offer. The distribution of video streaming popularized in the decade of the 2000, when the Internet bandwidth was accessible for most of the global population. There are no barriers to access and can include the standard offer or demand specific practices.

Many practices associates with prostitution distribute for free explicit videos, creating a demand of risky sexual practices based in two processes: naturalize those practices through the multiplication of videos picturing them and associate the advertising on the possibility to find those activities in their own city for low prices. Global positioning systems facilitate the work, the presence of sexual offers in all big cities, controlled by the mentioned business, does the rest of the work. The access is free and impossible to control, so many teenagers initiate on the normalisation of prostitution through those modalities of pornography (Weber, Quiring, Daschmann, 2012).

There are several important epidemiological studies associated with the compulsive behaviour, such as have sexual relation with multiple partners met on the Internet, excessive use of pornography of Internet sexual offers (Black,
In general, all those studies that analyse the possible influence of the compulsive behaviour associated with the Internet conclude that a high level of sexual compulsion is associated with a higher number of sexual partners, with the demand and practice of unprotected anal sex, with unprotected oral practices and a higher probability of suffering and transmitting a sexually transmitted diseases.

One of the most negative consequences of the use of Internet is the development of diverse illegitimate forms of pornography (minors, violent, non-consensual, etc.), but more worrisome is the development of live sexual services, which is to say the prostitution, based on the most infamous sexual exploitation, including child pornography (Taylor, 1999; Taylor, Quayle y Holland, 2001).

With the development of the technology anyone can access child sexual services just by connecting to the Internet. There are several types of use of this modality of prostitution: establish contacts (email, chats or online conversations, virtual communities) paying for “services” on distance (live sexual acts that can be seen by the payers) paying for personal “services” (different web pages include offers of direct contact with minors that include explicit sexual content).

However, the new forms of identity protection on the Internet have facilitated the development of bought “services”. Some of the used forms are: visual or audio-visual or audio.

The last developments include: access to Internet with mobile phones, interactive TV with Internet access and communication capacities (video-chat, telephone), low-cost tablets with access to Internet and all the communication capacities (video distribution, video-chat, television); complete audio-visual communication capacities on the Internet through high-speed low-cost wireless connections. This convergence has an immediate effect in relation with the issues introduced before, facilitating the development of web page editing and increasing profitability by increasing the capacity to reach a greater volume of clients.

### 3. Final notes

The development of communication technologies is unstoppable and difficult to control. Hearn (2006) admits that although on one hand communication technologies imply an affirmation of the new sexual citizenship, with the creation of new forms of community and sexual communication; on the other hand, it offers new opportunities for the pornography, prostitution, sexual exploitation and diverse types of sexual violence. The process is unstoppable, but, segmenting the involved sectors some action lines can be outlined to neutralize the most negative effects of delocalization of prostitution and other forms of sexual violence (minors and young persons). The training of education professionals and parents is key. Also key are the organization of informative campaigns and the distribution of informative kits in all public places frequented by young people. Some actions could also be developed to facilitate, whenever appropriate and necessary, the identification and access to contents and services of alternative quality (secure sex, peer chats, etc.) for minors, among other means through the distribution of access media in education institution and public places.

General population. Clear information about the services of telephone assistance and their increased competencies to receive complaints of the prejudicial sites (humiliated women, evident procuring, presence of minors, etc.) would increase the sensitivity on the dangers that exist on the Internet.

“Clients”. Development of a European regulation on the prosecution of prejudicial sites and the prosecution of clients through their payments and contracting of a service, as long as the site incurs in some of the characteristics of “gender violence”, in any of their modalities, always with documentation.

Women involved on a voluntary basis. Development of free and secure phones for the complaint and request of help.

The communication technologies surpass the limits of the traditional concepts on sexual relation and sexual violence. The future is unknown but it is very probable the process aggravates in the next few years with the increase of precariousness. Systematically thinking about this field is not only a challenge, it is a necessity for all the researchers, professionals and policy makers concerned with the modalities of sexual exploitation and the social changes that take place on the sexual relations.
Scientific literature on delocalized prostitution and new modalities on sexual commerce is still deficient in many aspects (Weitzer, 2010). It is necessary to develop research in line with the new necessities and changes in the reality, including the different spheres of prostitution and its new modalities.

References


i* Lets remember that procurement must be understood as the induction to prostitution, this is to say anyone that with the aim of economic benefit or to satisfy the desires of others induces a person to sexual commerce or prostitution.

ii* In our studies we have worked with a quite detailed identification based in the following components: commercial nave, more relevant messages, number of clients (web statistics and counters), webs formats, complexity of the site, language(s) used, services offered (publicity of the clubs, pornography services, etc.); direct offer of pornography – photos, videos, online webcams, etc.; contacts for future services; chat as well as other data up to a total of 25 different items.

iiiThe specialised journal: Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity can be consulted. For a review of the studies on compulsive behaviour and Internet see: Reay, Attwood & Gooder, 2013.

iv* Serina et al., 2013.

The young and teenager population has managed to take ownership more naturally of the digital technologies in general and Internet more specifically.