

# Emotional Confrontation and Public Deliberation on Paid Sex. The Struggle between Disgust and Shame

*Vanesa Saiz Echezarreta*

UNIVERSIDAD DE CASTILLA-LA MANCHA

[Vanesa.saiz@uclm.es](mailto:Vanesa.saiz@uclm.es)

*Cristina Peñarín*

UNIVERSIDAD COMPLUTENSE DE MADRID

[crispemar@telefonica.net](mailto:crispemar@telefonica.net)

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper, we address affective and motivational aspects in relation to the controversy, which can be articulated around a mediatised public issue. We are interested in how emotions are a part of the experience and definition of a phenomenon that is seen as intolerable and for which intervention is demanded and the strategic appeal to an affective repertoire in reaching a position on the issue. We analyse the systems of meaning and emotions mobilised in the current controversy about prostitution and trafficking of persons for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The goal here is to grasp how the perspectives involved employ emotional strategies in which basic affective dispositions and transitory emotions intersect, and how this affects deliberation on the issue. Discourses and stories, as well as defining and framing the emotions of the actors in the controversy furnish emotional experiences to their publics, encouraging them to incorporate certain rules of feeling that form part of the moral and ideological perspectives promoted.

Methodologically, we use an ethnographic approach to follow the conflict and a socio-semiotic discourse analysis. Our case study covers two linked viral campaigns in social networks (*Hola Putero* and *Hola Abolicionista*). The goal is to reflect on the way in which setting and affective strategies hinder resolution of the issue.

**Keywords:** public sphere, emotions, prostitution, semiotics, socio-sexual imaginaries.

**Corresponding author:** Vanesa Saiz Echezarreta. Edificio Polivalente - Facultad de Periodismo. Plaza de la Libertad de Expresión, s/n, (16071) Cuenca (Spain).

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## INTRODUCTION: MEDIATISATION AND PUBLIC CONTROVERSY ON PROSTITUTION

Prostitution, sex work and sex-trafficking are age-old public issues (Cefai, 1996; Gilbert and Henry, 2012; 1991, p. 31)<sup>1</sup>. The controversy surrounding them has a place of its own in contemporary public debate both at home and abroad (Andrijasevic and Mai, 2016; Bernstein, 2010; Heim, 2012; Sanders, O'Neill, and Pitcher, 2009; Serughetti, 2018; Wagenaar and Altink, 2012; Ward and Wylie, 2017). The debate on prostitution is part of a set of common interest issues that seem to be 'structural' in nature. That is because they are 'old chestnuts' in the public sphere, and arouse strong passions and debate on 'moral policy' (Wagenaar and Altink, 2012).

Likening the 'debate' to a war is not far wide of the mark, given the sheer aggressiveness and tension that has long characterised it (Gimeno, 2012: 17; Lamas, 2016). This sharp divide can be seen in the very first Conference on Prostitution, held in 1971 in New York, which marked the so-called 'Sex Wars' that broke out at the Barnard Conference. Although the controversy has undergone several twists and turns, the battle lines remain much the same. In this respect, the debate and become a long-running classic, or less flatteringly, repetitive and worn.

A controversy advances if it is a quest for answers and fosters dialogue centred on an expectation of closure or solution. However, when the commonplaces, stories and arguments deployed by the two mainstream camps are mutually incompatible, meaningful dialogue with 'the enemy' becomes well-nigh impossible.

There was a paradigm shift from an initial anti-prostitution position based on hygienist and moralistic models (stressing concern about vice and public order) to one based on the broader fight against sex-trafficking (which includes prostitution). This

mixing of prostitution and trafficking dominates the controversy. The approval of international regulations rooted in The Palermo Protocol fostered a Defence of Human Rights-based approach to paid sex. However, this focus is of limited practical use in dealing with prostitution given that priority is given to anti-trafficking measures, border control, and stopping illegal immigration. This disjuncture arises from the persistence of a highly-polarised debate on legal, political, and socio-cultural models of prostitution. These conflicting concepts hinder the wider adoption of a Human Rights approach.

The Spanish Congress' *Report on Prostitution*<sup>2</sup> (13<sup>th</sup> April 2007) was the starting gun for the recent debate, with attention mainly focusing on the controversy surrounding advertisements in the popular press. Later on, the focus shifted to public order and safety issues following the 2015 reform of the Law covering sexual procurement. That same year, *Ciudadanos* [a Far-Right political party] made a highly mediatic proposal for regulating prostitution — a subject it dropped in later electoral debates. In the political arena, *Partido Popular (PP)* [a Centre-Right political party] — took an abolitionist stance while in opposition but when in office took measures that were initially prohibitionist and later tolerant (Álvares, 2016). The *PSOE* [a Centre-Left political party] has institutionalised abolitionism under the banner of equality policies — a drift reinforced by the stance taken by *Podemos* [a Far-Left political party]. While the policy has led to internal rifts, the party nevertheless seems to assume Left-Wing abolitionist proposals — something that can be gathered from the appointment of Beatris Gimeno to the *Instituto de la Mujer* [Institute for Women] given that she is a strong proponent of abolition (Gimeno, 2012).

Contemporary abolitionism has evolved through its definition of the 'prostitution system', which links prostitution to sexual violence, 'criminalising the

1 This paper forms part of the R&D project Problemas públicos y controversias: diversidad y participación en la esfera mediática (MINECO CSO2017-82109-R) [Public Issues and Controversies: Diversity and participation in the media sphere].

2 Translator's Note: The long-winded Spanish title is: *Informe de la Ponencia sobre la situación de la prostitución en nuestro país*.

client' in the process. Although the first wave of radical abolitionism made a big impact on Spanish academia, it was not reflected in the legislation until recently. The context has been neo-abolitionist (above all, since 2008, being most strongly reflected in local by-laws) (Bodelon and Arce, 2018), with awareness campaigns aimed at discouraging would-be prostitution 'customers'.

The controversy has grabbed attention over the last few years, with key abolitionist works getting published (De Miguel, 2106; Cobo, 2017), and a documentary on sex-trafficking winning the *Goya* film prize (Lozano, 2015). The PSOE's abolitionist proposals streamline debate in the political arena, spurring strategic measures by social movements. Against this background of intensifying controversy, in December 2017, the *Towanda Rebels* dynamic duo (Sua Méndes and Teresa Losano) launched the *Hola Putero* [*Hello Whoremonger!*] campaign on their social channel, which went viral and is the subject of our case study. Only a few months later, in August 2018, a controversy broke out after the banning of the Union of Sex Workers (OTRAS). In response to this, the Socialist Government leaked a Draft Bill in December for outlawing sex-trafficking and that enshrined neo-abolitionist approaches to legislation on the subject.

Part of the abolitionist strategy in this recent era has been based on linking prostitution to sex-trafficking, framed in terms of a spectrum of 'patriarchal' violence. The design and implementation of policies in the fight against trafficking at the international level and the ease of translating this issue into awareness campaigns (often from the rhetoric of victimisation) strengthened this stance and turned it into a 'common sense' issue that elicited broad sympathy (Andrijasevic and Mai, 2016). However, its hegemonic position has been contested by the pro-rights movement, which has defended sex work as a legitimate occupation. This movement draws a distinction between prostitution and sex-trafficking, insisting on the need to protect the fundamental rights of those engaging in sex for money (Heim, 2012). In Spain, the movement's

ability to effectively advocate its cause in the public sphere is relatively new. The organisation's reach was extended (especially from 2015 on) by a strategy that went beyond self-help to take its message to the wider world and become more media-wise. An example of this can be seen through its re-appropriation and use of the slogan 'feminist whore'. The *Hola abolitionist* [*Hello Abolitionist!*] campaign was pitched within this framework and as a direct response to *Hola Putero* campaign. The former served as a tool for not only questioning the rules of feeling proposed by the abolitionist discourse to target audiences but also as an affective strategy for articulating the movement itself.

"The activities certain groups carry out when drawing up a definition or in stressing one issue over another are aimed at winning over target audiences or at least at emotionally mobilise them. These audiences will be broader the more generalisation mechanisms operate between a given case and the wider social setting" (Schillagi, 2011). By linking a problem to a system of meaning, affection and familiar values for the target audience<sup>3</sup>, the greater an actor's chances of winning supporters, conveying the message through the media, putting it on the political agenda, and in general of being acknowledged as the 'owner' and hegemonic voice in said matter. Actors play a game in which they strike a balance between both familiar and 'odd' aspects of the issue in pursuing their ends (Peñarín, 2016). Their goal is to reframe certain aspects of social reality, seeking new emotions and rules of feeling that get more people 'on board' (Flam, 2005, p. 19) with their political programme. This attempt to win over the general public on family issues tends to be made harder when audiences are presented with opposing, incompatible options. Our hypothesis is that blockage occurs when affective strategies seek

3 We use the notion of target audience found in Dewey's work (2004), developed by the French Pragmatist School (Joseph, 2015), which sees this audience as a community of actors who are directly or indirectly affected and mobilized by a given issue. Audiences are a form of social life typified by exploration, a creative quest for values, drawing up needs, and confronting systems of feeling and life in common (Cefai, 2016).

to maximise opportunities by exploiting fleeting emotions (Irvine, 2008).

### THEORETICAL PROPOSALS: GIVING MEANING TO THE EMOTIONS OF THE ACTORS AND THE PUBLIC IN A CONTROVERSY

Emotions play a role in the construction and modification of the public sphere in many ways. Among other things, they help create, foster, limit, or block political projects (Álvarez-Peralta, Fernández and Massoli, 2017; Ahmed, 2004b; Berlant, 2011; Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta, 2001). Emotions underpin new actors, their consolidation, and organisational modes, as well as forging links between these and other subjects (Ahmed, 2004a). They also create an audience interested in a given issue (in this case, prostitution), imaginaries, and socio-sexual practices.

Our working hypothesis is that emotional experience is central to the ways in which a mediated controversy evolves and is settled. We are interested in discovering how emotions: (1) work in aligning individuals with collectives and in mediating the relationship between the psychic and the social; (2) intervene in the power relations between actors and the production of hegemonic representations and values in relation to 'ownership' of public issues. Here, we have drawn on scholarly work stemming from the affective turn (Arfuch, 2016), theoretical-methodological tools for researching the emotional situation each angle on prostitution lays before the public, highlighting the performative, deeply political nature of affects, emotions, and affective dispositions (Frijda, Manstead, and Bem, 2000; Sais-Echezarreta, 2012). Here, we take a socio-semiotic perspective, analysing the values, emotions and links fostering visual and/or verbal discourses, and the stories rooted in each perspective (García and Peñarín, 2020; Illous, Gilon, and Shachak, 2014).

We analyse the emotional strategies (Whittier, 2001) of the actors in a context of mediated controversy

whose goal is to shape power relations and resolve a public issue. These strategies imply the development of affective work (Hochschild, 1990) by the audiences that are directly or indirectly involved, making use of certain empathy maps (Hochschild, 2013) and helping to legitimise systems of meaning, ideologies and rules of feeling — what Ahmed calls 'affective economies' (Ahmed, 2004a).

According to Hochschild, we have expectations about what one should feel in each social practice — something that shapes the emotional work we do to adapt to the norm and the affective style seen as appropriate. Activism campaigns create a common 'territory of feeling' on an issue, conditioning forms of participation and get on the same affective wavelength as everyone else in the community. To identify the rules of feeling in discourses, we looked at the intersection between affective dispositions (stabilised emotional rules and habits) and transitory emotions (Irvine, 2008). The emotional strategies that emerge at this intersection operate through the articulation of the emotional reports issued by the actors involved, repertoires for the public's consumption and interpretation and commanding their adherence (or not) in the mediated public sphere.

Affective dispositions shed light on the difference between feeling an emotion and being willing to feel it. Shared emotions within the framework of collective action are not reactions to singular beliefs or events but rather dispositional phenomena, which are projected, generate beliefs and enable action guides that need to be activated and performed. They are "tendencies that refer to a network of cognitive beliefs and affective evaluations that construct and delimit an object before which the subject positions herself and that, in addition, modulates an enunciative place shared with others" (Sais-Echezarreta, 2012). In this enunciative staging, such disposition acquires a specific trajectory in the face of emerging patterns and potential topics (Boltanski, 2000, p. 83). In this process, the disposition can act as motivation and argument to guide and promote collective actions.

We object to the idea of an *a priori* catalogue of emotions, which would identify those capable of fostering or blocking the emergence of a collective actor, activating or inhibiting political action, facilitating or hindering the closure of a controversy, and so forth. Instead we analyse how each emotion operates in specific contexts, how the various emotions intersect and articulate with one another within the framework of the affective repertoire, bearing in mind that emotions are not intrinsically positive or negative regardless of the meaning they acquire for the subject, spur action, or are experienced (Berlant, 2011; Macón, 2014). This complex, ambivalent articulation of emotion affects the target audience's stories, practices and emotional experiences. It also underlies 'affective economies', revealing "how emotions work to align some subjects with or against others" (Ahmed, 2004b, p. 118).

Our goal is to identify what happens in mediated contexts when affective repertoires emerge and circulate in ways that fuel controversy and confrontation. The emotional strategies used by actors in such contexts not only tie the issue in with feelings, affect, and familiar values in the target audience but also foster transitory emotions (Irvine, 2008). These strategies modulate the underlying affective climate to: (1) heighten emotions; (2) boost discourses and practices for mobilising target audiences and for resolving the uncertainties spawned by public controversies. Transitory emotions are of a strategic nature given that they forge links between public arenas (Cefaï, 2016) and actors: The State, interest groups, social movements, media representations, and citizens constituting emotional audiences.

Certain transitory emotions characterise the alert states common in moral panic strategies, described in the classic works by Stanley Cohen (1972/2017) and Stuart Hall (1978). In situations of moral and sexual panic (Rubin, 1989), the media intervene, together with other expert actors, furnishing key instances that reinforce the legitimising power of emotions and facilitating their circulation. This process naturalises "sexual hierarchies, establishing certain sexualities

as normal and others as disgusting or inexpressible". The affective conventions of sexuality — especially sexual shame, stigma, fear, disgust — reinforce this regulatory system and are therefore political" (Irvine, 2008). When certain emotions are naturalised, consolidated as a commonplace, the public can inadvertently identify with such emotional-moral predisposition and with the community that shares it, which evidently affects the power relations between communities and their emotional repertoires.

The performative efficacy of transitory emotions also depends on their dramaturgical dimension (their staging as an expression) that varies strategically depending on the audiences and the frames of meaning (Hochschild, 1990; Le Breton, 2013). In this case, emotional expression is embodied in speeches and stories that have to be adapted to media forms in a simplified and shocking way (Jasper, 2013) to make actors elicit/experience the desired emotions.

The debate on what is presented as a pressing public issue is largely framed by a series of recognisable scripts and patterns such that transitory emotions linked to the object of sexual moral panic are tied into affective dispositions (or emotional habits). The purpose here is to grab attention and to focus mutual commitment and to foster a strong sense of moral rectitude, legitimising public action and the practices of some of the actors (and at the same time, de-legitimising and masking those of other actors) (Irvine, 2008: 18).

Audiences can identify, incorporate and validate these transitory emotions because they are familiar, they stem from shared affective dispositions and repertoires that help in broadening, questioning, or developing an approach. On the other hand, expert actors (specialists, academics, public institutions, organisations) appropriate issues, capitalising on these transitory emotions, and amplifying and justifying them to regulate and legitimise the proposals they put forward.

Prostitution has always been linked to episodes of

sexual moral panic (Juliano, 2008; Rubin, 1989). Human sexuality is often problematic, since personal and social emotions and values intersect in its practices and the categories applied to it can be a source of moral and political conflicts. Prostitution is a grey area of socio-sexual practices in which sex is exchanged for money. It is a phenomenon that has challenged the hetero-normative bourgeois paradigm traditionally linking it to deviation, danger, threat and stigma, typical of sexual panic. In recent decades, the high profile given to sex-trafficking has turned the fight against prostitution into something more akin to a moral crusade and as an issue that overlaps with the re-emergence of criticism of mainstream pornography (Weitser, 2020).

Discursive strategies for eliciting transitory emotion use provocative, stigmatising rhetoric. Resort is made to inciting language and symbols, scapegoating, and depravity narratives (Irvine, 2008). The discussion on prostitution is also presented as unsolvable, timeless, polarised, and takes an aggressive, deliberative tone, hampering the scope for constructive dialogue. It is increasingly common for competing perspectives to be aired in hermetically separate forums, making dialogue between opposing camps even harder.

In addition, common resort is made to reiteration (or ‘viral logic’) in mediated controversy. This is because strategic repetition boosts the message and its performative capacity. These repetitions, as Butler (1997) explained, play with the gap between the familiar and the strange, between continuity and rupture. This gives rise to a paradoxical combination because the repetitions mobilise norms of basic social regulation, appealing to consensual ‘common sense’. They are presented as novel, transformative discourses (Irvine, 2008: 23), questioning the current social order.

To sum up, a repertoire of transitory emotions (whose efficacy lies in the intrinsic intensity of the alert state they delimit) is capable of mobilising an emotional experience. A belief accompanies this experience, managing, justifying and making sense of said emotion and its associated values. In the process, it

fosters legitimation of a political proposal. Thus the limits of legitimate, appropriate feelings are marked out in the public sphere. These bounds and their transformation are then played out in the media.

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## METHODOLOGY

The starting point for the methodology is based on: (1) the idea that the controversy over prostitution has come to the fore of the political, social and institutional agenda; (2) the framework of the R&D Project we have been engaged in since 2014. The methodology combined: socio-semiotic analysis of discourse; an ethnographic multi-situational approach (Boyer and Hanners, 2006; Marcus, 1995) from which to follow the conflict and the emotions aroused through mediated discursive practices. In the process, analysis was carried out of the way the news media conveyed the issue, the advertising of sexual services, and institutional campaigns against sexual exploitation. Among other things, seminars were held with experts, and academic debates and social networks were monitored. This preliminary research let us identify the main perspectives and the actors supporting them, the stories, meaning systems and commonplaces defended by each, and the affective strategies and dynamics characterising the course of controversy.

Our ethnographic approach to the communicative dimension of public problems and controversies is based on the assumption that emotions lie at the heart of human sociality. Here, one should note Flam and Kleres’s (2015) suggestion that both the make-up of emotions and how they circulate are nebulous and requires intense interpretation both in everyday life and in the research field. The main analytical tool is socio-semiotic methodology, which puts the construction of the senses and their interpretation at the core of the analysis (Peñamarín, 2015). Semiotics gives us tools to reconstruct and interpret meaning systems and so deal with the richness and intrinsic ambivalence of emotions and discourses, as well as providing ways to take in their complexity and

lessen their multidimensionality in the fostering of hegemony.

Methodologically speaking, we tackle the rhetorical, enunciative and performative aspects of emotional strategies, observing how these are inscribed and circulated through the discourses, and how performative practices define enunciative assemblages facilitating the emergence of audiences around a given issue. The dramaturgical tradition (Goffman) underlies the pragmatic analysis of the public sphere given the importance of the staging of affective dispositions and emotional repertoires. As we have pointed out, emotions respond to certain discursive and narrative patterns that have been described by sociology (Boltanski, 2000), cultural criticism (Ahmed, 2004b; Berlant, 2011; Miller, 1999), and the semiotics of emotions (Peñamarín, 2016). This approach helps us recognise socio-semiotic interpretations of how an emotion operates in a cultural context and to use these as valid analytical tools.

The socio-semiotic analysis of the discourses making up the controversy shed light on the emotional dimension involved. The analysis examines the: argumentative strategy (including framing and labelling); features of the discursive genre used; modes of figuration and narrativisation; appeal and discussion of imaginaries; enunciative dimension of the discourses (covering the construction of the enunciative voices, kinds of mobilisation, and the affective style used). The enunciative analysis helps us grasp how aggregations and proposals for collective action are made and articulated from movements of exclusion and hierarchisation of groups. These processes involve: (a) the intersections of identity dimensions (with gender, race, social class, and socio-sexual aspects playing key roles); (b) specific mobilisation of emotional repertoires associated with each type of subject, practice or object of value.

In this case study, we build the corpus from digital media campaigns, based on the hypothesis that technological mediation translates and adapts contemporary deliberative practices. While such campaigns are not

the be all and end all of interactions and practices involved in the public sphere, they do play a great role in the current transformation, hence our focus on them.

On the 3rd of December 2017 and after making themselves known with another video defending the sundry rape victims of *La Manada* ['The Pack', a group of young rapists] the Towanda Rebels<sup>4</sup> launched the *Hola Putero*<sup>5</sup> [*Hello Whoremonger!*] campaign, which epitomised the key premises of the abolitionist position. The campaign was populist, audience-targeted, and took an approach designed to make the message 'go viral' on social networks. It adopted a rhetorical style and affective tone based on anger and outrage. It prompted a direct response on the 22nd of December 2017 with the video *Hola abolicionista*<sup>6</sup> [*Hello Abolitionist!*], published on the sex workers' channel — a reaction that was symptomatic of the defensive strategy taken by the pro-rights movement.

*Hola Putero* got wide coverage in the news media, with appearances by the protagonists, revealing abolitionism as the dominant discourse (Sais-Echegarreta, 2019). Its dissemination served to publicise this group and subsequently position it as one of the most important media advocates for abolitionism on social networks (the two authors currently have over 35,000 followers on Twitter, outnumbering other advocates such as Mabel Losano -29,300 – and Amelia Tiganus - 19,100).

The *Hola Putero* video had 760,183 views and some eight thousand comments (as of the 27th of April 2018), and received 9,600 'likes' and 10,000 'dislikes' — roughly an even split between support and rejection. From a moderate abolitionist standpoint, Rubio argues that "criminalising bad social practices is not always the best solution because it strongly undermines social legitimacy and prove hard to apply or ineffective in

4 See: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCr4l0skM9D5RcY4Cwd2V-MA>

5 See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cb7t10c-blM>

6 See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B1dwlEB8mTI>

resolving conflicts” (Cited in Heim, 2012). One should note that the *Hola Abolitionist* video got 108,248 views and 3,500 ‘likes’ but only 205 dislikes, yet received hardly any media attention. This reveals the lack of interaction between opposing groups of activists, which increasingly act like ‘bubbles’.

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## ANALYSIS

### *Abolitionist perspective*

The *Hola Putero* campaign included the best-known arguments of hegemonic abolitionism: equating prostitution and sex-trafficking; the centrality of the victim - the main driver of the discourse and of collective action; the notion of prostitution as an essential institution of the patriarchy, perpetuating inequality, fostering violence, and underpinning practices in which women are seen as chattels or object of exchange. This explanation of the prostitution system gives prostitutes a privileged but puts those who define themselves as ‘sex workers’ in a small minority.

The construction of a commonplace that equates prostitution and exploitation is articulated through the isotopes of crime/infracton, suffering/violence, through the figurative roles of victims (that is to say, all prostituted women), criminals (clients) and accomplices (those in the know). This discourse stresses and repeats the supposedly degrading link between money and sex, labelling the practice as morally reprehensible and the resulting sexual practices as tainted by money (Seliser, 2011, p. 186 *et seq.*). We find constant references to payment, sale, purchase, money and investment. A chain of equivalences is established: buying sex is equivalent to buying a body and to buying a life (and thus tantamount to slavery). This same argument can be found in the slogan of the Spanish Government’s anti-prostitution campaign: “Do not invest in suffering” (2017), a theme used by many other campaigns in recent years. This follows a path in which a legal (though frowned-upon) act in Spain is turned into something that is degrading and even criminal (being put on a par with rape).

With regard to the enunciation and the emotional strategy, the campaign’s voice is figuratively represented by two young women who, using a free-form, indirect style, constitute a supposedly omniscient voice that challenges those defending prostitution, allegedly reproducing what they do, want, think and feel. The same voice judges ‘prostitution’ supporters from a position of moral superiority, endorsed by defence of the victims and a call for compassion. This voice defines itself as courageous, irreverent, and necessary and tags along with a new feminist ethos expressing women’s anger at ‘the patriarchy’.

The production of transitory emotions in a context of moral-sexual panic calls for ‘affective work’ whose goal is to elicit estrangement and so help drive rejection of the attitudes, practices and values associated with paid sex. The campaign seeks to scandalise audiences through its combative tone, emotional intensification and maximisation of the arguments for why the public needs to (or ‘must’) take the ‘right’ ideological and emotional positions and wholly support the campaigners’ proposals.

The affective strategy is achieved through a combination of compassion (as an affective disposition) and an emotional repertoire that resorts to disgust, indignation, shame and moral outrage. An imaginary of the victim’s plight is put to work by appealing to strongly standardised affective habits bearing on the suffering of others (Boltanski, 2000) and to values such as justice, generosity, and moral superiority (when dealing with criminals and/or the morally depraved). At the same time, it challenges women to share its outrage because they are all potentially victims of prostitution (which involves objectification of the female body and its degradation) and from which they should defend themselves.

The narrative and figurative dimension of the campaign points to disgust as a basic strategy for eliciting transitory alert emotions. To do this, a mainly corporal, visceral experience prevails over cognitive resources (hence the use of particularly crude body

images: *There comes a moment when you have to let rip, to find an orifice to stuff your frustration into*), a strategy conventionally linked to the use of moral shock (Goodwin *et al.*, 2001, p. 16). Behaviours are presented as both morally and physically disgusting (Miller). In this case, the disgust is associated with commonly accepted situations (Hello Whoremonger!, you are not alone) yet at the same time, it creates a strangeness, providing scope for re-categorisation (*You don't pay to fuck, you pay to rape*) which not only affects the cognitive framing of a practice but also the rules on what the 'socially appropriate' emotion is (Hochschild, 1990). The idea is that if we find something disgusting, we should throw it up but this is based on the premise that it is something that we previously swallowed (or accepted). Here, the campaign presents prostitution as a historically normalised practice and thus one that was accepted. The 'affective work' here consists of rejecting (metaphorically 'throwing up') something that is presented as threatening and polluting. Furthermore, disgust operates as a transitory emotion because it is a fleeting one marked by an irrepressible urge to expel what disgusts us so as to avoid harm (Ahmed, 2004b).

The strategy is to push the client into negative categories: from whoremonger to accomplice and, finally, to rapist. The goal is to make men — whether whoremongers and those who might become ones — ashamed and feel so exposed to society's wrath that they end up mending their wicked ways. The strategy is to make them disgusting to large swathes of public opinion. The stereotype of the 'guilty whorer' is used to show the depravity of using prostitutes' services, branding those who consider it 'normal' as the vile accomplices. The campaign opens an enunciative space that challenges the public as subjects who should feel disgusted and indignant, distance themselves and prove their adherence to this moral judgment by sharing the elicited emotion. That is to say, the mere presence of certain bodies and practices is supposed to disgust and anger us, rendering them intolerable.

Disgust serves to argue the discrimination and rejection of subjects and practices, for which it uses

its performative capacity to generate a surface, a 'contact zone' as it were in which bodies contaminate one another (Ahmed, 2004b, p. 24 *et seq.*). If all the emotion these unions cause arises from intimate bodily contact, the disgust is intensified, reinforcing base emotions because it lets us link signs and senses to bodies, blocking out our other senses. Disgusting bodies and practices are attractive forces, hence the women-victims are trapped in this affective and value universe characterised by moral disgust, especially when they are depicted as mere orifices and sexual parts (even in the case of the rhetorical strategy followed by the 'whoremonger discourse'). Stigma is performatively reinforced notwithstanding the critical goal, short-circuiting other modes of affective relationship with women in prostitution contexts. In our view, this makes it even harder to mobilise non-revictimising compassion.

The abolitionist discourse seeks to create a public, appealing to a sense of emotional belonging (an 'us') while identifying a disgusting, shameful 'them' (whoremongers and those who consent to their activities) who are placed beyond the pale. The limit of this strategy occurs when women, by contact, are also degraded by being in the thrall of slavery and violence and 'selling' their bodies. This way of linking themes is especially clear in the ambivalence with which the campaign mentions consent (Serughetti, 2018) (*Your money legitimises what you do and they allow you to rape them. Do they consent or resign themselves? Resignation to being second-class women, cattle, throw-away women, 'glory holes'*). Although Serughetti avoids explicitly accusing prostitutes (who present themselves as victims of exploitation), her discourse argues that paid sex is morally contaminating, degrades whores and their clients for which both should be utterly ashamed (especially if their behaviour is freely chosen).

For shame to have political significance, witnesses are needed who agree that any arguments questioning this perspective need to be blocked. This explains the moral reproof of and disdain for those rejecting the ideas of the affective community proposed by the abolitionists (Ahmed, 2004: 99). It can also be seen

in the enunciative change in which the campaign challenges the actors defending sex work (*When you speak of consumers who pay for a service, I speak of whores. When you speak of sex workers, I speak of slaves, because they are the result of thralldom....*). Here, I am not interested in whether women have the right to prostitute themselves or not. When the controversy is framed in such terms, the difficulty of any meaningful dialogue between the two sides becomes apparent.

### *Pro-sex work perspective*

Defending sex work constitutes a counter-hegemonic discourse framed as a response to the dominant abolitionism, adopting (in the campaign studied in this paper) a symmetrical enunciative strategy. This counter campaign — *Hola abolicionista* [Hello Abolitionist!] repeats the previous formula adopted by the *Hola putero* [Hello Whoremonger!], a strategy that limits its scope for connecting with a wider audience. The *Hola abolicionista* campaign got scant media coverage (though it commanded more interest on social networks). Nevertheless it also sought to reach a general public by reversing social contempt for sex workers and overcoming stigma by valuing their work, their freedom and their right to decide.

*Hola abolicionista's* enunciative strategy stresses the views of sex workers. Several women who say they are sex workers appear in the video snippets, speaking to the camera to question a 'virtual' abolitionist. The only exception to this treatment is a woman who hides her face to prevent her children being stigmatised. *Hola abolicionista* takes the form of a 'home video', a macro-genre found on social networks in which there is a clear unity of meaning and rhetorical orientation among the narrations of the speakers. Visually, the diversity of 'personal' scenes in which each woman has her own video snippet is unified by on-screen superimposition captions of phrases spoken by the women, which are thus highlighted as slogans. The combative graphics and provocative language are combined in the quest for dignity, the basic strategy used here is to value sex workers and normalise the work they do. The pro-sex work perspective has to

perform much harder emotional work than in the abolitionist camp because its argumentative and emotional strategy is articulated as a response to the abolitionist discourse, and is based on what is assumed to be a 'common sense' position.

In the first place, the *Hola abolicionista* campaign questions the privileged position of the abolitionist discourse and denounces the way it identifies sex-trafficking and prostitution (*Our work is not a violation. It is a contracted service. My clients treat me much better than those in other jobs. Prostitution is not trafficking*). They argue that such identification fosters greater stigmatisation of sex workers, making them more vulnerable, silencing their testimony and denying them any vestige of legitimacy (*Thanks to your anti-prostitution campaigns and the way you label whoring as 'paternalism', I am much more stigmatised and vulnerable than ever before and am not even allowed to stand up for my rights*). They denounce the abolitionist mission to 'save' them (*You want to save me and be my Prince Charming, well, my dear clients can save me from pretenders like you*). Second, it thematises the issue of women's freedom, claiming the value of their consent, their decisions and sovereignty over their own bodies, thus linking to a key value for the feminist movement (*What you want is to forbid me from doing sex work. But you should know you can't tell a woman what she can and can't do with her body and with her life ... / Did you know that when I have traded sex for money, my clients asked me more about my sexual preferences than when I've fucked for free?*). From that common place, she revalues sex work, alluding to the empowerment and scope sex workers have to set their own rules (*This is my bed and my workplace. Here I make the rules. Those who do not agree to them have to go elsewhere*). The *Hola abolicionista* campaign makes its demands explicit: rights for women workers; justice and dialogue in the search for models for managing these rights. It demands dialogue so that sex workers can put their perspective on an equal footing with that of their adversaries and because "*the discourse on prostitution — for or against — eclipses everything*". Lastly, the campaign wins legitimacy by carrying out a performative exercise by reviving the old "feminist

whore” label — a re-appropriation of the insult levelled at feminists in the past to associate the sex-workers’ cause with that of feminists, assuming the inclusion of sex workers’ rights within feminism even though the latter movement has been overwhelmingly abolitionist.

The movement and the campaign pursue two goals, namely to: (1) activate the affective disposition of solidarity while separating it from mere compassion; (2) deactivate the web of transitory emotions aggressively mobilised by abolitionism, especially those of disgust and shame. Likewise, sex workers must temper the sense of urgency and the state of alert conjured up by abolitionists to justify intervention to tackle prostitution. Here, sex workers need to win the support and sympathy of their fellow citizens and gain respect for their individual choices while avoiding being pigeon-holed as ‘victims’ or as vile persons engaged in an activity judged to be immoral, violent and contaminating.

First, the campaign seeks to reverse deeply-rooted social contempt for prostitution, and to foster respect for the activity. It does so by highlighting the dignity of the women who choose prostitution and why they feel empowered (for instance, because of the limits they place on their clients, etc.). In the process of redefining the rules of feeling, Flam (2005) mentions the added difficulties faced by movements fighting for recognition and in overcoming public shame. This emotion, like disgust, is one that helps forge links among actors, practices and objects to create a sense of unity and belonging (Ahmed, 2004b; Sedgwick, 2003, p. 104 *et seq.*). In the abolitionist discourse, both emotions facilitate the union between ‘whoremongers’ and ‘prostitutes’. According to Sedgwick (2003, pp. 36-38), while guilt bears on actions, shame bears on a sense of oneself, challenging identity by mobilising social expectations, cultural conventions, and stigmas. Shame does not stem from prohibition or repression *per se* but rather from communicative disruption, from a failure in identifying with others, leading to the subject’s isolation. In tackling such a context, the emotional work undertaken in political projects for

changing this state of affairs involves linking shame to other affective repertoires offering alternatives to this highly negative emotion. This is so because the emotional pairs of shame and pride, and of self-perception and dignity are simply two sides of the same coin (*Ibid*, 38). New collective identities are spawned by lack of social recognition: “pride, anger, and solidarity are signs of emerging collective identities and a precondition of the co-ordinated action typifying social movements” (Flam, 2005, p. 27) in which members demand respect and honour.

Appiah points out that respect by others and self-respect are central goods for recognition is a basic human need. As human beings, we need others to acknowledge our worth (2010, p. 18). However, this is not just a question of external recognition since each person needs to feel ‘worthy’ of esteem (Appiah, 2010, p. 31). That is why people who feel despised may come up with their own ‘code of honour’ (a set of rules and values) in which both their work and their worth as individuals are respected.

In the *Hola abortionista* video, the dignity and honour of women who identify themselves as sex workers and who have freely chosen this activity are key. Appropriating this central, well-established freedom in modern individualism lets sex workers spurn the ‘slavery’ label often used to describe their activity, helping them feel better about themselves. Sex workers insist that it is they who decide to have sex with a client or not, and it is they who make the rules. Reciprocity in giving and receiving is given as proof of the mutual respect on which the sex worker-client relationship is based. In addition to denying that they are slaves and victims, sex workers stress that winning respect for their work is vital to counteract the abolitionist’s lack of recognition for their profession. They reject being treated in ways that should elicit indignation. Compassion, they argue, does nothing to improve things that matter to them, such as their status as workers. In arguing that prostitution is a profession that commands respect, they note that their line of work is much less precarious than many other jobs and is less

subject to labour abuses. They also seek to limit the role prostitution plays for them. Sex workers see it as merely another aspect of their lives and not as something that defines them as individuals. This is why they strongly oppose a moral and affective framework that denigrates prostitution and turns sex workers into pariahs.

Recognition is often set against compassion. According to Douglas, the difficulty of this relationship is that there are no free gifts, “Although we praise charity as a Christian virtue, we know that it hurts. If we do not ask for anything in return, we do not recognise the mutual relationship between ourselves and the person to whom we offer our gift” (Douglas, 1990). “Put simply, reciprocity underlies mutual respect” (Sennet, 2003, p. 223). For this reason, the compassion of abolitionism towards the ‘victims’ is seen by sex workers as an utter lack of recognition and respect towards the very people the abolitionists say they feel sorry for.

The moral superiority exhibited by abolitionists offends those defending sex workers. The latter’s discourse reveals outrage for being stigmatised, for having no rights, and for what they see as the abolitionists’ contempt for them. Their response is to show the same contempt for the abolitionists by calling them whore-haters and as being the ones who stigmatise them and make them vulnerable. Thus the shame that would otherwise tar them is heaped upon the abolitionists. The sex workers refuse to feel ashamed because that would merely set the seal of approval on the dominant socio-sexual and moral code. In strategic terms, sex workers have to combat the subordinating potential of shame (Ahmed, 2004b, p. 107) and replace it with anger and indignation. The latter are two emotions where the subject may temporarily succumb to negative feelings, says Ahmed, yet where negativity and evil is then expelled and projected on someone or something else — in this case, on abolitionist feminists. The psychological reason for this ‘expulsion’ of shame is that if it did not occur, the subject would feel unworthy and contemptible and would end up rejecting herself. (Ahmed, 2004b, p. 104).

## CONCLUSIONS: VALUES AND EMOTIONS IN THE TWO OPPOSING CAMPS

Discourses and practices facilitate the circulation of sundry affective experiences, both those that have become habitual (affective dispositions) and those that are strategically mobilised (transitory emotions) in given political contexts. The emotional framework used by the actors in pursuing their political projects makes sense through the intersection that occurs in the production and updating of emotional repertoires in the mediated sphere, reinforcing or transforming the rules on legitimate/illegitimate feelings on a public issue. In the mediated public sphere, emotions are managed strategically and must dovetail with media approaches. These requirements open a gap between the emotions stemming from social actors’ internal experience of a public issue and the external context in which those actors must operate and that defines the ways emotions have to be staged. According to our observations, the emotional and argumentative repertoires of the abolitionist movement on the one hand, and of the pro sex work lobby on the other is more complex and diverse than appears in campaigns and public interventions. However, the need to mark one’s own position against the other requires emotional management to ensure affective opportunities can be seized to boost public support for one’s position. For example, one might say that the pro sex work discourse has limited the movement’s ability to publicly express the pain arising from the multidimensional violence found in prostitution contexts. That is because mentioning the unsavoury aspects of prostitution might only strengthen the opposing abolitionist arguments and proposed solutions.

Nowadays we know that emotion is a motivational force and that target audiences are not only driven by ideologically inspired proposals and arguments. This is why political actors strive to change the emotional culture of their target audiences (Gould, 2016, pp. 161-164). This implies that in a controversy such as the one analysed in this paper, the actors seek to ‘educate’ target audiences by providing emotional repertoires and discursive resources to put words

and images to shared emotions that were previously woolly and ill-defined. Among other things, such nebulosity may arise from perspectives on the world and values that have yet to be explicitly linked to the issue at stake. Common affective habits will help build bridges, bringing out a specific emotional experience bearing on the public issue. On the one hand such habits may work to modify pre-established empathy maps. On the other hand, they may lead to rejection of whoremongers shifting the notion of prostitutes as disturbers of the peace to one of victims worthy of our compassion. In this case, the public's empathy is sought by an appeal to listen to whores' stories and recourse to a performative rupture the 'feminist whore' slogan and identifying prostitutes with fellow citizens and workers who also suffer from precarious employment.

This analysis reveals the strategy behind mobilisation of transitory emotions, which connect the affective report of each perspective with certain emotions

typical of the protest (Jasper, 2013) (indignation, disgust, fear, anger, hope, frustration) to foster recognition and to build an audience around a proposal for tackling prostitution. The goal is thus to form an affective community committed to the worlds of meaning, values and, specifically, to the political proposals put forward by each actor in the controversy.

The affects also serve to mark the limits of what is correct and appropriate and thereby define lifestyles. In this respect, the perspectives intervening in the controversy on prostitution involve the affections enshrined in sundry bio political models, which aspire to regulate the regimes of sexuality and gender and, in broader terms, the forms of governance proper to sexual citizenship (Sabsay, 2018). In its current form, the controversy points to how normality and the processes of exclusion and subjugation are configured, rejecting dissident models of sexuality (Berlant and Warner, 1998).

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## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

### *Vanesa Saiz Echezarreta*

She is Professor of the Communication Faculty at the University of Castilla-La Mancha (UCLM), teaching and researching in the fields of Communication and Information Theory, Socio-Cultural Analysis, Semiotics, Gender

Studies and Feminism. Saíz is also a member of the Semiotics, Communication and Culture research group at UCLM and co-ordinates the Studies and Discourse Section at the Spanish Association for Communication Research (AEIC).

*Cristina Peñarín*

She is Professor of Information Theory at the Faculty of Information Sciences of the Complutense University of Madrid (UCM). She is currently the Lead Researcher for the project “Public Issues and Controversies: Diversity and participation in the media sphere”. Her teaching and research work focus on semiotics and communication, socio-semiotic analysis of the imaginative, ethical and affective aspects of the public sphere.

