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The “pedagogy of cruelty¹” in the “putero” narrative.

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Abstract:

Este artículo se centra en el estudio en la gramática sexual de los discursos de los clientes de prostitución en España en relación con la obra de la antropóloga Rita Segato, con el propósito de entender por qué los hombres acuden al sexo de pago. Mediante entrevistas en profundidad semidirigidas, entrevistas grupales y grupos de discusión se pretende indagar en las causas y sentidos que articulan el “relato putero”. La sucesión de paradigmas sociosexuales en nuestro país ilumina la comprensión de este fenómeno que sitúa a España en el país europeo con más consumo de prostitución masculina. Las narraciones se can a clasificar en cuatro categorías: misógino (odio a la mujer); consumista (todo se compra y vende); amigo (afectivo aunque abusa); y crítico (ocasional y arrepentido). Desde nuestra perspectiva, la compra de sexo de pago responde a una estrategia de refuerzo de una masculinidad conformada por una identidad que gira en torno a la exhibición frente al grupo de pares masculinos.

Abstract

This article is focused on the study conducted on the sexual grammar of the narrations of prostitution customers in Spain in relation to the work of the anthropologist Rita Segato with the purpose of understanding why men pay for sex. In order to understand the causes that articulate the "putero" narrative, the discourses of prostitution customers were analyzed through semi-structured in-depth interviews, group interviews and discussion groups. The succession of socio-sexual paradigms in our country illuminates the comprehension of this phenomenon that places Spain as the European country with the highest rate of male prostitution consumption. The stories are classified in four categories: misogynist (hates women); consumer (everything can be bought and sold); friend (affectionate but abusive); and critical (occasional and remorseful). As far as we are concerned, the purchase of sex is an strategy to reinforce masculinity based on an identity focused on exhibition in front of a group of peers.

Palabras claves: *putero, prostitución, marcos de interpretación, paradigma sociosexual.*

Keywords: *putero, prostitution, framework for interpretation, sociosexual paradigms*

Introduction

When approaching the phenomenon of prostitution, generally the debate drifts towards a confrontation among the positions that defend legalization and consider that women in prostitution are sexual workers¹ and other positions that consider that prostitution is an effect of patriarchy and gender-based violence (Gimeno, 2012).

Once again, the attention is aimed at women in prostitution, tackling questions such as the causes of prostitution, whether they are victims of trafficking or whether they volunteered or are forced, etc. but there is a fundamental forgotten actor and without

¹ This concept is inspired in the work of the anthropologist Rita Laura Segato. Her approaches will be used to guide the interpretation of the analysis of the "putero" discourse in this article.

him, this phenomenon could not be understood: the prostitution “customer” or “putero”².

Prostitution is an eminently gendered phenomenon, as 90% of victims of prostitution are women and 99.7% of prostitution customers are men (Seville City Council, 2011). Nevertheless, why are the majority of prostitution customers men? Why are the majority of those who prostitute themselves women?

Furthermore, the statistics prove that our country has the highest rate of prostitution in Europe. Prostitution is not a residual and minor fact, but rather major and meaningful. What is currently happening to men to be massively exchanging sex for money? Why do they frequently go to prostitution spaces? How do they build and live their eroticism? Are we facing an “agony of the eros”ⁱⁱⁱ or a unique sexual culture? We aim to answer these questions through the analysis and consideration of the results obtained from several research studies that started in 2004 (Gómez et al, 2005, 2015) through interviews with “puteros” and men in general³. Considering the previous paragraphs, the discourses of the interviewed “customers” constituted the main topic of this article, the aim of which was to analyze their discursive emphasis on their sexual grammar in relation to the context of “war against women”⁴ (Segato, 2016).

Male sexual rhetoric and purchase of sex: discursive emphasis.

Spain is the top country for consuming prostitution services in Europe (APRAMP, 2011) and the top destination for victims of trafficking (Meneses, 2016). In fact, the sexual health surveys conducted on European and national levels demonstrate a significant increase in commercial sexual relationships, particularly in our country. The “Sexual Behavior and HIV/AIDS in Europe” is the most exhaustive European study conducted on sexual and sanitary habits on the continent until today. This study shows a comparison between 11 countries and Spain is in first place regarding sexual

² Assuming the current cultural meanings of prostitution in our society, we should consider the “customer” as the main actor that exercises the main role and primary responsibility of the existence and permanence of the phenomenon and, consequently, the need to designate him as a “prostitutor” (prostitution agent) or “putero” (De Miguel, 2015).

³ Besides the individual interviews with men and those that demand commercial sex, women in prostitution were also interviewed, as well as transvestites in prostitution, owners and workers in flats and clubs, government and non-government technicians and academics or experts.

⁴ Catherine MacKinnon (1993) and other authors state that, currently, there is still a continuity of war crimes and peace crimes against women. Gender does not know peaceful times.

relationships in a prostitution context: almost four of every ten Spanish men, 38.1%, admitted to having purchased sex at some point in their lives.

In fact, the most recent paper by Carmen Meneses (2016), estimates that around 20% of men interviewed acknowledge going to prostitution spaces. Previously, in a study conducted by the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS, 2009), it was detected that 32.1% of men over 16 years of age had used prostitution services, in comparison with 0.3% of women. In 2003, in the survey of Health and Sexual Habits (INE, 2003), 27.3% of men reported having had sexual relationships in the context of prostitution.

As seen before, in 2004 we started a series of research studies on the phenomenon of prostitution, focusing the study on the masculine narrative of male purchasers of sex in Galicia⁵, and in 2011 we continued expanding it to the rest of Spain⁶. The first discovery of our research is related to the inexistence of a specific sociological profile among the group of men that pay in order to have sex with women: neither the age, the social class, the habitat, ethnicity, studies, job nor political ideology were useful to determine a stereotypical statistic model of the “putero”.

In order to analyze the narratives produced by men that pay to have sex with women in prostitution, the theoretical framework “*frame analysis*” was used (Gerhards, 1995; Goffman, 1974). The aim was to coherently structure their narrations regarding the sense given to the action of the purchasing commercial sex and to classify them into categories in order to improve the classification and comprehension of the same.

Below are the four prostitution *narrations* according to the discourses of the men interviewed.

⁵ Gómez and Pérez published the book "Prostitution: customers and other men" in 2009, which focused on young men and the consumption of prostitution in Galicia. In this paper, there were 17 interviews with customers, 5 interviews with discussion groups of masculinized collectives (doctors, metal union workers, students of electricity vocational training, IT and secondary school), 6 with female prostitutes, 2 with transgender prostitutes, 3 with owners and managers of prostitution clubs, 1 with a worker of these clubs and 3 with social services technicians that work with female prostitutes. (Gómez and Pérez, 2009).

⁶In this regard, Gómez, Pérez and Verdugo published the book “El putero español” in 2015, where the results of the project “Prostitution consumption in Spain: customers and women” are explained (COMPECLIMU). Exp. Núm. 2011-2013 Instituto de la Mujer. Main Researcher: A.G.S. In this research study, in-depth semi-structured interviews were held with 29 customers, 13 female prostitutes, 3 owners of prostitution clubs or flats, 4 workers from these clubs, 23 social services technicians, academics and/or professionals of social services. Moreover, 3 group interviews were performed with groups of men from 9 autonomous communities in Spain: It is important to point out that the structural scientific samples in the qualitative research are chosen through sociostructural representation criteria. The representation of the structural technique is not based on the probability of choosing a proportional sample, but as a representative character. In this case, those interviewed were selected using the “snowball strategy” (García Ferando et al., 2000).

The first typology refers to the so-called “misogynist narration”, that considers that women are in prostitution because it is their will and they like their job because it is comfortable and they earn large quantities of money without great effort. They perceive them as experts and sex professionals.

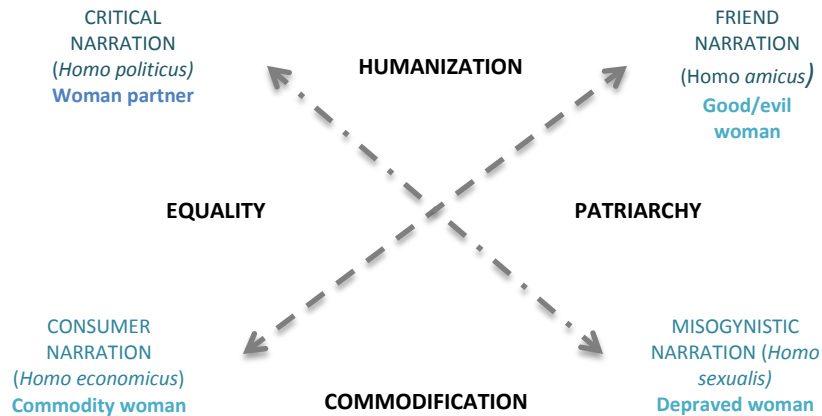
The “consumerism narration” classifies the woman in the sexual field as an option for consumption, compared with the asexual affective femininity of the women-partner”: if everything can be consumed, why not bodies too?”.

The “friend narration” wishes to treat women in prostitution as free lovers but reproduces the parameters of traditional sexism, according to which women are fulfilled through satisfying men.

The “critical narration” humanizes women in prostitution by identifying them as people subject to a practice of economic (not sexual) exploitation and to social injustice. He finds himself compelled to consume prostitution services due to sexual-affective crises.

The following chart represents these four narrations with regards to sexism and the feminine imagery associated to them. The two axes are defined by the reification and the consideration of equality towards women. In first place, the highest level of reification corresponds to the misogynistic and consumerist narrations where there is a commoditization of women, defined in one case by their low social value (misogynistic) and in another by their value as commodity (consumerism). In second place, the lowest reification level is established as humanization or empathy, which corresponds to the friend and critical *narrations*, with an affective-sexual or political side. In all cases, the context that structures the cases projects a high-impact modern patriarchy (Segato, 2014).

Chart 1. Representation of the typology of the discursive emphasis of the “puteros”.



Source: Prepared by the author, from Gómez et al, 2015

Likewise, the equality axis alternates between a patronizing attitude based on female incapacity (because she is unfathomable and dangerous, so she must be subject to male control (misogynistic *narration*), or weak and in need of protection (friend)) and a perception of equality of rights (mostly working rights) that leads to the vision of the woman as a potential peer in the affective, family and working (consumerist) fields or as someone that must fight to achieve her rights (critical).

These *narrations* result in the correspondent identities defined by the staging of the “I” (*self*) as *homo sexualis* (misogynist) that defines himself by his active sexuality and by his opposition to women. He must defend himself against women because their interests are conflicting and are achieved at the expense of men’s interests, where women are seen as false and depraved (“all women are whores”). The *Homo consumericus* (consumerist) detaches the commodity woman (hypersexualized woman) from the partner woman (affective). For the *Homo amicus*, women are evil (those that question his political-sexual hegemony) or good (those that accept his hegemony). And for the *homo politicus* (critical), women are divided among those that are structurally oppressed

and exploited because of their condition and those that have already achieved liberation by confronting the capitalist and patriarchal order (Gómez et al, 2015).

The structure-action system in prostitution

Certainly, in order to understand the masculine demand for commercial sex, it is necessary to bear in mind the structured and *structuring* nature of masculinity models (Connell, 2003 Bourdieu, 2000). For this purpose it is necessary to take into consideration several initial hypotheses that refer to the complex interconnection of structure-action systems that point to different variables.

On one hand, a structure of favorable opportunity in an advantageous legislative context and an occasional connivance between authorities and sexual ⁱⁱⁱindustry. As Rita Segato points out, we are facing a context where illicit business produces massive sums of undeclared capital⁷ which is linked and protected by the state, named by the author as “Second Reality” (Segato, 2016). On the other hand, there are media lobbies that legitimate and advertise this flourishing and organized sexual industry, a change in the affective-sexual paradigm of a population. It is necessary to consider an emotional patriarchal dominant culture and a hegemonic masculinity model that switches into a hypersexual idea of virility (De Miguel, 2015). Indeed, the power structures and the affective-sexual and political culture work against gender equity.

Effectively, there is a preexisting structure that overlaps every personal interaction which is characterized by the relationship of power, oppression and subordination of women in prostitution, with the “puteros” and owners of the sexual industry being the beneficiaries of an industry that is close, in many practices, to the criminal field.

In our country there is a favorable structural situation due to a lax legislation and lack of will by some authorities to prosecute the criminal activities of this sexual industry, parallel to the existence of media lobbies that legitimate and advertise this sexual industry. The changes experienced in the affective-sexual paradigm together with the new hegemonic masculinity models have promoted the prostitution industry. In essence, to build a hegemonic masculinity there must be correspondence between the cultural

⁷In 1999, in the UN Convention on Transnational Organized Crime, it was estimated that drug trafficking alone had better revenue than global oil transactions. This (illegal) “second economy” exceeds the (legal) “first economy” (Castells, 1999).

ideal and the institutional power. The highest levels of the business, military and government scopes deliver a very convincing corporate display of masculinity.

The socialization, through mainstream pornography, and the toxic sexism of the mass media, which promote an erotic-misogynist pattern, together with the absence of formal affective-sexual education (*cathesis*) and the control of the neoliberal logic are generating an affective-sexual subculture that is still promoting mass consumption of prostitution by part of the male population in our country.

France has recently passed a law (6th of April, 2016) that approaches this reality through an array of measures that include the field of formal education, social awareness campaigns against the commercialization of human beings, the criminalization of prostitution “customers” because this law judges them as the key element where the dynamics of the sexual industry lie, perpetuating situations of sexual slavery and the trafficking of women and children in the West. In Spain, this debate is not on the table and this change in the French legislative paradigm has hardly had any media impact, which is, at the very least, unsettling.

Sociosexual paradigms: a diachronic perspective of our country.

In the current context of social and ideological crisis that we are facing, the uncertainty, disorientation and unpredictability of the future brings us to a moment of strong intellectual reflection on the transformation and the sense of life (Bauman, 2015; Laval and Dardot, 2015; Han, 2014). Thus, it is important to open theoretical consideration of one of the key areas to give meaning to existence: the sociosexual order, one of the strongest prints of these times, which is becoming more complex and confusing⁸.

Therefore, the theorization about human sexuality and the different “sex pedagogies” has turned into a basic task for the social scientists devoted to the creation of new theories of the person, the identity and human body realities.

Nowadays, the prostitution of women is an indicator of the dominant sexual culture in the post-consumerist patriarchal societies, with a pornographic and commoditization

⁸ Papers such as “Sexing the body” (Anne Fausto-Sterling) scientifically question the biologist basis of sexual identities and, consequently, gender identities. This has fostered the breaking of binary discipline and the emergence of new sexual identities called: *algosexual, non-binary gender or gender non-binary, agender, cisgender, fluid gender or maverique*. Hence, in the social network Facebook and also in western countries (Germany and Australia) and non-western countries (India, Pakistan and Nepal) there has been a change in their registries where the category of “*indeterminate sex*” is offered.

nature (Segato, 2014) that cannot be ignored. Even though prostitution has turned into an universal phenomenon, its historical and cultural manifestations take us to a phenomenon which is, on one hand, very complex and varied in its shapes but always anchored to unequal gender relationships⁹.

Approaching this topic in terms of social dynamics, our country shows that in recent decades, a series of sociosexual paradigms have occurred that have started several “sex pedagogies” and have marked the affective-sexual culture and the emotional weakness of our population. During Franco's dictatorship, the dominant paradigm was based on a “sacred sexuality” where the only aim of sex was procreative and it was only performed within the framework of the marriage and the family, where the pedagogy of femininity as submission is hegemonic...

At a later stage, during the political transition, in the post 1978 period, a new rule emerged, based on the *ars erótica* (Foucault, 2006) that emphasized the experience of sex as a pleasure of the relationship, in naturalized, physiological and normalized sex, connected with emotional needs and sexual liberation. This imposed an elastic and hedonistic sexuality understood as a means of pleasure and personal fulfillment as recreational space democratically shared between partners and peers (Saez, 2015).

Finally, with the arrival of the stage of neoliberal capitalism of advanced consumerism, the new *scientia sexualis* appeared (Foucault, 2006). This emphasized representation, perversion and externality; a new sociosexual pornographic-liberal pattern that meant the arrival of a new alienated, pornographic, objectifying and scopic view of the body (Segato, 2014). It was also the arrival of the commercialization of human relationships and a compulsive and consumerist desire that, together with a powerful patriarchal culture and “leisure” industry (De Miguel, 2015:10, Saez, 2015), led to the building of a narcissist, hypersexualized, alterophobic and pornographized masculine identity, from a neoliberal rationality that generates major limitations of empathy and affection. This required a necessary pedagogy of insensitivity and blocking of empathy that Segato (2014, 2016) included in her so-called “pedagogy of cruelty”, that is the pedagogy of the pornographic consideration.

This set of narrations that intertwine through men's day-to-day lives nowadays makes the emergence of new masculinities possible after the decline of the traditional models

⁹ The prostitution phenomenon is not the manifestation of an activity that is itself good or evil, but rather, is a historical and social product. Certainly, among the *bijagó* tribe in Guinea Bissau or among the *mosuo* in China, prostitution does not exist (Gómez, 2010).

of men but without involving the disappearance of the cultural base of the “high intensity modern patriarchy”. This redounds in the significance of this phenomenon, consequently, there can be no turning point provoked by a generational change or by new family models.

In view of these circumstances, it is important to highlight that nowadays various differentiated masculine models exist, from the prevailing hypersexual hegemonic type to others that do not have the same shape because they are considered subordinated masculinities (deviated from the prevailing heterosexual rule), accomplices (those that are not misogynist but adopt the hegemonic rule), alternatives (men that support equality, progressives, feminists, transfeminists...) and/or marginalized (deviant and/or dissident) that share a pornographic-sopic view and a leisure model that is carried out in prostitution spaces (Connell, 1987).

The old hegemonic masculinity was exclusively built around the idea of the provider family man. This idea is diluting and dispersing into diverse shapes that coexist in a space of identity hegemony, where we can speak about masculinities defined in a reproductive scenario (Connell, 1987: 36). The structural parameters of the construction of gender identities seem to be unaltered.

Bearing in mind all of the above, the consumption of prostitution services survives under the traditional masculinity model (father-protector-provider) as well as under the emergent masculine identities (porn-copulator-consumer) that comprises a masculinity model that can be called the “bon vivant copulator”.

The construction of masculinity

In order to understand and address the analysis of the data obtained from these research studies, it is necessary to reflect on the sex/gender system and the construction of masculinities in our country. The cultural anthropologist Gayle Rubin defined the gender/sex system as a “sexual technology (...) through which society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity” (Rubin, 1996). Gender is one of the elements through which power and resources are distributed in society, and through them the individuals change the meaning of their lives. In order to deal with this social fact, it is necessary to start from the consideration that any research conducted with gender perspective is research into the asymmetric relations of power and an opportunity that each individual has within society, depending on their sexual body

(Ortner, 1979). Therefore, the sociosexual order is a way of using social practice that, in turn, is organized in symbolic practices that can remain in the life of an individual for longer and are related to discourse, ideology¹⁰ or culture.

Nowadays, there is a high-intensity “consent patriarchy” (De Miguel, 2015: 11) where subjugation is intended. Authors such as Pierre Bourdieu highlight that “masculine domination” involves a symbolic dimension where the dominator (the man) must achieve from the dominated (the woman) a type of adherence that is not based on a conscious decision but on an immediate and pre-reflective subjugation of the socialized bodies¹¹.

In this context, masculine and feminine categories that must be understood as political categories are built. Badinter (1992:43) considers that masculinity is not only an essence but also an ideology that tends to justify masculine domination¹².

The anthropologist David Gilmore tried to seek the roots of masculine power and affirmed that many cultures believe that men are created artificially and women naturally, this is why men have to test themselves to demonstrate their manhood: ...*“men are made, women are born (...) masculinity is fragile, always questioned, under suspicion and is found almost in any society”* (Gilmore, in Gutmann, 1999).

The hegemonic masculinity¹³ is still composed by the phallic, the sexual and the calculated subjugation. Were this hypothesis true, sexuality would be one of the fields where man tests himself and before others as “men”. For Kimmel (in Carabí and Segarra, 2000), virility should be examined by other men from a perspective of “homosocial validation”, that is to say, other men exert the scrutiny to accept them in the kingdom of virility.

In fact, most men think that sexual conquests give them reputation: the higher the number of sexual relationships, the greater the manhood. Bourdieu (2000) assures that “sexual intercourse is represented as an act of domination, possession, the “taking” of a

¹⁰ Ideology, as highlighted by Ángel de Lucas (Arribas *et al*, 2013), following Göran Therbon, highlights what exists and what does not exist, good and evil, fair or condemnable, the beautiful or the horrible and what is possible and impossible.

¹¹ However, Pierre Bourdieu (2000:69) points out that masculine privilege is a trap because men must always affirm their virility. The myth of the physical strength of men falls to pieces when considering the highest mortality index among fetus, children and male adults. Also, the number of psychiatric disorders and the number of suicides (Castells and Subirats, 2007) is higher among men.

¹² All societies have cultural registries of gender but not all have the concept of “masculinity” (Gutmann, 1999).

¹³ Gramsci’s theory regarding hegemony explains how a dominant class controls the main aspects of society, introducing their own definitions regarding important questions in the same, which then become socially predominant ideas and have the consent of the dominated groups.

woman by a man that, as signaled by Segato (2016), is a unique act of physical and moral domination to transmit a message of power pronounced before the brotherhood. The “production of masculinity” and its relationship with prostitution is not built in reference to the woman in prostitution, but is built in reference to a cruel masculine mandate and in reference to the rest of men that find commercial sex an opportunity to obtain their masculinity status and identity fulfillment.

Conclusions

The contrast produced between the trivialization of the consumption of commercial sex among many customers of these services and the dramatic situation of a large number of women in prostitution invites ethical reflection on this social phenomenon where gender perspective cannot be avoided. Here, unequal gender relationships, ethnic origin, feminization of poverty and the so-called “pedagogy of cruelty” (Segato, 2016) have a major place. This pedagogy of the pornographic approach to the body-object of women turns into a sacrificial feast where the body is consumed as food for the pact among men, which is thus celebrated and consolidated (Segato, 2014). This is the reason why many men go in groups to prostitution spaces, or, if they go alone, afterwards they share their “adventures” with the group of peers/friends. Is necessary to have a certain dose of insensitivity, a lack of empathy and considerable distance to generate the *sprit-de-corps* of the masculine fellowship (Segato, 2014). Indeed, the consumption of commercial sex turns into a violent and cruel “acting out”, in an expressive and communicative act that, through some kind of “blood pact”, renews the votes of virility (Segato, 2016). Therefore, this does not imply an instrumental act in order to look for “sexual pleasure”, but rather an expressive act of domination through the writing on the body of women that acts as a “battle field” in this war against them.

This research study concludes that there is no single sociological profile of customers, but rather, the reality shows a heterogeneity of men (age, social class, employment, studies or political ideology) that go to prostitution spaces. Regarding the narrations map of the same only show that the consumer narration is more common in younger customers. We identified four categories of customer "narrations": the misogynist (commodifies the woman), the friend (humanizes the woman), consumer (neoliberal-McSex vision) and the critical (repentant). These four typologies use traditional,

reactionary, neo-misogynist and post-misogynist theories that range from the mildest option to the hardest on the ideological patriarchal scale.

This paper started from a series of hypotheses where the prostitution consumer is not seeking “sexual pleasure”, there is no sexual motivation in their behavior, but rather a political-identity motivation in order to obtain the “macho” status or, at least, to look like this before a group of peers. The social fact of going to a prostitution space is understood as another construction process for masculinity among men, subjects compelled to acquire a status under the gaze and evaluation of their peers, provoking and reaffirming their skills of resistance, aggression, capacity to dominate and accumulate the so-called “feminine tribute” in order to exhibit the powers that allow him to be recognized and known as the “masculine subject” (Segato, 2014).

The prostitution scope works as a homosocial mechanism that generates a complicit “prostitution subculture”, shared by the group of men in our country that answers to a way of closing a link of membership in the communities of masculinity (Turner, 1969/1988) where collective consumption reveals itself as a foundational rite of “being a man”. In the achievement of the masculine identity, the men of our country go to homosocial spaces as brothels in order to reaffirm their virility in a neoliberal context of “pedagogy of cruelty” that inoculates the lack of empathy in human relationships and is a symptom of the absence of humanist education references in the affective-sexual field among the main socialization agents, which is covered by a sexist media discourse and a misogynist and phallogocentric mainstream porn narration.

Nowadays, there is a humanist point of view that is promoting a change in the sexual model, creating new spaces to eliminate sexism and generating the erosion of the imposing and violent model of men. We must install a different “grammar of sociality” that removes, with the collaboration of men, the mandate of the cruel and lethal hegemonic masculinity and to start a new community experience through the path of affection (Segato, 2016).

The aim of this paper is to contribute to the construction of a new social epistemology that helps to provide solid criticism of the binary model of gender, creator of contradictions, inequalities and ambiguities in gender relations, thus leading to a new sex-gender order founded on new ideological and material paradigms that alter dystopic power structures and a weak affective-sexual culture that works against equity and human rights.

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ⁱ Beatriz Gimeno approaches this debate in her book “La prostitución”, (2012) where both positions are identified: the so called “pro-prostitution” and “anti-prostitution”.

ⁱⁱThis expression refers to the title of the book by Byung-Chul Han, which approaches the transformation of “love” and “passion”. Other authors have studied these changes in the intimacy of current society, such as Anthony Giddens in his book “The transformation of intimacy”, Niklas Luhman in “Love as passion” or Zygmunt Bauman in “Liquid love”.

ⁱⁱⁱ Even though, as pointed out by the sociologist Hilario Sáez, not all prostitution forms part of the sexual industry. Complete sectors, such as homosexual prostitution, are pre-industrial and part of the growing and diverse offer on the internet that can be considered post-industrial.