

3

cuadernos de  
**ética**  
en clave cotidiana

Ethical interpellation  
of women who exert  
prostitution and are victims  
of women trafficking for the  
purpose of sexual  
exploitation



Fundación Europea para el  
Estudio y Reflexión Ética

M<sup>a</sup> LUISA DEL POZO  
SISTER OBLATES OF THE MOST HOLY REDEEMER

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## 1. Introduction

In the present booklet "Ethical interpellation of women who exert prostitution and are victims of women trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation", I set off from the principle that: each and every citizen of a country is responsible for its moral life and that's what I intend to claim from the start. We are more than barely spectators of what is happening in the area of prostitution and trade in women for the purpose of sexual exploitation, even admitting this reality, in most cases; it is an invisible, silent and silenced reality..

As citizens that seek the common good, we cannot look aside, shelter ourselves claiming lack of knowledge of what is happening, and at the same time, support the collective imaginary, so many times stereotyped and frequently reproduced by the Media.

*Each and every single person in a country is responsible for its moral life.*

If the World is ours and we are called to build it collectively, we are required to have a very proactive attitude and think that everything we do or don't do makes a difference and it will be in favour or against a more or less fair and egalitarian society.

Pope Francisco, referring to human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, says "it is a disgrace. A crime against humanity... One needs a common responsibility and political will to win on this front"

Dealing with such a complex phenomenon (i.e. prostitution), doubts could arise about whether we are facing an impossible fact, as despite all the studies, all the researches, all the

attempts of dealing with it, the stereotypes pass from generation to generation and, at present, it remains an outstanding matter without a clear solution.

*Prostitution and  
trade in women  
is still an  
unresolved  
issue.*

This booklet tries to provide the elements to help reflecting and deepening on prostitution and to reach a sceptical position and at the same time to contribute and demand, according to the subsidiary principles and participation the Church Social Doctrine speaks off, the necessary guidelines to create, all together, a different future.

We will divide the work in four sections:

The first one seeks a theoretical approach to the prostitution phenomenon and its link with the migratory movements and Trafficking and Human Trafficking for sexual exploitation purposes in an attempt to clarify concepts.

In the second section, we allow the women's own voice to question us through their attempts to become visible and their complaints, from their life experience and their rights to be restored.

In the third, we offer some clues to ensure interpretation from different perspectives: human rights, women's rights, specific ethics and anthropology, from the Gospel and from the charisma of the Congregation to which I belong to: "Sister Oblates of the most Holy Redeemer", which aim is to live a solidarity commitment with women practising prostitution; determined to walk alongside with them in a releasing evangelization path.

In the fourth, we will try to design some clues based on our intervention proposal, involving all parties, achieve a personal change as well as a society change, as a whole. As a final outcome - a call for hope.

*This Boobklet  
intends to be a call  
for hope*

Our thanks, as Congregation, to Funderetica, for offering itself as cause of interpellation of women who exert prostitution and are victims of Human Trafficking for sexual exploitation, so it reaches different areas within the Society and the Church, and for the opportunity they have offered us. This reflection has been a further reason to live with renewed passion our following of Jesus and commitment with the women.

## **2. Prostitution phenomenon and women's trade for the purpose of sexual exploitation.**

### *2.1. What are we talking about? Copy or reinvent new definitions?*

There are multiple and preconceived ideas about prostitution. It is an indicator of the difficulty posed to define globally a reality, that when in close relation with it, tells us that is changeable and permanent, unknown and criticized, used and rejected, invisible and real, but always interpellant. Usually, when dealing with specific matters (e.g. social, cultural, religious, etc), unquestionable and black and white approaches are not possible, and certainly prostitution is one of these. For such a dynamic and changeable reality, over which different ideological, legal and politics approaches are



given, it is necessary to extract, of each one, those elements shared by all positions: fight child prostitution, Human Beings trafficking and sexual exploitation in the exercise of prostitution.

*It is necessary to clarify concepts to be able to defend the Rights of all the women involved.*

Lately, and especially since Spain's approval of the Integral Plan against HumanTraffic for sexual exploitation purposes in 2008 and the further reform of the Criminal Code in 2010, it seems that Human Trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation has become fashionable:the terms of prostitution, trafficking, sex Trafficking and sexual exploitation, are confused in the social mind, what immensely hinders the defence of the rights of women who decide to exercise prostitution and demandfor it tobe a recognized and accepted job, as well as those who are victims of exploitation.

## *2.2. Emigration, Human Beings Trafficking, Trafficking, Prostitution.*

Migration from poor countries to rich countries has always existed and nowadays, it not only continues, but in some places it is increasing. Media globalization that reaches every corner of the planet, along with other positive effects, spreads the lure of a happy lifestyle in rich countries. However, that visonhas little to do with the picture that people will encounter, promoted by poverty or social and political violence in their home countries, when they decide to emigrate in order to move to a a better situation. The deceitful face of welfare of developed countries turns into exploitation, humiliation and legal prosecution.

Human Trafficking, trafficking and prostitution cannot be disassociated from those world-wide population movements, from the migratory policies of countries of origin, transit and destination and ultimately, of social and economic inequalities.

*Human Trafficking, trafficking and prostitution cannot be disassociated from those world-wide population movements .*

This phenomenon is not new, but is marked by peculiar characteristics such as: gender, as it mainly affects women as the most vulnerable sector of the population in their determination to achieve a better life for themselves and their families, and on the other hand, the increasing inequality, and social and economic poverty, of the most disadvantaged areas of the planet which become, in that way, in an efficient option for Human Trafficking .

*Gender and social and economic inequalities increase human trafficking networks.*

Prostitution has evolved in the same way as globalization and similarly the related expansion of capitalism in all sectors, including the sex industry. Today, we could say, that prostitution has become a consumer product managed by "multinationals" and we know sex has always guaranteed profits.

### *2.3. Trying to throw light upon:*

The protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Human Trafficking, especially Women and Children (also known as the Trafficking in Persons Protocol) is a protocol of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. One of three of Palermo's Protocols, the other two are the United Nations Protocols against the Smuggling of Migrants by

Land, Sea and Air and the United Nations Protocol against illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, adopted by the United Nations in Palermo, Italy in 2000. The Trafficking Protocol came into force on 25th December 2003 and by February 2014 it has been already ratified by 159 States.

### 2.3.1. What is Women Trade ?

Within the definition given by the Trafficking in Persons Protocol, three important elements are disclosed:

- **An Action:** recruitment, transportation, transfer, host or receipt of persons.
- **Means:** using threats or the use of force or any other means of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or under a position of vulnerability or giving or receiving payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person.
- **With a purpose:** exploitation. Exploitation can include, as a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal or organs.

*Trafficking involves an action, means and purpose of exploitation.*

### 2.3.2. Illicit traffic of emigrants

The United Nations Protocols against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, was adopted to warn and fight against the illicit

migrant traffic, to promote cooperation among States and to protect the traded migrants Rights. The above mentioned protocol defines "illicit traffic" as:

- **An Action:** to provide the illegal entry of a person in a Country of which such person is not a national or permanent resident.
- **A purpose:** to obtain a financial benefit or any other material benefit.

*Illicit Traffick and trade in woman are not the same*

Between illicit trafficking and trade in women, a series of connections and differences take place. We are, at this point, going to point out, at least, three differences that are fundamental when identifying possible victims.

- **Consent.** In the case of smuggling of migrants, they give the consent, although it is often performed in hazardous or degrading conditions. Trade in Women victims, on the contrary, have never given consent, or if they did, initially, that consent has lost its value due to coercion, deception or abuse of the traffickers.
- **Exploitation.** Illicit trafficking ends with the migrants' arrival to their destiny, whereas trade in women involves persistent exploitation of the victims, in some way to generate illegal profits for traffickers, so victims of women's trade are most severely affected and require a greater protection.
- **Transnationality.** Illicit trafficking is always transnational, whereas women's trade may not be. It can take place regardless of whether the victims are transferred to another Country or

only moved from one place to another within the same Country.

### 2.3.3. Prostitution

In relation to prostitution, of all existing definitions, including the one in the Spanish Language dictionary, we would choose those elements that are common to all forms of prostitution, those that remain over time as well as new forms including those which are exerted through internet. All of them have three elements in common: sex- activity- remuneration. The combination of all three elements and their variations will bring us closer to the most accurate definition of prostitution.

We have thus, three concepts to which we should add one more added by the reform of the Criminal Code in June 2010: sexual exploitation, which not having been appropriately defined, in practice is causing serious problems when trying to identify the victims of trade in women for sexual exploitation.

It is essential, as explained above, to understand, despite difficulties, the identification of each concept in order to determine, in what measure a woman exerting prostitution may do it freely or, on the contrary, as a victim of sexual exploitation or women's trade. The appropriate identification is so vital, that the life of the victim and family may depend on it. Baring in mind this global vision, it is necessary to point out that in this booklet, we will make reference, only, to these concepts to the extent that they are related to prostitution.

*The correct identification of the offences is key point to the protection of the victims and their families.*

Firstly, prostitution is referring to an activity that can be exerted freely or forced, while trade in women for the purpose of sexual exploitation and the smuggling of migrants are crimes: the first one against people and the second one against the laws of the countries. So far, and despite the progress made, an effective procedure for identifying and protecting victims has not been yet achieved.

If we take into account that women and girls' trade for sexual exploitation is a dynamic reality, and that the procedures and routes used are changeable, it is necessary to constantly revisit these in order to gain a global vision, avoiding getting lost and distracted in partial approaches, useless for a subsequent intervention.

There are several organizations that support the fact that as almost all of the women who exert prostitution are immigrants (around 90%), the vast majority of them are victims of women's trade . Some others deny the existence of women's trade or minimize it as an excuse of the invisibility of the phenomenon and the denial by some of the women.

Our approach, based on working experience, agrees with GRETA's report (Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings) presented in Spain on the 27th September 2013 under the name "Report concerning the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings by Spain"

In that report, this Organization points out some interesting recommendations to fight

*Prostitution is not a criminal activity while women's trade and trafficking are crimes.*

*One reality with different approaches*

against the Trafficking in Human Beings, confirming our vision:

- Trafficking in Human Beings and prostitution are not the same, although they are related.
- There are no studies that back up numbers. Therefore, it cannot be supported that 90% of women who exert prostitution are victims of women's trade.
- Prostitution claims cannot be discouraged under the excuse of fighting against trade in women.
- Since 2004, some Spanish cities (including Bilbao, Barcelona, Seville, Malaga, Granada, and Alicante) enacted civil ordinances that establish the possibility of fining prostitutes and/or their clients. Other Municipalities are in the process of enforcing these ordinances. In addition, the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP) have created a Municipal Ordinance model with the aim to reducing prostitution in public areas.
- The impact of these ordinances are for people exerting prostitution, to look for clandestine areas within the city or in the outskirts in remote and isolated areas, which translate into higher vulnerability. In these circumstances, detection is even more difficult, leaving them exposed to a greater violation of human rights, denying them the protection they are rightfully entitled and leaving free ground so those who profit from their exploitation can continue acting in total impunity.

*Repressive measures heighten the victims' vulnerability as they hinder being identified and protected.*

#### 2.4. *Paradigm of Complexity.*

We would like to point out, that in order to approach such a complex social phenomenon as prostitution and its relationship with women's trading, we need all sciences, all points of view, all guidance, and all different perspectives. Complexity cannot be looked upon with a naive look, but from an irrevocable Rights approach.

Based on the close contact with this reality and several observations undertaken, we perceive that Prostitution, as stated by Beatriz Gimeno, has to do with everything: with ethics and morality, to the extent it relates to human relationships; with sexuality and the various approaches to sex; with the social construction of desire; distribution of social and sexual roles and the unequal distribution of power amongst men and women; with the real income but also the symbolic; capitalism, labour exploitation, poverty, globalization, inequalities; with the market and the supply and demand laws; with the exacerbated consumption and the necessity to immediately meet the required needs; with individualism without any connection to the wider community.

Therefore, so many factors affect prostitution, that any attempt to give simple and one-way explanations would be hiding an important part of the issue. If all the factors are not taken into account we will only offer biased visions.

*Complexity needs to be answered from a global and irrevocable rights approach.*



### *2.5. Trying an approximation to the issue.*

*To come close to  
this reality, it is  
prerequisite to  
leave aside  
preconceived  
ideas*

In order to approach to the issue, we should put aside all ideas and preconceptions we have about prostitution and allow reality speak by itself. Looking at this reality and listening to it, to observe and analyze men and women's behaviour, we must establish not only the differences but also the inequalities and the structures that maintain such inequalities in order to implement the required measures and make equal opportunities more effective.

The first question that arises when we talk about the phenomenon of prostitution is about the numbers or quantities involved. How many? I don't know the source of information used by those ones who dare to venture the number of women that exert as the percentage of men users and the amount of money involved. In my long career, I have never been able to determine the number, limiting myself to speak based on the number of women assisted in the Oblates projects, projects offered by some non-for-profit entities and State Security Forces. In all of them, there is a coincidence in the women profile subsequently explained, acknowledging that, in any case, the data may only be the tip of an iceberg of what the whole phenomenon represents.

Always based on the women assisted, the profile is as follows:

- In the project and the shelter home, in 2013, Out of 121 women attended, 97.6 were immigrants, although, we must admit that lately there is a prostitution rebound among national women due to the economic crisis.

- They come from different countries: Nicaragua, Bolivia, Honduras, Dominican Republic, Colombia, Paraguay, Peru, Brazil, Equatorial Guinea, Lithuania, Rumania, Cameroon, Nigeria, Argelia and Spain.
- In relation to their status as immigrants, as we have pointed out above, we may distinguish between prostitution, Human Trafficking and trade in women for the purpose of sexual exploitation. These last two with high debts acquired before the trip, which for the women, becomes their main concern due to the consequences of non-payment.
- High percentage of young women with children and relatives under their care which were left behind in their countries of origin, to whom they have to provide economic support .
- Above all, strong, courageous, vulnerable, resilient, able to decide for themselves and their life conditions, even under challenging circumstances. Women that try to live in a world full of economic, gender, ethics, cultural and religious inequalities, trying to improve their life conditions.

*Women come from different countries*

But, what would you think about prostitution? Throughout history, prostitution has caused all type of reactions and points of view that have been expressed in the laws of different countries, from rejection and persecution, to acceptance or at least permissiveness and regularization. The current debate on how to address this phenomenon is divided between two main positions, but not exclusively, both

maintained by feminist ideologies and with difficult conciliation; the abolitionist that considers prostitution as slavery, something to eradicate and believes that the customers are the main cause of the existence and perpetuation of the phenomenon and the regulatory that considers prostitution as an inevitable fact that fulfils a social purpose. Therefore, when exerted between adults, freely and voluntarily it has to be regarded as any job, with social and employment rights and the same duties as any other worker.

While a sector appeals to human rights to defend the abolition, the other appeals to personal freedom of every human being to defend regulation. We have to add to these positions, those that defend absolute abolitionism, or prohibition, in which the prostitution must be stifled and legally repressed, ignoring that repression has never been the solution to anything and that such measures, as those adopted in several Spanish cities and referred to above, so applauded by some sectors, do not but only increase women vulnerability due to a greater clandestinity.

Clear deep contradictions appear in the speeches maintained nowadays at prostitution debates in Europe and worldwide. This demonstrate the complexity of the issue and allows us to assume that when it comes to adopting appropriate measures, these measures are implemented over the prostitution in itself but not the root causes that originate it. From our point of view, prostitution is an activity that evidently takes place, and we claim that the person and the core values of dignity, autonomy,

*The two extreme positions are abolitionist and regulationist*

*To focus on the persons is the fundamental criteria of our action*

freedom and liberty will always be above and beyond the activity itself.

Legal alternatives to the exertion of prostitution, given the different approaches (even among the women themselves, whom are ultimately the most impacted) cannot be conveyed through a single legal measure, whether the abolitionist or the regulatory one. Any of these measures will always leave aside an important sector of women who exert it, hence it could be questioned whether the justice would always be universal. The women human rights, their autonomy and freedom must be protected so each woman may plan their life as they consider most appropriate. We want to make clear that trade in women and trafficking are crimes that should be prosecuted by law with the corresponding indemnity to the victims.

*To choose a single legal measure would question the universality of justice*

## 2.6. *Where we speak from*

As a Congregation living a solidarity commitment with these women for 150 years, our methodology option involves giving priority to a model of intervention in which women's voice, appeals, builds new epistemological frames, encourages us to review our own practices and to propose social models and regulatory frameworks, without disregarding the contribution offered by the social sciences.

*Women's voice is key to define our position in the reality*

It is impossible, when we are so close to this reality, not to be impacted by it; we accept our perception is biased by names, faces and life stories we listen to on a daily basis. This, makes our vision partial and biased as we refer ourselves

only to those women we know and not to the whole group, and positioned by the mystique that brings us closer to them. This implies we may not be pragmatic in our approach and hence to respect and accept other differing views with which, apart from the dissent, we may also have some common points .

*Our vision of the  
reality will always  
be partial and  
positioned*

### **3. Women's ethical interpellation**

*If the echo of their voices weakens, we will die.  
(Paul Éluard)*

In this chapter we want to highlight the questions queried by women who exert prostitution and are victims of trade in women for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Expressed in their concerns and hopes. Coherently with our approach, we let these women, give us a master class of what implies the exercise of prostitution and the context in which it is exerted.

In the research made at our Congregational level in 15 countries (2009-2015) to women practising prostitution and that were victims of trade in women for the purpose of sexual exploitation , we gathered those situations which were expressed by women as a 'clamour', 'yell', requesting to be heard, understood, assumed and reproduced.

It is interesting to point out that this level of "yell" is not very common in the social research, so in this Congregational Study we have explicitly wanted to use this term, far from presenting "options" we have chosen to inquire over vital situations which cannot be "mentioned" as simple

facts of a research. These ‘yells’, so bold, as well as intense, come from women, bearers of rights, and we understand, when rights are so brutally infringed, they cannot be muttered, cannot be discussed, one cannot give just an opinion... they are yelled and manifested.

*3.1. The visible invisibility "They want us to hide so they may think we do not exist"*

In her presentation, Ms Soledad Becerril, Ombudswomen, shows the trade in women 2012 Report saying "Victims of this slavery are difficult to recognize but they are very close to us; they are unwilling to talk, mainly because of fear, being ashamed of the situation, or being very hard to re-live the circumstances they find themselves in. They are the invisible victims".

*The interpellations of the women need to be heard, understood, assumed and demand an answer*

The term ‘visibility’ refers to the possibilities of the people to "make visible" what seems hidden, that does not want to be seen, perceived or known by Society. The women ‘yells’, ‘clamours’ allow us to be aware of those situations they suffer daily, and avoids our eyes getting used to look at them, without seeing them, without paying attention and discover that, like us, they have rights and obligations and they challenge the way we think about them and define them.

*"People think we are here because we want to..., they don't think anything good about us... they don't want us near, people don't like us..., are not interested in us, they talk about us by what they see on television, and that is never good". "It is not easy; it is a great pain when society does not see us as people but as sex*

*machines". "I want to have rights and don't feel looked down upon".*

*From a demanded visibility to a desired invisibility "I don't want my mother or my son to know, they don't know what I do, I have no other choice if I have to feed them..." "From the moment you start the prostitution, the person begins to make life routine as a lie, one has to hide it from family, friends and everyone. It's as if one doesn't exist." "My husband knows about my life and he is always reminding me of it, but he lives off it and does nothing about it". "Clients are also afraid of being recognised and ask us not to recognise them".*

*Sometimes we  
are requested to  
be invisible*

*Depression starts to be felt: "Currently I don't go to the hospital because I don't want to get cured, what for? My life isn't worth anything". "I'm shaking with cold and tiredness, since six o'clock in the morning and haven't managed to earn the 25\$ I need to pay the hotel". "Here you lose not only the pace of normal life but the direction, the life cycle changes; you sleep when people are awake and live when the people sleep, so you become invisible".*

*Abandoning  
prostitution can  
be very difficult*

*"When you want to abandon prostitution you come back again because you feel weak, it is as if you walk in a closed circle that always takes you to the same place...". "Clients touching your body, it is a really painful emptiness and it really hurts to be unable to speak about it". "Prostitution is a double sided coin but people don't want or don't know how to look at it from a different perspective". "Why do people judge us but do not offer us any other possibility?"*

*Don't you think it is unfair? I want to drop it. I stick notices on lamps and traffic lights, but nothing. Who will offer me a job?"*

*"I got off a plane with thousand of dreams that were locked during two years in the only street in Italy I knew; there I had to prostitute myself to pay off the debt. How much solitudeness! People pass by but doesn't see you and the only constant look is the man that controls you looking out of the bar window"(...)"They say I am a protected witness but no one can make you invisible or protect you of your own fear, the more you want to go unnoticed the more you always feel the eyes of someone you believe is following you. M. says, eventually you get used to..."*

*"We all deserve the chance to change and to have the opportunity they have never given us". I don't feel at ease here, I would like to go home, I would like to get out of here, but when I need money and cannot find a job I fall for it again."*

*"The fact of being a women working in prostitution is something that condemns us to withstand their abuse..."*

It is evident from these words the right's violation and the lack of opportunities, the gender issue as a strongly discriminatory matter in a patriarchal social structure, and how prostitution is linked to other women related issues, the concealment of prostitution, the physical consequences, their longings to get out of prostitution and the economic needs they suffer.

*Prostitution implies rights' violations and the lack of opportunities*



### 3.2. *Society, I appeal to you*

Complaints want to manifestar the injustice suffered by women. These are multiple instances of humiliation against their dignity. ‘Yells’, looking for an echo and the need to show the corruption systems and social structures that threaten their rights and simultaneously victimize them.

*Complaints go over at times the outrage of women.*

From realities marked by poverty, women report the naturalization of prostitution . *“In small towns where there is hunger and need, daughters are sent to do sex work... therefore sex work is a work option when there is no other. In the same village some live in the lap of luxury without having done anything while others have to devote ourselves to this. Nobody will take action?”*.

*“How is it possible that there are no minimum for all and that wealth is so badly distributed? We are persons, not sexual objects. We have rights”*.

*“We would not like to be mistreated and pointed at for exerting or having exerted prostitution, there is so much humiliation, rejection and pain that some of us may commit suicide”. “We spend every day with different people and don't know what is going to happen to us:several times, I didn't know if I was going to finish the job alive... it is a horrible feeling and this is seen as an easy job”. “I feel fear, we cannot live like this”*.

We are challenged as society and a stake is required in those issues that concern them: *“Generally, supposedly legal agreements are*

*achieved, always without taking us into consideration, without listening to us, and remembrance dates to finish with the violence against women; but they only think of us one week before and one week after the day... then life goes on as always, you are fucked and you keep on going”.*

*“We need more security, where I am is dark and I am alone”.* I suffered once, when a customer's wife found us and attacked us. I didn't suffer the blows, I suffered her pain”.

*“Governments should give more support to single mothers, because life is difficult for them being on their own... Where are the male parents? The children belong to both”.*

The stigma cannot be expressed better *“It is a sad and dirty life, never mind how much we clean ourselves inside, we feel dirty, and it is a spot in our lives that will never come out, tattooed forever”.* *“Facing the pain of being a woman, but even more being a prostitute, it seems that the only way out is to shut up”.* *Prostitution exists, because those who enable it, men, exist”.* *“I want to be heard and treated better, I want to be seen as a normal woman”.*

*Prostitution is stigmatized.*

To the extent that women are empowered, the level of complaints and reporting the issue increases. *“I demand respect from businessmen and female owners as well as customers; I am bored of enduring, and after all it's me who pays”.* *“Some neighbours blackmailed me; they said that if I didn't have sex with them, they would tell my family about my sexual activities. At first I was afraid, my family does not know what I do, but then I faced them and I*

*threatened them with letting their wives know and matter settled". "We are here because we want to? No one wants to be at the stop, any girl you ask will tell you so".*

*Society points out to women who exert prostitution*

*"We are the village's whores and they treat us with contempt; they do not know that in many instances we do it out of necessity and you cannot or don't know anything else to do; we come last. In Society I feel pointed at, criticised, isolated by the neighbours and by my family as well and that is violence too".*

*When women refer to the security forces, on one hand they reveal how they are being victimized: "The police don't believe us, they say that we are looking for it because we are prostitutes". "The police are always after us. When they do raids, I am angry because I feel that they keep on sweeping until we are piled as dirt and I wonder until when we have to put up with it. Can't anyone stop it? Leave us alone and stop charging us with unfair fines". We are still being abused by the police, institutions, society and even ourselves".*

*In relation to justice "Our word doesn't count for the judges, they do not try to understand us". "We are worthless for the Authorities". "We don't have any protection, and Police are never on our side". Governments don't pay us attention in order to help us. They don't question themselves as to why we are in this job; Authorities don't help and with no papers, we cannot ask for help either". "We are harassed by the Society and the Authorities; we are prosecuted as criminals, pimps, mafia and smugglers".*

3.3. *From the deepest... I shout help, help, help... but nobody listens to me.*

They show us their deepest feelings, in which we perceive, in addition to their fragility, their resilience.

*“When we work we have to endure people staring at us, but ‘Why don't they look into our eyes?’ What are they afraid of? We have to not express what hurts us, not to shout out from the rooftops the abuse and defamation we are suffering”.*

Conviction and certainty of their dignity lead women to claim: *“I'm going to get out; I have to get out because this is not a life for me or my children”. “I want to rebuild my life again”. I do other things, I sell cosmetics, I sorted myself out; This way, I feel less bad and I can come less”. “My brother was an alcoholic and met a whore, she got him out of it and he doesn't drink any more, so that they can say we are not good and supportive”. “I don't want to continue going to bars, I wish to work in something else...”*

*The woman that exerts prostitution, experiments a close God.*

In these feelings that sprout from the deep, the experience of God appears; a close, listening, close to our lives, to their claims appears... *“I asked God. Lord, until when these sufferings? I keep asking God to protect me from violent clients”. “Every morning when I do my prayer, I pray for all my colleagues and I pray to God that my daughters may have a good future, not like me”.*

The following conviction exists: *“God listens to us, it is my certainty”.* *“I felt that God was*

*near, he gave me strength even though I have not always found His presence". "I cannot speak with God if I am in the brothel, I know He is there but I feel it is a lack of respect". "When I am working in the street my tears are not of water, they are of blood, I cry and I pray to God to help me".*

They also talk to us about faith, their religious seekings and their relationship with a God present in their daily lives and their project of life , common places where the spiritual dimension is also expressed.

### *3.4. Same situations, other perspectives...*

*"Those dual morale should be put aside and let it be recognized as a job... Why not to respect my freedom?"*

*Some women live prostitution like a normal job*

*"I have never been forced either physically or morally. I have to make myself respected". "The best think that can happen is legalizing prostitution for the prostitutes better quality life, with rights and duties". "I see it as a normal job, I have another tiny job in the mornings, but I'm still here". "I get money quicker than in a family household". "It is the sexual satisfaction and joy you feel when you get paid and when someone gives me something in exchange, that helps me".*

They also tell us about the satisfaction they get when they exert prostitution: *"It helps me to keep my vanity"* at the same time they point out that to exert prostitution is their choice of living. *"To be able to exert prostitution only for a period of time". "It is a solution to the lack of*

*employment". "I only exert prostitution when I need it". "Now I am a new woman, I have learnt many good things in this life". "I see some female prostitutes, like me, who are taken into account, and have done other things".*

In relation to gaining labour rights, women vindication cries are outright as they demand equality and standarization: *" Housing planing given to us, were for women exerting prostitution and we don't want a neighbourhood for prostitutes only, but a home, like anyother normal family". "Employment allowances, security at work, that owners and employers become responsible for us during difficult times". "Justice and rights, that the Association of prostitutes defend our rights".*

It is reinforced the legalization of prostitution: *"Prostitution has to be legalised, I think customers would treat us better because at the moment, they think we are objects and people with no feelings; By egalizing it , we would have better employment conditions and when we grew old, we could have earned a pension". "It should be treated as a job, not as an easy job, that is not, but other jobs are not easy either". "Prostitution should be legalized in premises fit for purpose, having women and clubs their obligations and rights: insurance, retirement benefits and decent wages". "It would be the way to work safer".*

*Woman who  
exerts  
prostitution  
claims their  
rights*

The rights they demand are referred to the fact that *"The social welfare bank allows us to contribute as self-employed, but that the word prostitute is not reflected in the retirement benefits". "Thanks to the prostitution I have*

*started my medicine studies; I don't need anything right now". "I have few negative memories; it has always been good for me. I always made myself worthy".*

It is emphasised that *"It is a job where you get money and it is always there if you need it". "It helps us to support our family despite what it involves exerting it, but if I want to continue exerting it, I want security and hygiene guarantees". "At least you can eat and give something to your children".*

To conclude this chapter, we can say if we go back to the origins of our Congregation, the task initiated by Jose María Benito Serra and Antonia Maria de Oviedo, 150 years ago, we can discover that their discernment emerged from a heartfelt observation and listening to their cries. Laments that touched them deeply and triggered a personal merciful answer to accompany women in the task of recovering the rights snapped up by an exclusive society.

*We have to listen  
and observe the  
cry of women*

Today, similarly to older times, the voices of women from all around the world keep on reaching us. Our task is to pick them up, open up to their interpellations and try to understand their desires and hopes, to recognize in this experience the opportunity of the Grace (Kairos) in which God passes through their lives and through our lives.

#### 4. Some keys for interpretation

*“Thinking without commitment is useless,  
commitment without thinking is dangerous”.*

(Natividad de la Red)

##### 4.1. From the Human Rights perspective

Adela Cortina reminds us that, although some laws are inspired by them, human rights are ethical requirements, not legal mandates. Its ethical condition has a demanding nature for everyone and it keeps its prophetic encouragement and hence its protest and indignation related nature.

*Human rights  
are an ethical  
demand for  
everyone*

When most of the mankind do not have access systematically to its full exercise (the interpellations women make are a good proof of it) we must reflect on the very definition of human rights and on what prevents the "right to have rights".

In Spain we have a democratic Constitution based on a core values in which all human beings, not only Spaniards, have rights: civil, political, economical, social and cultural. To all of them we should add the right to live in peace and in a healthy environment, without pollution and noise.

*We must reflect  
on what is  
banning some  
people to have  
access to human  
rights*

It is shameful to state, that although Spaniards accepted these rights and have committed to them, the logic of a marketplace that declares vital the economic growth, above and beyond the human being and the common good, added to your own satisfaction culture and to every man for himself, it is generating injustice and expelling all "human surplus" out of society. If we all keep recognizing these rights and committing ourselves to the victims of this



system, we are still on time to redirect the situation.

We have to introduce ethics and a critical assessment to all institutions that do not meet their purpose or objectives...

Debate not only the reorientation of our collective actions, but also how to do so. Prove that there are not only objective and possible options, but that they are also so much better for the progress of society than those based on other targets far from the needs of people.

#### *4.2. Women's Rights and specific ethics*

Regarding women's human rights, Professor Marcian Vidal proposes two basic criteria in order to illuminate the ethical discourse of the situations directly involved : women's personal dignity and their equality (as subject of rights) with men. This double affirmation leads us to two implications: ethical equality claim which involves autonomy and reciprocity between equal people and the ethical complaint of equality and discrimination. Today, as throughout history, the main sources of discrimination are still race, sex and social status.

Feminist movements have played a very important role making visible the widespread marginalization of women in the exercise of human rights, as a reflection of the inequality of gender and the dominant male hegemony. But, moral, political and legal equality between genders does not imply ignoring the biological differences to meet with equity the different needs. The organic and corporal differences

*We need to rectify  
history and return  
to the people  
excluded what is  
theirs by dignity*

*Faced with  
inequality  
ethical claims  
and report  
prevail*

imply a distinction in treatment in matters such as sexual rights and reproduction.

Gendersocial structure can lead to diverse ways of families, social and conjugal ways of living together, but none of these forms of relationship can be sustained in violence or imposed by force of one gender over another. Forced prostitution and trade in women for the purpose of sexual exploitation are the clearest examples of violence exerted on women and a systematic attack on fundamental rights.

*The organic-corporal differences imply a distinction in treatment*

Christian ethics, in the words of Marciano Vidal "must opt in favour of a radical feminism of comprehensive liberation, a feminism in which women's emancipation bring together liberation of other alienation and marginalization suffered by human beings, specially the weaker ones".

#### *4.3. An anthropological look*

The importance of this look lies on the fact that it is a self-criticism that takes into consideration people, responsible and committed with changing reality and approaches to social problems.

This look, involves dropping aside our own prejudices about the phenomenon and trying to look at it from the women's eyes. A look that requires putting ourselves in their shoes and then propose the social intervention. So, there is no better way than living together, speaking, feeling and empathizing more and better.

*We have to leave our own prejudices and look at it from the women's eyes*

It is the attitude that counts. To put yourself in their own lives, to understand their emotional situation, to have an intimate awareness of their

feelings, to get inside their own experiences, to let their sufferings and hopes touch us deep inside to be able to undertake their situation, to forget oneself momentarily and to get into someone else's shoes during part of their way.

In this anthropological look we cannot give anything for granted. We need to ask ourselves why there is prostitution and why it happens this way and not differently, to whose interest it serves.

*Why does  
prostitution exist?  
Why in such a  
way?*

We need to consider the phenomenon, not as an isolated fact, but in relation to the context in which it evolves. We have to change the fact that prostitution is an isolated fact to conceive it as a social phenomenon which impacts the whole society.

This critical look, that starts with having a sensibility that enables us to perceive what is happening, requires the contribution from the social sciences to perform beyond what we see and to plan an appropriate intervention.

#### *4.4. A gender approach*

Dealing with prostitution should not be undertaken without an analysis from the gender perspective. Data about prostitution, suggest that it is exerted mainly overwhelmingly by women and girls, while consumers of prostitution are mostly men.

*Sensitivity is the  
first step to  
understand  
reality*

To understand the ethical dimension of corporality, we must distinguish between sex and gender. The biologic-corporal difference between male and females is sex. Gender, on the other hand, is built with psychological and social traits

that determine roles and conducts to each sex. We learn to behave as men or as women , we differentiate what type of activities and attitudes are "inherent" to each sex. Thus the stereotypes have emerged.

Gender equity is a fundamental ethical principle, so the oppression and exploitation of the female by the male is unacceptable and demands the complaint of any idea or action which considers women less and that denies their basic rights and equal opportunities, or which tries to use them as simple means for a purpose without their consent or under coercion or violence. This is what is called chauvinism. When women are considered unable to rule themselves, to have lower intellectual abilities, or as if there were "under age" and hence that should be directed by males, even under the excuse of "protecting" them, we would be talking about a patriarchal system.

The biological differences between sexes show people's diversity and richness, but it does not mean that men are superior to women or vice versa. Hence, there is no justification to inequality and gender hierarchy neither in a moral, legal or political sense.

Consequently, prostitution is an institution that serves to maintain the current gender order. The patriarchal system is confirmed, it is stabilized and it becomes natural through the production and reproduction of this practice that, although it is not the only one, its importance can be considered according to the number of elements that it involves.

*Gender point of view is essential in the analysis of prostitution*

*The ethical dimension of corporeity requires differentiating between sex and gender*

*To do justice is to respect differences*

*Women's body as a space of liberation and not as an object of exploitation and violence*

#### 4.4.1. The stigma

In sociology, stigma is a condition, attribute, feature or behaviour that makes that its bearer is included in a social category whose members receive a negative response towards them and are seen as culturally unacceptable and inferior.

The American sociologist Irving Goffman, in his work "Stigma: Notes on the Management of spoiled Identity" reflects on everyday situations of the individual always heading towards social stigmatization, exclusion and inclusion systems. It emphasizes the fact that the relationship of the stigma is established between an individual and a group with defined expectations, so each one of them play both, stigmatizing and stigmatized roles.

The prostitute is the prototype of stigmatized women. She is named and at the same time disgraced with the nickname "whore". The stigma still persists in today's societies. We are tolerant with the social fact of prostitution, we can even link it to leisure environments, but it is not the same for the women who exert it, as we will still continue to categorise her as a "bitch", in a contemptful, negative and humiliating manner.

Dolores Juliano referring to the stigma, defines it as a trade mark or sign upon the group. The stigma is socially constructed and fulfils a social function distinguishing between good and bad women, sanctioning the latter. It entails as we have seen in the interpellations, a heavy load, reaching even the sense of guilt and the need to hide their activity which implies living a dual life. Lastly, it is within the exercise of prostitution the element that generates the most suffering and it

*Stigma creates  
suffering as is  
difficult to  
overcome  
because it  
endures over  
time*

is the most difficult to overcome because it endures over time, even after stopping the activity. The exertion of prostitution has incarnated in them so deeply, that it becomes an enormous challenge: get back to themselves and to the inherent dignity in every human being.

From the perspective of stigmatizing people, stigmatization leads to their dehumanization, the threat and aversion to others, depersonalization to others through stereotyped caricatures.

#### 4.4.2. A language issue

This stigmatization is perfectly reflected in the words used. It is more than enough to revisit the worst insults directed to both, women and men, referring to their mother, in order to get the message and the long way ahead, if we really want to eradicate these terms and all of its stigmatizing contents.

Language is of utmost importance because we understand that it defines the view of the world that a group has, therefore, it structures the perception of reality and it strongly influences attitude and behaviour.

Throughout the history of our congregation, language has been evolving and adapting to new realities. Starting from the term “marginated women”, to “prostituted women”, “in the context of prostitution”, “in situation of prostitution”, “women exerting prostitution”.

At this point in time, we believe that the name that best reflects our perception of reality, our attitudes and our model of intervention is “Women exerting prostitution”; although in

*Stigma affects both people and stigmatized groups as those who stigmatize*

*Language is not naive; it expresses the vision of reality and influences attitudes*

common terms we only use the word 'Women'. As you can see, this is the term used throughout this workbook. This puts them and us on an equal level.

"Women who exert prostitution". This differentiates the person from the activity that performs, it is broad and therein all women, irrespective the type of prostitution they are engaged in, fit within. The reason for not using the term 'prostituted women' is to consider women as active subjects with rights and duties and not passive subjects with the ability to assume the main role of their lives. For this reason, the word 'victim' is only used for 'trade in women and sexual exploitation' as they are considered victims of serious offences.

*Women who  
exert  
prostitution  
reflect our  
perception, our  
attitudes and the  
way we  
intervene*

#### *4.5. A believer's look*

To look at the reality of forced prostitution and trade in women for the purpose of sexual exploitation with God's eyes generates two key feelings: compassion for so much suffering and avoidable outrage over injustice of some human beings to others.

The dignity of man and woman is rooted in the creative plan of God: "In the image of God he created them; male and female he created". The most basic sense of equality and solidarity requires acknowledging the other as a person, overcoming all temptation to turn it into the object which satisfies one's individual and selfish interests.

This principle of human dignity reaches its culmination in Jesus and expresses it into a new

paradigm: the equal dignity between men and women in a patriarchal society, the Jewish-Palestinian society, which shares with the other Mediterranean societies and the ancient Near East, the values and fundamental guidelines of appropriate behaviour that characterise this type of patriarchal moral.

*Jesus' new paradigm: equal dignity between men and women*

It would be anachronistic to present Jesus as the forefather of feminism, engaged in the struggle to obtain equal men and women rights. However, His faith in the Kingdom of God and His defence of the last ones led Him to challenge habits, traditions and practises that oppressed women in that society.

It is in the encounter between Jesus and a woman with prostitute manners, where despite her "slightly indecent" attitude, Jesus, instead of rejecting her, He welcomes her warmly and defends her from outraged witnesses. The scandalous nature of the story derives from the contempt that all patriarchal morals encourage towards the prostitute and towards the stereotype of women behaving like her. Understanding the role that this form of rejection has in the patriarchal system allows understanding Jesus' counter-cultural and inclusive attitude .

*"I do not condemn you, go in peace. Woman, your faith has saved you"*

Jesus was brewing in his mind a completely original project. The eruption of God's compassion in the World, the dignity of the latter as a goal, His healing mission , and the offer of forgiveness caused a great scandal and hostility towards Jesus during his activity in Galilee.

*Compassion is the principle of action that defies conventional schemes*

According to this project, Jesus followers' first task is not to celebrate cults, elaborate theology or preach morality, but to cure, to free



from evil, to relieve from the doldrums, to restructure society, and to have a healthy living. This therapeutic programme is the way to the Kingdom of God.

It would be enough to introduce this healing dimension of Jesus in the Church so that everything changed: liturgy, theology, pastoral action. Some things will fall, others would be transformed and many would be channelled in a more evangelical way. Jesus' dream would come true: healing communities in the society, a sign of a God «friend of life».

As Jesus did, the ethical assessment of women trafficking makes us go against the tide. The model of a human being that generates "materialistic and economist thinking" that dominates our culture, shows that when the person is not recognised and loved in their dignity, the person is exposed to the most aberrant and humiliating ways of instrumentalization and exploitation . Pope Paul VI, in his speech to the International Abolitionist Federation (IAF) in 1996, had already qualified this Traffic as "unworthy trade which quite rightly might be regarded as the most degrading form of modern slavery and shame of society".

The permanent principles of the social doctrine of the Church: the dignity of the human person (in which any other principle and content finds its base), the common good, subsidiary and solidarity sprout of the encounter with the Gospel message and of its demands contained in the Supreme commandment of love to God and love to your neighbour and in justice.

*Jesus followers'  
mission is to  
cure, free, repair  
society and help  
to live with  
dignity*

*Jesus' dream is  
source of social  
and ecclesial  
transformation*

Pope Francis defines trade in women as "a crime against humanity, a true way of slavery which is extending itself to all countries and affects the most vulnerable people in society: women, girls, boys and girls, disabled, the poorest<sup>1</sup>".

*The commandment of love and justice are the origin of the fight against prostitution and trade in women.*

He makes a warning, under the principle of subsidiary and solidarity saying that "All together, we can and we must commit ourselves to stop this horrible trade. Taking common responsibility and more determined political will is needed to beat this front. Responsibility towards those who have fallen victim of human trafficking, to protect their rights, to ensure their and their families safety, to prevent that corrupts and criminals evade justice and that they have the last word over people. A proper legislative intervention in the countries of origin, of transit and of arrival also in order to facilitate regular migration, can reduce the problem».

#### *4.6. A look through the Oblates Charisma*

The charisma we have historically received makes us responsible of a proclamation: The Gospel is humanization and liberation for the women who exert prostitution. This task passes through the encounter with the cultural reality and the effort to bring us into a way of living: the one that makes transparent the mission of proclaiming the dignity of women and the love of God towards them. It is essential to us to convey the message

*The new ecclesial paradigm consists of suppressing suffering and reducing borders of poverty.*

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[http://mobile.vatican.va/content/francescomobile/es/speeches/2013/december/documents/papa-francesco\\_2013121](http://mobile.vatican.va/content/francescomobile/es/speeches/2013/december/documents/papa-francesco_2013121)

of redemption. We express it in our welcoming, mercy and universal brotherhood.

*The Gospel  
proclamation is  
humanization  
and release*

This constitutes the paradigm where the Oblates life is concentrated."Our spirituality consists of walking over Jesus footsteps, looking into the examples and actions of his life and being like Him<sup>2</sup>". It puts us facing the project God has for mankind and specially for women to whom we are sent; He makes us discover that they are our reason for being in the world and in the Church, our vital space and sacrament, and mobilizes us to provide an answer, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, in his essay " The Church and the Jewish question": "We shouldn't only worry for the victims of the torture machine, we should stop the machine... Only the ones who lift up their voices in favour of Jews (we could say in favour of women) can tone Gregorian chants".

*God has a  
liberating  
project*

Therefore, it is our task dealing with the matter of women's body in a new spirituality. We claim the women's body as a liberation space and not as an object of exploitation and violence. We denounce the double moral that, for centuries, has condemned and still condemns the body and female sexuality, denying as a joyful meeting place between the human and the sacred.

We affirm that this liberating project, in a society marked by neoliberalism and globalization, where the new and huge poverties affect in particular to women, is everyone's responsibility. The Oblates family participates sharing the good news of Jesus with the women

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2 Constitutions of the Congregation nº 7

from an attitude of: gratuitousness, hope, compassion and justice<sup>3</sup>.

Such Mystic turns into practical applications which, as we shall see later, may be shared by any person and organization feeling questioned by this reality. In the project I work in, we take into account the following criteria: starting from the reality regardless preconceived ideas and having an alert attitude to discover the changes that are taking place in order to give appropriate responses. In such knowledge it is essential to listen to women and make their sadness and their anguish, their joy and hope of our own.

*The body and female sexuality are spaces of liberation*

- Apply a gender perspective that takes women's intercultural and interreligious character into account.
- Women as subjects: the support is comprehensive, covering all areas and enabling empowerment, both individually and collectively. To gain confidence in them, to be assertive, to achieve spiritual, political, social and economical strength to promote positive changes in the situations in which they live, to take decisions and, ultimately, to act as entitled to rights.
- As a group, to create support groups among them to encourage the rest to participate to draw up proposals, their implementation and their evaluation, in search of employment and a solidarity and support network which will continue after the project is ended.

*Fulfilling a liberating project is everyone's responsibility.*

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3 XVII General Chapter. 2001

Regarding the way of intervention:

- The tasks are performed at an interdisciplinary team level with the participation of women providing knowledge, generating ideas, proposals, evaluation, etc.
- To consider intervention with a strategic vision as an measurable process, allows us to see the achievements and move forward.
- Standardization and inclusion in the services offered in the neighbourhood, the city, in which they can involve themselves given the fact that they have “no papers” (i.e. not regarded as “legal”), or if they have the residence and work permit, in the services offered to the whole population. In any case create dual services.
- Coordinate with other entities and citizen movements establishing awareness and social criticism and participating in demonstrations.
- Constant update. The projects and actions belong to very changing realities, and need to achieve the objectives established, to update knowledge and tools for intervention. It is materialised in the institutional and individual commitment, by being questioned by reality, to make an effort of analysis, synthesis of what we observe, dialogue and development of the continuous improvement process in all the activities, resources, actions and procedures.

*Way of  
intervention*

All of the above from our values: dignity of the person, humanity, Social Justice, defence of

Human Rights, freedom, equality, solidarity, empowerment.

## 5. Dreaming of possible futures

### *5.1. Without worldwide ethics a new world order is not possible*

Our world goes through a radical crisis that cannot only be considered as a global economy crisis, but it is closely linked to the worldwide ecology and worldwide politics. New challenges require new answers. Without worldwide ethics, where immovable criteria and basic personal attitudes are given a new worldwide order is not possible<sup>4</sup>.

As I mentioned in the introduction, we are all responsible for the pursuit of a better new worldwide order. We do not only have an inviolable dignity and rights but also a non-transferable responsibility of the consequences of our way of acting or lack of acting.

If we really want to have a critical and committed stance with the global reality, and therein, with the forced prostitution and trade in women and girls for the purpose of sexual exploitation, it is essential:

- That the commitment with human rights, with freedom, justice, peace and Earth conservation constitute the ethical basis on which our personal life and social order settle.

*We are all responsible for the pursuit of a better new worldwide order.*

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<sup>4</sup> Declaration of the II Parliament of World Religions held in Chicago in 1993: Towards a Global Ethic: An initial statement

*To believe in a  
new world is  
possible and  
necessary*

- A change of mind in each person and in the public opinion to change the course of history. Media play a key role. They have the power to reproduce an alternative discourse to the current one, create a trend of thought and become, in this way, agents of awareness and social transformation. Society has the right to information that does not respond to particular interests, but founded on truth, freedom, justice and solidarity.

*Mindset changes  
produce a  
change of  
structure*

- A change of the existing structures: an ethical economic system that gives priority to the person and common good, above profit and accumulation of wealth. A proper political policy in which the State and their different powers, market, social action groups and communal units, popular organizations, not for profit organizations's, citizens, each of whom, with their different responsibilities, take active part in the change of the present structures of exclusion. Mindset changes produce a change of structures.
- To think that the plurality of approaches, different religious and cultural traditions should not be an obstacle to prevent us from working actively together, against any kind of discrimination or exclusion in favour of a greater humanization.
- Humanity needs, as well as social and ecological changes to recover the transforming strength which arises from the inside of each person and the common effort to achieve an ethics of consensus based on dialogue and respect for others.

- We live a moment in which the ethics demand is trendy: business ethics, environmental ethics, legal ethics, engineering ethics, Media ethics, cyberspace ethics bioethics, etc. To revitalize ethics and moral, which is so urgently needed, leads us to discover the ethical potential and solidarity which already exists in each person and in our society and groups to build together a different future.

*Demand for an ethics of consensus before a fragmented society*

### 5.2. And meanwhile, what?

*“Little things. These don't end with poverty, these don't take us out of underdevelopment, and neither socializes the means of production and change... But these may trigger et off the joy of doing and turns it into acts”.*

*(Eduardo Galeano)*

In this section we are going to propose some guidelines; some of them have been taken from the proposals of intervention we are developing in the Oblate Sisters' projects, explained above. We understand these can be assumed by anyone or any organization with ethical convictions.

First and foremost, and bearing in mind the purpose of this booklet, we want to raise some questions that may help the reflection and that added to new questions which may arise from its reading, provide answers that involve an active participation in a paradigm shift in which women who exert prostitution and that are victims of trade for the purpose of sexual exploitation, take the place they should have in the society and in the Church.

*There are questions awaiting an answer*



The proposals go through:

- Listening to the reality from an active attitude, letting ourselves being questioned by what we see, listen, and receive through the information the Media offer: radio, television, press, social networks, internet ...and adopting a critical attitude that is able to see more than what it looks like. Looking into the 'why' of the news, its contents and the way of transmitting it.
- Women who exert prostitution and even the victims of trade in women are there, very close to us. Visible but at the same time made invisible. They occupy public spaces, and sometimes, their presence create conflict. What is our positioning going to be? Which are the reasons to keep our views? Where do we base it on?
- Getting closer to the reality of prostitution, which does not have to be physical, means learning to look in every direction, trying to adopt an empathetic attitude that allows us to perceive what women who exert feel and understand their situation. This empathetic attitude helps to get rid of topics that hinder the recognition of women who exert as both, subjects of rights and citizens.
- It is important to realize that the way in which we perceive the world is certainly subjective. The way we are brought up, the values we have been educated on, the cultural codes, are the elements with which we encipher and decipher the world in which we move around.

*Listen to understand*

In Ward L. Kaiser words: “The transformation of the world begins with the transformation of our minds and renewing our minds start with transforming the images we introduce in it: the images we hang on our walls and the ones we carry in our hearts”.

From here we can ask ourselves some questions. *Learn to look*

Which is our perception of prostitution? And of the women who exert it? Why does the prostitution exist and why in this historic moment is it exerted in this way? What can be the cause that being human being trafficking a flagrant violation of human rights, in which women becomes merchandise, does not cause social alarm? What could be the reason that this practice lasts throughout history?

If we really want to make a deep reflexion about prostitution, it is essential to take into account the feelings and the way of thinking of the women who exert this activity: their experience of life, their specific proposals (in section 2 we have offered wide information on the subject). To consider them as adults that know what they want and have the right to decide over things that affect them.

*Tell me what you think and I will tell you how you are*

To listen to the women will facilitate breaking the social picture that when represents prostitution, it is done by putting a woman's face, stigmatizing her and rejecting her, while it forgets the other element in the issue, the so called client or procurer (depending on ideology) protecting him as a collective in the shade, normality and anonymity.

*Women have  
voice but no  
space*

In this reflection, we can not forget the active involvement of men, as they are necessary agents for the upkeep of this phenomenon. We must continue questioning how they live their masculinity and their relationship with women. Which role are they willing to play in the fight against verbal, physical, psychological and sexual violence? Are they also willing to participate actively in the achievement of the fulfilment of a real equality of gender, or on the contrary, do they live this achievement as a threat ?

*Facing the  
invisibility of  
"clients" ....at least  
men*

It is essential to change the paradigm the world is organized upon. If day by day the holistic momentum is gaining strength, if everything is connected, then personal relationships also are. It is important beginning to see a more connected world, more feminine, more in line with the globalization of love, reciprocity, and respect.

It is necessary to carry out a work of sensitivity and awareness of all the population. Forced prostitution and trade in women for the purpose of sexual exploitation, understood as gender violence, are not individual acts but that highlights the kind of society we are building. Have we really assumed as a society that forced prostitution and trade in women is an issue that concerns all citizens?

*Prostitution and  
trade in women is  
an issue which  
concern all  
citizens*

To what extent the family, the school, the parishes... as first units of socialization, teach children in the equality of rights, power-sharing and responsibilities and mutual respect? What kind of masculinity and femininity is being transmitted to childhood as identity models and positive integration of the other?

If, as we mentioned above, language is not neutral, we should start analyzing the language used when insulting, the jokes told in relation to women etc. and wonder what is behind certain expressions; simply routine, without considering the consequences on those who listen? Or in the contrary, does it truly express the perception we have of reality and our position towards it?

*Prevention better  
than cure*

We do not start from scratch.

Hundreds of organizations and individuals strive day by day to alleviate and overcome this situation. Volunteer work and solidarity are extremely valuable. Solidarity helps, but it is not enough. The cutbacks we are suffering as a society, are massively impacting these women individually and collectively. It is not only social cutbacks but also reductions in the fundamental rights that are demanding to go beyond assistance.

This implies recognizing that participation is a right to intervene in the social and political life of the place where someone lives, and from there, to sue and demand the State in its different constituencies, the management of a reality that must be given an answer avoiding exclusion and guaranteeing fundamental rights, such as access to public and universal health, education, free legal aid etc., so that they can improve their life conditions, fight against illegal and criminal elements and to offer adequate protection to the victims.

The organizations, including organizations of those women exerting prostitution and different religious confessions, have a key contribution so this challenge becomes a reality, because they are

who on a daily basis closely live this reality, combining realism with utopia, working to achieve a present and a future with more life and citizenship.

*Social action is a right*

The level of participation will be different according to the individual or group possibilities. Possibly, in the city or town where you live, there are organizations that can offer different activities for different people: volunteer work at various levels, forums, debates, etc. In those places where there are no care resources, pose a challenge to the creativity of those questioned to get involved in this reality.

What about the rest?

*Analyze to understand and decide*

Before engaging ourselves, personally or as a group, it is necessary to analyze the mission, vision, and values of each organization, and discern which of them could be offering the best quality service in respect of women and their impact on society.

Those who really feel questioned, but cannot be directly involved, always have the chance to read about it, to take the opportunities given by the social networks, internet, dialogues with people who work in this field in order to better approach this reality.

The important thing is that every action, small or large, have a multiplier effect in our relationship circles: family, work, and friends, study centres etc. It should be aimed to construct, effectively with others a plural “US”, sovereign and citizenship that demands, concrete and expand public policies and the restorative justice that women and girls need. Those which demand

their rights. The rights we need, possible, urgent and unavoidable.

## **6. As a conclusion: HOPE**

This is not utopic if we look at it from the interpersonal relationship that Jesus taught us and if we consider that these are universally because of the burden of humanization that they bring. Only from the "Samaritan" culture, of whom goes through life with eyes wide open and feels the depth of what happens in the way, is able to dismount their own securities, their own preconceived ideas to approach people and to perceive them as they want to be perceived. Men and women capable to touch, to put the oil of compassion on the wounds, to let those "injured" occupy our physical space and heart and to keep on involving as the Samaritan did with the innkeeper, other people. Hence, only in this way, we can take charge of these women and let them become a blessing for us.

*To build citizen spaces is everyone's task*

It is certain, that this will not be achieved in one day, because it is a gradual and feasible process. Our position, as believers, cannot be to adapt to the "status quo", but a radical stance which goes straight to the root, which for us is as much as returning to the Gospel and therefore, it will result in a new order and a fruitful relationship in between taking care of people, the justice and the social transformation.

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