

## MEDIA EDUCATION: the fight against post-truth and misinformation on trafficking in women and girls

EDUCAÇÃO MIDIÁTICA: o combate à pós-verdade e à desinformação no tráfico de mulheres e meninas

EDUCACIÓN MEDIÁTICA: la lucha contra la pos-verdad y la desinformación en la trata de mujeres y niñas

### Sandra de Souza Machado

PhD in History - Gender and Feminist Studies (UnB).

Journalist (Blog da Igualdade - Correio Braziliense).

[sandramachado14@gmail.com](mailto:sandramachado14@gmail.com).

 0000-0002-0064-4995

### Begoña Sánchez Torrejón

PhD in Arts and Humanities. Professor, Department of Didactics - Faculty of Science Education, Universidad de Cádiz, Spain. [begonia.sanchez@uca.es](mailto:begonia.sanchez@uca.es).

 0000-0002-1242-4172

### Víctor Amar Rodríguez

Doctor of cinema history. Full Professor, Department of Didactics, Faculty of Education, Universidad de Cádiz. [victor.amar@uca.es](mailto:victor.amar@uca.es).

 0000-0001-9036-2651

Mailing address: Correio Braziliense, Correio Braziliense (Newspaper) - SIG Quadra 2 Lote 340, Zona Industrial, 70610901 - Brasília, DF - Brazil.

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### ABSTRACT:

Data, discursive and methodological analysis, from the perspective of Communication and Education gender studies, are applied aiming media literacy for a responsive citizenship in the fight against trafficking in women and girls. Questioning gender violence in misinformation, fake news, post-truths, and malicious intentions. Media literacy, co-education and collective awareness function as strategies of action to combat the trafficking of (young) women, which reaches alarming degrees in the 21st century, including during the global pandemic of COVID-19.

**KEYWORDS:** Media; Education; Trafficking; Women; Post-Truth.

### Introduction

The Oxford dictionary defines "post-truth" as "circumstances in which objective facts influence public opinion less than references to emotions and personal beliefs". This term was elected the "international word" in 2016, and in recent years the expressions fake news and post-truth have flooded the mass media.

According to the United Nations (UN), the concept of trafficking in persons is the displacement of victims for purposes such as work in conditions analogous to slavery, with the sexual exploitation of (young) women and girls being the fastest growing criminal activity in more than 170 countries. In this 21st century, human trafficking is a crime that only loses to weapons trafficking, in terms of income from transactions by gangs of exploiters (mafias), being now more profitable than drug trafficking.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Specific data on the accelerated growth of human trafficking around the world, since the first decade of the 21st century, are part of the ILO (International Labour Organization) Report *A Global Alliance Against Forced Labour* (2005), analyzed in *Tráfico de Pessoas – Uma abordagem*

As a reminder, since its Report published in 2005, the ILO (International Labor Organization) has accounted 43% of victims of human trafficking used in commercial sexual exploitation and 32% in economic (labor) exploitation. The remaining 25% were trafficked for a combination of these two forms of slavery, or for undefined reasons, such as supplying trafficking in human organs or the illegal adoption market. At the time, the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) attested that 2.6 million people were trafficked, annually, in the world.<sup>2</sup>

Such statistics will greatly increase within a decade. In the ILO 2016 Report, trafficking for sexual exploitation alone already accounted for more than 3.8 million adults and 1 (one) million children victimized, annually, worldwide.<sup>3</sup>

Still in 2005, in a country like Switzerland alone, the Federal Police Secretariat counted between 1,500 and 3,000 women living under sexual slavery (many of them were Brazilians). According to the data released at the time by that European country, each woman could generate a profit of 120,000 Euros, annually, for her mafia explorer.<sup>4</sup>

The trafficking in women and girls for sexual exploitation and labor servitude is a phenomenon that undermines the dignity of its victims and their human rights, and has spread internationally, always incorporating new modalities and different routes. This serious crime against women's (and children's) rights consists in the act of separating or tearing the victim from her environment or origin in order to exploit her in another place(s) of destination, forcing her to sexual or pornographic activity against her will, without receiving anything (or very little) as payment. This is sexual and labor slavery.

In this sense, mainstream media could not reverberate speeches of legitimacy, those that contribute to sustaining the patriarchal violent ideology towards women. This trampling on their rights cannot be normalized, or the damage minimized, and speeches that help justify such violence must be neutralized. Everything seems to explain the insufficient actions by international authorities in face of the problem, for at least the past two decades, since it is clear that this crime has worsened, without a greater commitment by nations to social education.

The objective of this investigation cannot pass through a well-intentioned list of points of clarification, but the fact that it focuses on reality in an adequate way must be

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*para os Direitos Humanos*, booklet published by the National Secretariat of Justice (SNJ/Ministry of Justice, Brazil), 2013, pp. 26 e 27.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 26

<sup>3</sup> Article on the ILO 2016 Report, published by Cara Kelly, in *the USA Today*, on December 16th, 2019, under the title *13 sex trafficking statistics that explain the enormity of the global sex trade*. Available: <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/investigations/2019/07/29/12-trafficking-statistics-enormity-global-sex-trade/1755192001/> Access: 20/05/2020.

<sup>4</sup> *Op. Cit.* SNJ/Ministry of Justice (Brazil), 2013, p. 26.

evaluated, with results to be approached responsibly. When it comes to human beings, to vulnerable people, to victims of sexual exploitation, the co-responsibility must be social, that of citizenship, where the university (education) is included.

However, so that societies do not become accomplices to such crimes, the affirmation of truth is a revolutionary gesture (ŽIŽEK, 2015). It is not worth, upon becoming aware of it, to drop an *Eppur si muove* (and it still moves, a phrase attributed to Galileo Galilei when he admitted the heliocentric theory before the court of the Holy Inquisition). The pro-social and university conviction must go further. It is not to admit obviousness, not just to denounce it. It is necessary to act and, in this case, go beyond and also raise awareness of citizenship.

Human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation (forced prostitution) and to feed the pornographic market (and the pedophile) is an atrocity that expunges human dignity. It is a profit that fundamentally destroys the most vulnerable women and girls. It is a double game action: consumption and use. For what has begun, perhaps, as a dream full of promises to these women, ends up being a nightmare. One must first keep reality in mind and, second, never run away from the victims. This is to further celebrate the *poiesis* (the Greek concept linked to creation or production, in its derivative of making or creating) approaching the *praxis*.

Perhaps we resemble and share some of the questions asked by Schmitz and Goodin (2000, p. 26): "which institutions contribute to improving living conditions? Those that make staying behind less likely, or those that make it less bad? Those that encourage contribution, or those that make needless contribution?" To these we would add: why the commercialization of bodies, mainly female ones? How much longer would it last? For truth contributes to people's welfare.

Introductory lines loaded with *euritmia* and *eudaimonia*. The first term we combine with harmony and balance, while the second is what the Greeks call prosperity or wellbeing. Both are needed to sustain and maintain human dignity. In the same way, the methodological approach in this research is the documental review to make it possible to know and understand this fierce and unfair reality.

### **Media Literacy: tools for equal opportunities**

It is postulated that the issue of human trafficking requires analysis from gender and human rights perspectives. The necessary gender perspective will make one reflect on how legitimizing the sex trade of women and girls is nothing more than a way of normalizing sexual exploitation in regards to women. In recent years, the number of

female victims of trafficking has increased due to the introduction, commoditization and use of information technologies in advertising, reach and persuasion.

For these reasons, media literacy with a gender perspective is considered more urgent than ever, because the new generations are highly influenced by social media (and their own networks). It is therefore necessary that adolescents and young women and men learn how to decode the information transmitted by the media they access.

Kahne and Bowyer (2016) demonstrate, in research, that people who take media literacy courses develop various skills to evaluate and analyze the messages that are conveyed by the media. As reflected in several studies, it is necessary to strengthen the citizenship of both women and men, and provide the necessary media skills to analyze, evaluate and be able to differentiate between real, trustful, and fake news.

We refer to the urgent need for critical technological literacy, with a gender perspective, as a tool to combat exploitation of women, to enable people with a civic sense to build an informed citizenship so that they can freely discern information. It is high priority to train civically in responsibility to be able to fight sexual and labor exploitation of women and human trafficking itself:

The media build social reality, but at the same time they are in themselves a socially constructed reality. The products released by the media contain ideologies and opinions that are often not perceived with the naked eye, and what they convey, either explicitly or implicitly, influence the political and social journey. (PEREIRA, PINTO and PEREIRA, 2012, p. 93).

Authors such as Collins and Andersen (1992) point out the direct impact of vulnerable conditions endured by women, due to the gender issue, on the persistence of the sex trade. These authors highlight the complete invisibility of the violent situations that women and girls who are victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation go through.

In this digital age, children should be trained in the good use of online tools available, but there is still the fundamental role of both teachers and the family in the process of media literacy with a gender perspective. A research by Martín Jiménez and Etura (2016) indicates that the sexist image of women conveyed by the mass media perpetuates roles and stereotypes by reproducing and legitimizing macho/sexist attitudes and behaviors, the basis of gender violence.

It is necessary that media literacy be targeted at awakening the critical spirit in citizenship, with regards to trafficking in women and girls for sexual purposes. It is

inevitable and urgent to fight this atrocity against fundamental rights, which requires communication based on the truthfulness of the messages and rigorous information.

Livingstone (2011) emphasizes that, through a vision that ensures objective observation of the world, the approach to media literacy must focus on critical understanding, media analysis, and the creation of media resources to fight social injustices.

Aguaded and Cabero (1995) point to the need of various skills when implementing media education. Among such skills, they emphasize:

- Understanding competence: knowing the different production processes of the messages, their languages, and meanings (...)
- Critical competence: ability to analyze the messages received and to have personal opinion about them.
- Selective competence: selecting what is of interest and learning to value it.
- Participatory competence: accepting positive messages and assimilating them.

Mass media play a role as creators of the term “gender technologies” because, through the contents they transmit, they are responsible for the dissemination in societies of stereotyped gender roles, to which both women and men must be enrolled (LAURETIS, 2000; BUTLER, 2001).

It should not be forgotten that the sexual commercialization of women and girls is a highly lucrative international business, and is also part of the daily and collective sexual ideology of many men. Nowadays, the sex trade of women and girls is closely related to trafficking, and this in turn relates to the processes of transnationality. This factor facilitates the mobility of women and girls who will be subjected to exploitation by gangs of human trafficking and prostitution on an international level.

We propose that, from the mass media level, news related to trafficking for sexual exploitation of women and girls should be treated from a perspective of social inclusion. The journalistic practice needs to implement gender-based approaches in its discourses. From the various media, a new approach should have another viewpoint of social denunciation and protection of the victims of exploitation and sexual trafficking, where one reflects on the violation of human rights, inviting citizenship to a broader and more realistic view on this issue.

### **Media education against post-truth and misinformation in Human Trafficking**

Human trafficking aimed at sexual (and labor) servitude, and also at feeding the pornographic market, has further increased, along with other forms of violence against

women, during the lockdown, or quarantine period, and the closing of borders in countries on all continents, during the COVID-19 global pandemic, according to two UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) reports.<sup>5</sup>

At each country part of the trafficking routes among the Americas, Africa, Asia and Europe, women and girls have been bombarded by a load of news and messages in the mass media and/or social networks. Over-exposure to fake news or exaggeration of the truth (or half-truths) – in this age when the debate in the media revolves around post-truth<sup>6</sup> – can confuse, lead to discredit, or lead to error of judgment. For example, believing that drug-trafficking mafia people do not belong to the highest social circles and/or to one’s family spheres (these being the majority of cases).

There are plenty of examples of the intense activity of gangs associated with transnational human trafficking during the pandemic that erupted in 2020, and they are abundant in European news and in the Americas. These are key regions for the many routes of this crime. In Spain, precisely during the most difficult period of confinement due to deaths and contagion from the new Coronavirus, between the months of April and May, the national police dismantled one of the many networks of trafficking in women and girls in that country.

In the southern region of Andalusia, one of the mafias maintained sexual services named “women at your home” (on demand). The police operation arrested seven people for the crime of human trafficking, and freed 12 women, one of them a minor. All were victims of sexual exploitation in the municipalities of Córdoba and Jaén. These women had been captured in Colombia, deceived by false promises of legal domestic work in Spain.

(...) Despite the confinement, many clients requested sexual services, either by going to the apartments where the women were or demanded that they went to their homes. The investigation began thanks to statements by two Colombian women who were tricked into traveling to Spain with the promise of work on domestic chores. Once in the country, they suffered threats and physical violence, and were

<sup>5</sup> See research released by UNFPA in April, 2020:

<https://www.unfpa.org/resources/impact-covid-19-pandemic-family-planning-and-ending-gender-based-violence-female-genital>. On the same subject, UNFPA also published the archive *Against My Will*, in July 2020. Available at: <https://www.unfpa.org/swop> Access: July 8, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Post-truth is a neologism that describes the situation in which, while creating and shaping public opinion, objective facts have less influence than the appeals to emotions and personal beliefs. There is a Brazilian online class on this subject, made by *Casa do Saber*, with explanation by professor Luís Mauro Sá Martino, doctor in Communication, about post-truth themes, fake news and fake ethics. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WFzk12KPYvE> Access: October 30th, 2019.

forced into prostitution to pay off the debt they had contracted with the crime organization. In an attempt to escape from their captors, one of them, forced into prostitution in an apartment in Cordoba, communicated her location to her family by cell phone. Her relatives reported it to the Colombian police and the latter transferred the case to the Spanish National Police.<sup>7</sup>

This can be considered an exceptional case of successful liberation, as women and girls co-opted by the human trafficking mafias are usually unable to report to their families or to their countries' police and judicial authorities. They are kept under constant surveillance, with little access to communication means, and suffer physical and mental torture. The most common abusive methods are death threats against them, their families, and their bonds of friendship. These gangs operative means are reinforced by their local agents placed where they recruit or abduct the victims. In general, mafia recruiters are well known within the circles close to the victims.

There are difficulties in calculating accurate statistics on trafficking in persons to supply the sexual and pornographic market, because there is significant underreporting or even total lack of records in most countries' public security systems. The ways in which the criminal mafias operate, which lure or abduct socio-economically vulnerable people, orphans and/or refugees in regions of conflict, poverty or misery, make the victims become invisible, disappearing without leaving a trace. In most situations, these vulnerable victims are not remembered or sought.

Based on research and projections, data from the ILO (International Labor Organization) Report in 2014 indicated that organized crime gangs directly raise about US\$ 32 billion a year from human trafficking. Including sums from slave labor, directly and indirectly, this criminal underworld market generates approximately US\$ 180 billion per year worldwide<sup>8</sup>.

Out of these totals, a sum around US\$ 99 billion goes to the sexual and pornographic market gangs. Forced sexual work obtains the highest profits per victim, compared to other types of slavery, such as forced and unpaid domestic work.

<sup>7</sup> Article published by the Spanish news portal *Cordopolis*, on April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020: *Desmantelada una red de trata de mujeres cuyos servicios pedían hombres durante el confinamiento*. Available at: <https://cordopolis.es/2020/04/10/desmantelada-una-red-de-trata-de-mujeres-cuyos-servicios-pedian-hombres-durante-el-confinamiento/> Access: 4/25/2020.

<sup>8</sup> See article written by Sandra de S. Machado for *Blog da Igualdade, Correio Braziliense*, published on May 31, 2018: *Quando o Ser Humano é Mercadoria – É estarrecedor o lucro com o Tráfico de Pessoas*. Available at: <http://blogs.correiobraziliense.com.br/igualdade/quando-o-ser-humano-e-mercadoria/> Access: 6/30/2020.

The absolute majority of victims of the sex trafficking crime are women and girls, although men, boys, transsexuals, intersex persons, and/or non-binary individuals can also be enslaved. In its 2016 Report on Human Trafficking, the ILO estimates that 99% of adults and children forced into sexual exploitation are female, within totals of victims up to 3.8 million adults and 1 (one) million children worldwide, per year.<sup>9</sup>

Although most victims of sexual trafficking either have their origin in the Americas (United States, Mexico, Brazil and Colombia being the major routes) or Eastern Europe (Moldova, Romania, Hungary and others), more than 70% are located (final destination) in South Asia and the Pacific – Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, and South China, for example -, compared to 14% in Europe and Central Asia, and only 4% within the Americas.

Due to the expansion of forced prostitution (sex slavery), the Social Democratic government of Sweden introduced, in 1999, a pioneering law applying the policy of zero tolerance against “buyers of sex” – the Johns, as are called in the global North those who pay for sex (prostitution). At the time, Western Europe was becoming one of the main routes and major market for trafficking in women and girls for sexual exploitation, and the Swedish government aimed to discourage and dismantle trafficking mafias settled in the country.

On the other hand, the Netherlands, where prostitution was legalized in 2000, witnessed its capital Amsterdam become the main European “destination” as a receptor of human trafficking for prostitution purposes and also to supply the pornographic market. Other European countries such as England, France, Germany, Spain and Portugal have also become major recipient markets to this crime, over the past two decades. This is due to strategic geographical factors, including the concentration of large urban and tourist centers, or to precarious laws and supervision (namely the corruption of political, judicial and police authorities).

In Sweden, the 1999 law was against this European trend and faced disapproval both internally – nearly 70% of the Swedish people did not approve it, mainly because they feared an increase in domestic violence and men's sexual frustrations – as well as

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<sup>9</sup> *Op. Cit. USA Today. 13 sex trafficking statistics that explain the enormity of the global sex trade.* Available at: <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/investigations/2019/07/29/12-trafficking-statistics-enormity-global-sex-trade/1755192001/> Access: 5/20/2020.

from neighboring countries, which were trying to pass the legalization of prostitution.<sup>10</sup>

However, the Swedish government led by a feminist management faced it as a gender issue, concluding that the sexual and labor exploitation of women is a clear sign and fruit of the social, economic and political inequalities which harm women in patriarchal societies worldwide.

The justifications for the laws criminalizing buyers and mafia gangs that operate in the sex market are mainly such inequalities, and/or the women's family history of poverty or misery, as well as violence and abuse suffered by most women since childhood or adolescence. These factors often lead them to "normalize" the abusive cycle in their lives. According to UN studies on gender-based violence, more than 35% of women throughout the world suffer or have suffered sexual and/or physical abuse in their lives.<sup>11</sup>

It is a fact that the vast majority of women do not "choose" prostitution as a means of life. Even less as slaves to illegal human trade, forced to endure 20 to 30 daily sexual (mis) encounters. As victims of human trafficking, they are constantly coerced and beaten up by pimps, and by many of the Johns, and do not receive enough payment for survival. As such slaves, they live in precarious conditions, have little food, are subject to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and drug addictions, and are under constant mental and physical stress, by exploitation and coercion.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See a 2015 article published in the *New York Times*: *Swedish Prostitution Law Targets Buyers, but Some Say It Hurts Sellers*. It is a balance of 15 years of the law that criminalizes the purchase of sex in Sweden and, at the same time, allows its sale – that is, it overloads the buyer, but not the prostitute -, while providing more assistance to women who wish to stop selling their own bodies. According to the NYT article, the law has been considered successful and a model for other countries, since 1999. A study released by a government agency in Stockholm showed that prostitution in the streets of the country had been reduced by more than half between 1995 and 2015, and that the number of men admitting to having bought sex had fallen by more than 40%. The findings were consistent with another official 2010 Swedish government report that concluded that the law had reduced trafficking in women and girls into the country and transformed attitudes toward sex buying. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/15/world/swedish-prostitution-law-targets-buyers-but-some-say-it-hurts-sellers.html> Access: 5/27/2020.

<sup>11</sup> Data published for the launching of the worldwide campaign *#HearMeToo* at the UN headquarters in New York, November 2018. See UN Report *Violence against Women is Global Pandemic*. Available at: <https://nacoesunidas.org/violencia-contra-as-mulheres-e-pandemia-global-diz-chefe-da-onu/> Access: 5/27/2020.

<sup>12</sup> See article written by Daphne Bramham, *Outlawing the purchase of sex has been key to Sweden's success in reducing prostitution*, published in the *Vancouver Sun*, on September 21,

To discourage this barbarism, Norway and Iceland passed legislations similar to the Swedish in 2009. In 2014, the European Parliament decided to reduce the demand for prostitution by punishing clients. However, constant evaluation and collaboration among countries are urgently needed in order to discourage and eliminate sex trafficking, including the effects of new digital technologies on the sex market and against the very rights of people (independent individuals) who prostitute themselves.

The issue of human trafficking for sexual and pornographic exploitation is criminal and gender biased, and must be fought. In the last two decades, the problem of human trafficking, especially of women and girls, has become so exorbitant that there are countless reports in various mass media and within social networks, like channels of influencers (people who have thousands or millions of followers on YouTube, for example), which focus on this crime. Also, a handful of fiction and non-fiction films have been made both by mainstream studios and the so-called independent industry.

In one of these documentaries (*Nefarious: Merchant of Souls*, USA, 2011), a victim identified only as “Eva”, a rare survivor from the mafias of trafficking in women for sexual slavery in Europe, confirms that laws such as the one in Sweden may be the best way to fight organized crime.

They (gangsters) lure us with false offers of jobs in other countries or cities, and when we realize the reality, we are trapped in unknown places, they take away our documents, we are beaten and raped daily, we go hungry, until they manage to bend us and we see that there is no escape (...) We have to serve dozens of men per day. We are broken in mind, spirit and body.<sup>13</sup>

The testimonies of “Eva” as well as those of other victims and the accounts of “repentant” enticers and pimps, within these documentaries, reports and articles on human trafficking, lead to the disappointing realization of how easily deceived are women and girls from various countries of patriarchal tradition. There is also, probably, despair itself in face of harsh realities that would engender self-delusion. In the cases of many girls and adolescents, the families themselves are responsible for marketing their

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2016. Available at: <https://vancouver.sun.com/opinion/columnists/outlawing-the-purchase-of-sex-has-been-key-to-swedens-success-in-reducing-prostitution> Access: 5/28/2020

<sup>13</sup> Interview given to director and producer Benjamin Nolot, of *Nefarious: Merchant of Souls / Human Trafficking Documentary (USA, 2011)*. Available at: <https://youtu.be/MFaDHgXPbUg> Access: 6/30/2020.

daughters to pimps or mafias, or set up “donations” for the purpose of child marriage, as shown in the UNFPA report, which will be further discussed in this paper.

There is also the reality of misinformation. As it has been made clear by the fact that the highest political, economic, and judicial spheres all over the world may be involved with human trafficking mafias. This was evident in the recent revelation of the scandal involving the late US millionaire Jeffrey Epstein and his (former) partner, the British socialite Ghislaine Maxwell. In 2019, he was arrested in New York, for the second time in 11 years, on charges that he ran a prostitution ring of underage girls – many around only 14 years old – for sexual and pornographic purposes.

Nevertheless, it was Ghislaine Maxwell's arrest in the United States, in July 2020, that revealed or confirmed the existence of files with the names of famous sex pedophile crime “clients”, including numerous politicians, businessmen and legislators from the U.S. and Europe (some are also royalty in the Old Continent). Among other charges, she and Epstein were arrested for conspiring to lure minors into committing illegal sexual acts; encouraging travel by minors to commit such acts; conspiring to transport minors with intent to engage in criminal sexual activity.<sup>14</sup>

The debates surrounding the legalization, or not, of prostitution, the sex market and pornography, show tensions and heat, but are somewhat superficial in view of the statistics. While in countries where there are laws that prohibit prostitution and rigorously punish sex market recipients and clients, violence against women and human trafficking have been significantly reduced over the past two decades, the opposite occurs where the sex market is legalized. One example is Germany, where prostitution is legal. In 2015 alone, the country has officially registered 70 deaths of prostitutes. They were murdered by gangsters, pimps and/or clients. In Sweden, with its laws against clients and mafias, there is no record of deaths of prostitutes in the same year.

In the Netherlands there might happen changes in the Red Light District of Amsterdam, one of the most popular legalized centers for prostitution in the world, known to be a destination for the trafficking in (young) women and girls displaced

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<sup>14</sup> See article about the arrest of Ghislaine Maxwell, in the USA, published by *BBC Brasil*, on July 2nd., 2020 - *Ghislaine Maxwell: a ex-namorada de Jeffrey Epstein presa em escândalo de abuso sexual de menores*. Available at:

[https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/internacional-53271599?at\\_custom1=%5Bpost+type%5D&at\\_medium=custom7&at\\_custom3=BBC+Brasil&at\\_campaign=64&at\\_custom2=facebook\\_page&at\\_custom4=6A6FC856-BCA4-11EA-9D26-ABD8923C408C&fbclid=IwAR0JPdg2uHSuieEznCb4WAHSgHQYQhw9H1qzRkX1cThTchMp4T2fDJ6NF94](https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/internacional-53271599?at_custom1=%5Bpost+type%5D&at_medium=custom7&at_custom3=BBC+Brasil&at_campaign=64&at_custom2=facebook_page&at_custom4=6A6FC856-BCA4-11EA-9D26-ABD8923C408C&fbclid=IwAR0JPdg2uHSuieEznCb4WAHSgHQYQhw9H1qzRkX1cThTchMp4T2fDJ6NF94) Access: 7/5/2020

mainly from Eastern Europe and Latin America. More than 600 prostitutes are exposed daily in the neighborhood glass windows. In July 2020, the mayor of the city, ecologist Femke Halsema, presented a project to put an end to the mass tourism that is congesting the place and to combat prostitution and human trafficking.

Femke Halsema considers that the Dutch capital is ready for a change of image and, if accepted by its citizens, could foresee the closing not only of the window curtains (to avoid groups of curious people) but also of the brothels in the region – which are distributed in other parts of the city as well. Prostitution was regulated as work in the Netherlands in 2000 so that women could exercise the profession independently. However, the shops' glass windows and brothels in Amsterdam have always been mostly occupied by sex slaves, trafficked young women, constantly guarded and explored by mafia agents (pimps).

In the controversy, those in favor of legalized prostitution claim that women are safer, by exposure in public places and by alarm devices in their cabins or in the brothel rooms. Nonetheless, they remain victims of physical and moral aggression, rape, and murder.<sup>15</sup>

According to part of the Dutch judicial system, sex industry is seen as synonymous to violence, drugs, money laundering and other crimes, and brothels are related to human trafficking.

(...) The rights of prostitutes to work independently must be guaranteed, but in the Red District they have become an attraction and people laugh at them, insult them, or take unauthorized photos. It is also necessary to fight human trafficking, fraud, and money laundering, returning tranquility to the neighborhood.<sup>16</sup>

In the United States, illicit parlor or massage rooms – note that there are laws against prostitution and/or sexual exploitation in all states of the country, except for Nevada, where brothels have been legalized<sup>17</sup> - hide a number of female victims of

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<sup>15</sup> See story on crimes against prostitutes in the city of Amsterdam released on *BBC News*, on January 20, 2020: *The hard life of prostitutes on display in Amsterdam windows*. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-46935343> Access: 6/15/2020.

<sup>16</sup> Story reported in *El País Brasil*, entitled *Amsterdã quer pôr fim ao espetáculo da prostituição*. Published on July 5, 2020. Available at: [https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2019/07/03/internacional/1562176038\\_355687.html](https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2019/07/03/internacional/1562176038_355687.html) Access: 7/7/2020.

<sup>17</sup> *Op. Cit, Blog da Igualdade, Correio Braziliense*.  
<http://blogs.correiobraziliense.com.br/igualdade/quando-o-ser-humano-e-mercadoria/>

human trafficking who come from China “with a remarkable number from Fujian Province in Southeast China”.<sup>18</sup>

Young women and girls from South Korea form the second most numerous groups enslaved in these “massage houses”, which reach up to nine thousand spread throughout the USA. This fact reinforces the stereotypes developed for decades, or centuries, in Western literature and media about the supposed “sexual docility and submission” of Asian women.

Although there are more trafficking victims in Asia, annual profits per sexual slave are higher in developed Western countries because traffickers can charge more for sexual activities. Since the exploitation of each young woman or girl can be repeated several times per day, with an average cycle between 7 up to 10 years, the ILO estimates “annual collection rates around US\$ 80,000 per victim in developed countries and US\$ 55,000 in the Middle East”<sup>19</sup>.

The UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) published in a 2019 Report data confirming the fact that human trafficking is on the rise and is taking on “horrific dimensions”<sup>20</sup>. According to this report, it is the violent sexual exploitation of the victims the main factor in these horrors. Children now account for more than 30% of trafficking victims (much more girls are detected than boys). Young women up to the age of 25 and girls represent 71% of the victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation, to supply the pornographic market, or for child marriage.

Approximately 35% of women and girls who are trafficked in the 142 countries surveyed are used in forced labor, which can also involve abuse, rape, and prostitution. In the sex market, the profits obtained from the exploitation of a girl or young woman are low risk, with minimal costs compared to the sums collected and, as a rule, of long duration. Profits made by trafficking mafias also include commerce of human organs – which often occurs after long periods of sexual slavery and the consequent “exhaustion” of what the gangs call the “useful life of the human commodity”.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Op. Cit*, USA Today, 13 sex trafficking statistics that explain the enormity of the global sex trade, <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/investigations/2019/07/29/12-trafficking-statistics-enormity-global-sex-trade/1755192001/> Access: 5/20/2020.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>20</sup> UNODC Report *Rising human trafficking takes on 'horrific dimensions': almost a third of victims are children* published on January 7, 2019. Available at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/01/1029912>. Access: 5/15/2020.

<sup>21</sup> A former agent of these mafias of trafficking in women and girls in Europe, codenamed “Ohad”, who acted as a pimp for 11 years, states that the gangs view the victims as mere

Human trafficking for the purpose of illegal adoption can also serve the market of pedophile networks and/or forced marriage for girls, who become doubly victimized by later “resale” to the mafias for other transnational displacements, when they no longer serve the initial buyer (a mixture of pedophile “husband” and pimp). The characteristics of the vast majority of the female victims are low access to formal education, low income or family misery, unemployment or sub-employment (precarious work), helplessness and/or lack of regional or national public policies that discourage human trafficking.

### Trafficking and violence against women during the COVID-19 pandemic

What are the most effective ways to at least diminish human trafficking and curb this crime on so many international routes? For decades now, since the 1980s, trafficking in women and girls for sexual/labor exploitation and to provide the market for pornography, especially child abuse, has been growing tremendously worldwide. This crime has further increased, along with other forms of violence against women, during the months of lockdown, or quarantine, and the closing of borders in countries on all continents, during the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic.

The fact is that the efforts made so far to ensure that women's rights are respected can be reversed because of the pandemic. This is evidenced by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) research on transformative results in combating multiple forms of violence against women and girls, according to the global planning for the period 2020 through 2030.

The predictions are disappointing in this study, called Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Family Planning and Ending Gender-based Violence, Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage – Pandemic threatens achievement of the Transformative Results, commissioned by UNFPA, with contributions from Avenir Health (Global Health and Social and Economic Planning NGO), Johns Hopkins University (USA) and Victoria University (Australia).<sup>22</sup>

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merchandise, objects to be used and which have an expiration date. The difference is that they must be “disciplined in service”, as animals would be. “There are no emotions, no forgiveness. They are like stones”. Interview with the producers of *Nefarious: Merchant of Souls | Human Trafficking Documentary* (USA, 2011). *YouTube*. <https://youtu.be/MFaDHgXPbUg> Access: 6/30/2020.

<sup>22</sup> UNFPA research *Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Family Planning and the End of Gender-Based Violence, Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage – The pandemic threatens the achievement of transformative outcomes*, was released in April 2020. Available at: <https://www.unfpa.org/resources/impact-covid-19-pandemic-family-planning-and-ending-gender-based-violence-female-genital> Access: 6/14/2020.

This UNFPA report resulted in a document on gender-based violence, titled *Against My Will 23*, in which there are 19 practices that violate the rights of women and girls. However, three acts considered the most invasive and abusive are highlighted: female genital mutilation (FGM), child marriage, and extreme preference for the male child. According to the document, in the year 2020, it is estimated that approximately 4.1 million girls will undergo genital mutilation. In total, the UN estimates that currently 200 million women are survivors of FGM worldwide.

UNFPA also reports that, every day, about 33,000 girls and adolescents under the age of 18 are forced to marry usually much older men. These thousands of daily cases are the result of sale, commercialization, or “donation” by “promise”, in the vast majority of cases by the families themselves. This also occurs through the criminal action of human trafficking in orphanages and foster homes for abandoned minors or refugees. Many girls and adolescents promised or sold enter the statistics and cycle of sexual and pornographic human trafficking.

In countries where there is a preference for a male child, sex selection or extreme neglect promotes the death of many female children, resulting in 140 million “missing women” in the world, nowadays. Monica Ferro, director of UNFPA in Geneva, says the most urgent intervention is needed. “We can't stop until we reach zero and we can't let the Covid-19 pandemic get in the way”<sup>24</sup>. Yet the pandemic already interferes negatively in the planning until 2030, according to the report.

The survey confirms the common knowledge among official agencies, international NGOs and activists in defense of women's rights that every year hundreds of thousands of women and children are physically and/or psychologically abused, frequently with the full knowledge and consent of their families, circle of friends and communities. Urgent action is indeed needed, given the pandemic and the lack of control over violence and trafficking in women, the situation is likely to get much worse. Natalia Kanem, executive director at UNFPA, reaffirms the urgency for strong action by governments and organizations to combat crime and violence against women:

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<sup>23</sup> The archive *Against My Will*, released in July, 2020, is available at: <https://www.unfpa.org/swop-2020>

<sup>24</sup> Article on the UNFPA 2020 Report, published in the Portuguese news portal *SAPÓ*, World section, on July 4, 2020, titled *The impact of Covid-19 on the “silent and endemic” crisis of abuses of girls and women*. Available at: <https://visao.sapo.pt/atualidade/mundo/2020-07-04-o-impacto-da-covid-19-na-crise-silenciosa-e-endemica-dos-abusos-a-meninas-e-mulheres/?fbclid=IwAR3-DoRhleSbBVMdEjb8bXMFOwyB9dfs-zDRo6mv8iYxjq504A0V6XcJaEc> Access: 07/07/2020.

We need to solve the problem by addressing the root causes, especially in relation to gender norms. We should do a better job by supporting communities' efforts to understand the price of these practices and the benefits that accrue to society as a whole, by preventing them from going on.<sup>25</sup>

The conclusions presented by the UNFPA research clarify that the end of child marriage and FGM could happen in 10 years, if girls were kept in schools, by educating them to adult life in equal conditions, without being subjected to such mistreatments. In total, the analysis demonstrates that it would take three billion Euros, annually, until 2030, to accomplish these actions in fighting the suffering of around 84 million girls.

According to the previously mentioned UNODC report, the fastest growing criminal activities among transnational trafficking organizations revolve around the sex and pornographic markets and victimize mostly women and girls. A single case may involve dozens of female victims. Factors such as lack of resources and of systematic reporting by mass media, governmental campaigns, education and social networks alerts of these crimes in most countries make it difficult to dimension and fight the issue.

Information and entertainment mainstream media contribute to shaping public understanding and opinion on social issues. Simultaneously, they influence (inter)national policies, programs and public policies, and legislative actions. The variety of ways in which the media, in a broad sense, relate to the different facets of trafficking needs to be explored.

How can mainstream media influence a country's legislation? How can they affect or help victims? Today, whether it's a lack of spontaneous publicity or just sporadic campaigns paid for by governments, the media ends up helping the perpetrators - mafias - of crime. So what would be the impact of news coverage on crime? In what ways can media representations of human trafficking legitimize or challenge different kinds of power imbalances and social hierarchies based on gender, social status, age, and/or ethnic and cultural background?

Today's xenophobic media and political atmosphere, present in several countries on all continents, has led to misuse of discourse against human trafficking. According

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem.*

to the document issued by the UN26, many victims of traffickers are immigrants, refugees or asylum seekers, who decide to leave their countries or regions for various reasons, such as war conflicts, natural disasters, persecution or extreme poverty. They leave their social protection network behind and become particularly vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation.

Immigrants or migrants are often targeted as a threat, when in fact, as a rule, they contribute to the prosperity of the host country or region. In this context, anti-trafficking discourse is wrongly used to justify restrictive immigration policies and retrograde activities. It is civic, in this matter, to speak out against xenophobic and racist approaches, as well as against violence, hatred and discrimination. This would be a duty of citizenship, of citizen education.

Despite the transformative actions by social movements, especially the feminist and gender issues agenda for equal human, social and civil rights, concerning the current design of social relations, in order to eliminate inequalities regarding social class and/or race/ethnicity, and particularly those based on biological sex, women remain victims to the most extreme forms of violence, both material and symbolic.

The multiple forms of trafficking have existed since antiquity and are quite complex phenomena, which in our contemporary times mainly include weapons trafficking, drug trafficking and trafficking in human beings. These three modalities lead criminal activities in the world. In great expansion, the “trade” of human beings includes sexual and pornographic illegal activities, forced labor, human organs trafficking, and that of children, mostly girls, for illegal adoption or marriage, and/or to supply the pedophile/pornographic market. In this sense, it can also affect the most socially favored people, either in the North or in the Global South.

In the geography of inequality, women excluded from the educational system are the poorest, the most exploited, the most discriminated and besieged in their bodies and in their processes of subjectivity, to the violence practiced in midst of a daily life designed within norms and powers. Male gender dominance and their rights to social appropriation of women are built and instituted. In this context, trafficking in (young)

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<sup>26</sup> Between the years 2018 and 2019, on dates such as the **International Day against Trafficking in Persons** (July 30) and the **International Day against Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking in Women and Children** (September 23), the UN issued notes and data calling attention to the rapid increase in human trafficking crimes, especially among the most vulnerable groups: women and girls. They represent 71% of the victims of criminal networks. Verify at the UNODC website, available at: <http://www.unodc.org/lpo-brazil/pt/frontpage/2018/07/mensagem-do-secretrio-geral-no-dia-internacional-contra-o-trfco-de-pessoas.html> Access: 11/20/2019.

women and girls reaches alarming levels, made naturalized, in countries whose gender inequality allied to low human development indexes (HDI) are striking.

Nations aligned with mature democracies are exceptions, for their greater equity and strong participatory tradition such as the countries of European social democracies. The term citizenship, for women, means not only their greater presence in formal political institutions but mainly in all sorts of activism, social movements, voluntary associations, and centralized corporate negotiations. For example, at the beginning of this 21st century, citizenship was the subject of debates in Scandinavia from the point of view of the relationship between the “small democracy” – local, community – and the “big democracy” – at the national level (SKJEIE, 2005).

In other words, how to effect the integration between the mobilization of women, in their diversity and intersectionalities, in social movements and voluntary organizations, on the one hand, and political parties and institutions, on the other. In this debate, there is a great deal of feminist criticism on the notion of social-democratic citizenship for which the hero par excellence is the worker linked to the labor market. Citizenship and democratization cannot refer only to the integrated, but to all individuals, indistinctly, whatever their professional situation or status.

Women's response to these situations has been that, more than ever, it is necessary to continue fighting for a “politics of presence” (PHILLIPS, 1995), especially in countries of strong patriarchal tradition. Women's political representation is of the utmost importance, always taking into consideration the real divisions in their world, such as social status, ethnic and racial cleavages (YOUNG, 1995). Women must relate their concrete needs to activism, like any other socially marginalized group that needs the public arena to exert political influence and achieve its ends.

On the other hand, the opposite would work: even in accordance with favorable social and cultural standards, there is the trivialization of violence through continuous access to (mis) information and images – print, electronic and digital media. Whether they are news and documentary films/photographs (non-fiction), or soap operas, TV series, films, and other fictional productions, they could trigger latent reactions that would provide the socially acceptable normalization of violence. There could also happen the discrediting, the disbelief in the reality of information. Nowadays, the world goes through the crisis of post-truth: the fact that lies or fake news are transformed into truths and vice-versa.

This is the case reported in a story by Spanish news portal El País, also published in Brazil, entitled Trafficking in Persons – “I went with a suitcase full of dreams”: Thus

Brazilian women are transformed into sex slaves in Spain (free translation). "Carla", who became a social worker, told the reporter how she managed to escape the mafia that forced her to work as a prostitute in Madrid and Seville.

It took Carla a week to be informed that she would not be working as a nanny. Nor would she take care of the elderly. She wouldn't do any cleaning, as she was told. No. She would have to prostitute herself. They communicated that without half a word. They intimidated her. They threatened to hurt her family. And she had reasons to believe it. Many. They had, under some pretext, removed her Brazilian passport as soon as she landed in Spain, and she was now in an unknown country, at the mercy of people whom she previously believed would help her. (...) "I was going to college, but I was out of work and a friend offered me the possibility of coming to work in domestic service for six months to raise some money. I thought it would be a hard time, but I would get over it. When I arrived, the reality was very different. I never believed that this could happen to me. I thought everything that was told about deceived women was a lie", she says, with her countenance loaded. She was 23 years old then.<sup>27</sup> (free translation)

The heavy load of so many news and messages within mainstream media and social networks, with clear over-exposure to false/fake news or to the exaggeration of half-truths, can confuse or lead to error of judgment. Why, then, there are not promotions of more campaigns of long duration and reach, to alert and educate on the grave, urgent, issue of human trafficking?

What is there, over international media, up to the moment is clearly insufficient. Public actions (policies) are needed to alert populations to the gravity of the problem. However, such actions must be critically engineered in schools, universities, social networks, and the mass media, with the necessary support of specialists, repeatedly, until the most remote corners of each nation are reached.

Above all, the vices and secular violence of patriarchy must be re-educated throughout the world. Like all the reasons alleged in the Swedish legislation that penalizes the Johns insinuated, it is necessary for societies, and individuals, to learn how to solve their problems, their sexual and psychosocial frustrations, through other

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<sup>27</sup> Article published at *El País Brasil* website, titled *Tráfico de Pessoas – "Fui com uma mala cheia de sonhos": Assim brasileiras são transformadas em escravas sexuais na Espanha*, on April 21, 2017, available at: [https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2017/04/18/internacional/1492537286\\_311397.html?rel=mas](https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2017/04/18/internacional/1492537286_311397.html?rel=mas)  
Access: 5/20/2020.

means. Violence and sexual abuse against women and children are not the solution. They are crimes.

### **Raising Collectives Awareness**

Addressing the semantics of words should be a priority, for the simple reason of making it meaningful and sharing the same consideration. Upon this premise, awareness is an action towards which we should have sensibility, become a faculty of feeling and, we emphasize, develop the relevant capacity to have and maintain capabilities to know, understand and respond. In a way, to be aware is to become sensitive. In other words, feel in order to think and act. When we refer to the collective, we combine with a group of people, perhaps united by professional, affectionate or commitment ties. However, what about when there are no particular bonds?

It is at this point we become aware of the responsibility that implicitly carries the effect of consciousness. Moving from initial reflection to praxis, it arises in parallel to the contemplation of a political practice close to the exercise of awareness (CARBONELL, 2018). Citizenship perplexed and oppressed by its own daily life is "sensorially hyper-stimulated" (FERRÉS, 1994). It is difficult to discern what may be of interest, but educommunication professorship have to ask themselves what the other should do to become interested in diverse social realities. In a way, it is a matter of "why not".

However, we are facing a fact that encourages awareness so that citizens broaden their capacity of vision and admiration, rejection or criticism, struggle or denunciation. Therefore, we encourage education linked to the adequacy of reality (DE LA HERRÁN, 2017, pp. 457-517). It is not worth the simple intention, it is necessary to take impulse and subscribe *res non verba* (fact, not words), next to a *flagrant hic et nunc* (here and now). In this exercise one perceives the denouncement: it is a gesture of help to the Other. It is the most lucid way to reject what is not worth or does no good to the community. However, reality faces an agraphic society that barely reads or writes, that dispenses *literae* (literature) in favor of *imago* (image).

However, equally, presenting at least two environments can encourage the duality reader-writer to understand the realities as confronted. This is not our intention. All we intend is to provide understanding of a communicative fact inspired in the reading and writing of life. These are not two simple nouns. Our purpose is to offer a particular vision where the reading of life is an active fact and to

write an action that we carry out in our coexistence with others (AMAR, 2016, p. 976).

In this context, the impulse of technologies is here to stay. The technological enthusiasm assumes the edu-communicative processes and we share, on this particular, the classic "if you can't win your enemy, join him". For this reason, we propose a change in attitude, in the way one acts and, at the same time, the aptitude, as that capacity which we develop to interpret reality. It is not worth standing still. Relevant actions and interaction are necessary to and for the Other.

In this sense, to show a way of proceeding, we propose to keep in mind as a communicative strategy that, for example, there is always a day. The one that has to be prolonged in time. So, there is always one day later. An action, also cybernetic, that impacts, anticipates and maintains the latent message. So, it is proposed to oppose advertising. Let's see how business strategies will be, prolonging the look and the interest. Certainly, advertising sells and influences, and education contributes to the integral development of people (LÓPEZ-JURADO, 2011).

Advertising is persuasion, while education is insight. Nonetheless, the first, by sharing a social discourse, shapes the world and current visions, while the second contradicts these invitations through analysis, reflection and criticism, as well as its contribution to knowledge.

Raising awareness of collectives is a proactive action within society in order to avoid remaining impassive in face of injustices and abuses against the most vulnerable people. Even not being the object of study, it is an essential active subject to understand the role citizenship must play in face of the problem. It is also part of the discussion about misinformation, a product of interests and manipulation. Community awareness is needed to confront this global and unfair reality, otherwise the poor and unfaithful eye can become an accomplice to the crime of human trafficking (and many others).

Misinformation must be kept at bay as a product of the supra-ideological interests of social and/or traditional media. Also behind, in the past, must be kept the impassibility of a large part of civil society, so that awareness should act to improve the fight against human trafficking since its origins, from where the enticement and abduction take place, until the final "destiny".

Likewise, there is the campaign with its double purpose: to influence and inform. Education is quite ahead with its values and the need to transform ideas and beliefs.

Both initiatives (advertising on its propagandistic side and education on its educative work) are grouped around the intention of encouraging citizenship. Education requires continuous drops of humor so as not to fall into routine or monotony, exclusive of and in the classroom. The educational practice has to go out to the streets, face new contents and know how to work with them, by evoking the ludic, and provide guidelines for improvement.

In the intermediate path, from an educational perspective, the awareness campaign would be encouraged as that shared action in order to promote knowledge and further reflection on situations that harm, subtract or do not contribute to the community. Sensitize a situation that incites co-responsibility. And yet to make reality visible, with the purpose of making it understood. Here and now, the working groups should act towards promoting the common good, come into action uniting the efforts of NGOs or NPOs (Non Profit Organizations) as well as other social agents or institutions.

The educational campaign promotes a look of co-responsibility reflected in some commercial postulates. In the sense of disseminating and announcing a product as to further evolve to community service or public service. As much as there is publicity, there is counter-publicity in education as well. It is possible to unlearn, because what is not worthwhile must be rejected (CORBERA, 2018). Wherever it is necessary to promote transversal knowledge, not only of contents, but also to involve the majority of the socio-educational community. Then, the educational campaign must be anchored in the teaching procedure (DE JUAN and others, 2020).

That is, the intention of explaining everything to everyone respecting their learning and understanding pace. It is, in short, an exemplifying task. And it distances itself from normalization, from irresponsible reproduction that perpetuates involution. There is need for a look that unwraps new ethics in correspondence to the promotion of benefits and improvements among individuals or communities. All intended to encourage a citizenship that prevails and is not deceived by the aesthetics of discourse that eludes the ethics of transforming need. Need for a look full of co-responsibility that will contribute to a fairer and more critical society, more active and democratic.

Dare need for actions to overcome the state of a catatonic society, alien to reality, shaped by media commercial interests. "A free spirit should not learn as a slave" (ROSSELLINI, 2001). It is urgent to always stand up against the wall of interests of those who profit from the ignorance of others.

### **Media co-education: the path to women's empowerment**

Valuing should be a key element to carry out media literacy based on gender studies, at educational centers, that empowers girls from the early stages of childhood education. Citizenship must be accompanied by informational media literacy, as this is of vital importance for younger generations, so that from an early stage they are active participants within society. Above all, citizenship must embrace the fight against the infodemia that eclipses the truth of speeches. It should, from a gender perspective in media literacy, encourage and enable citizens to access tools that help them to interpret and critically analyze messages issued by various media and make use of these tools within the framework of democratic participation and learning about equality.

Authors like Monasterio, González and García (2011) reflect that co-education is a process that leads to social inclusion, by recognizing the multiple differences of each and every person, and also by applying the necessary value to educate on equity of rights. Therefore, co-education is based on the search for equity and balance between men and women, by educating in values such as equality, respect and tolerance.

The same authors postulate co-education as a methodology of transversal character, that is, a theme that must be present in all areas of education, focusing on a continuous process, as opposed to that of a timely nature. Regarding the term co-educate, Cabeza (2010) points out the need to correct male chauvinist and sexist stereotypes, and proposes a balanced curriculum that eliminates sexist biases and encourages the development of all individual capacities, regardless of gender.

As Pérez Tornero (2009) argues, gender perspective in the classroom is necessary, through the insertion of training projects related to media literacy, because there is a close relationship between equality and media culture. For this reason, gender equality should be addressed in an integral way in education, involving diversity, as a preventive tool against gender violence.

Among the key elements in the process for equal opportunities between men and women in education, the training of teachers is essential to build citizenship in equal rights. Prevention is key as a way to avoid exploitation of (young) women, from an educational perspective, and furthers building equal opportunities. Local, regional and national educational administrations should value strong commitment in building a society free from exploitation, violence, and trafficking in women and girls.

### **Final Considerations**

We ponder that the figure of the educator, the teacher, is fundamental for the realization of adequate co-education, based on media literacy with a gender perspective. It is necessary to transmit content necessary to develop skills, including media and information literacy in classroom practices and, beyond them, in the communities where they are inserted. Through a methodology that emerges from the needs and contributions of the student body itself, so that different understandings and perspectives on critical analysis of information with a gender perspective are developed.

Educators should have the ability to analyze and understand media production and information content, such as the messages these media present, and be able to evaluate them. Also, teachers should embrace the possibilities of using media and information for different co-educational purposes. For this reason, it is necessary the adequate formation of the faculty, with a gender perspective in media literacy.

Up to date training is needed in this digital era for a social/community educator, a schoolteacher, or faculty professor, to be able to explore the issue of representation in the various media and information systems. Interpret the ways in which images of women and men are approached in mass media. In addition, to foster among students and social and media activists the ability to critically evaluate and analyze, through the prism of gender equality, the interpretation and evaluation of various messages conveyed by these media. Seek information from various sources for comparison, so that truth emerges.

In the final trace of this research, three emerging elements face the reality in focus: post-truth, disinformation and trafficking in women and girls. All three must be debated with questions and convictions close to truth, information credibility, and social justice in relation to human dignity. In this context, the debate focuses on the role of citizenship, in each community corner, and on the transforming power of media literacy as an axis for action against injustice.

Raising awareness of collectives is necessary for a context far from the manipulation of lies, before they become possible truths. The ideas postulated by Aguaded and Cabero (1995) are still in effect in the sense of competencies that include understanding, criticizing and participating. These skills are intertwined with the methodological option of approach in this research: to be aware and understand this ferocious and unfair reality in order to reinforce the fight against post-truth and misinformation in trafficking in women and girls, and the urgent need for media (re) education.

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**RESUMO:**

Análises de dados e reflexões discursivas e metodológicas, nos campos da Comunicação Social e da Educação, sob a ótica dos estudos feministas e de gênero, pela alfabetização midiática para a cidadania sensibilizada no combate ao tráfico de mulheres e meninas. Questionar a violência de gênero na desinformação, falsas notícias (fake news), pós-verdades, e intenções maliciosas. Alfabetização midiática, co-educação e conscientização coletiva funcionam como estratégias de ação no combate ao tráfico de (jovens) mulheres, que atinge graus alarmantes no século 21, inclusive, durante a pandemia mundial do COVID-19.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVES:** Mídia; Educação; Tráfico; Mulheres; Pós-Verdade.

**RESUMEN:**

Análisis de datos y reflexiones discursivas y metodológicas, en los campos de la Comunicación Social y de la Educación, desde la perspectiva de los estudios feministas y de género, por la alfabetización mediática para la ciudadanía sensibilizada en la lucha contra la trata de mujeres y niñas. Cuestionar la violencia de género en la desinformación, las noticias falsas, las pos-verdades y las intenciones maliciosas. La alfabetización mediática, la coeducación y la conciencia colectiva funcionan como estrategias de acción para combatir la trata de mujeres y niñas, que alcanzan niveles alarmantes en el siglo XXI, incluso durante la pandemia mundial de COVID-19.

**PALABRAS-CLAVES:** Media; Educación; Pos-verdad; Trata; Mujeres.