

"Sex, Slavery and Politics" Representations of Trafficked

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Une ONG de femmes en Serbie, l'Action anti-traffic du sexe (ASTRA) a effectué une recherche sur la façon dont le trafic du sexe a été présenté en Serbie entre 1998 et 2001. Cette recherche a conclu que le sensationnalisme médiatique qui a entouré cette annonce a occulté le véritable problème du trafic des femmes.

... It is mostly about the girls who do not care about the money, they care more about the food. While I was involved in this kind of business in an Italian city, it happened once that a beauty from Ukraine with a torn sneaker came to me. I took her out to eat and I ordered a hen, and she was shocked, and she told me that they ate hen only for Christmas. She could not believe what was brought before her. She also didn't know what pineapple was. She just stared at it and marveled.... (Interview with a trafficker published in *Blic*, January, 4th 2003)

"Sex, Slavery and Politics" is the heading of an article that appeared in the daily newspaper, *Vecernje novosti*, in December 2002 around the time the Deputy Public Prosecutor in Montenegro, Zoran Piperovic, was arrested for trafficking in women. The article focuses on how many people one unnamed "Moldavian woman" who was arrested recognized, who her clients were, and what her

"true identity" might be. This article is an example of the sensationalist way the issue of trafficking, and trafficked women, are represented in the Serbian media. This case is still being closely watched in Serbia, yet not one article or editorial has appeared which supports the victims in this case, the trafficked women, or that supports the work of women activists who are trying to help them. Furthermore none of the articles published in the Serbian newspapers remind their readers that these events could happen in Serbia and the criminals involved would

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not be prosecuted as there are no applicable laws through which they could be arrested or tried.

In Serbia, Anti-Trafficking Action (ASTRA) feels that trafficking in women is one of the most extreme forms of violation of women's human rights. By trafficked women I am referring to migrant women who have been coerced into sex work (and/or other forms of labour as well) without their knowledge or consent and who are kept there by physical and mental abuse, threats, or blackmail.

Balkan and East European countries belong in a group of the most jeopardized countries in the world. They are used as transit, sending, and destination countries for trafficking in women. Poor economic situations in some post-Soviet countries are especially devastating for women who are the first dismissed from their jobs, and who, contrary to traditional images of the men as breadwinners, have substantial responsibility for providing for the family. Violence against women and the militarization of the region are some of the causes of the migration of women; both factors make them vulnerable to traffickers. Some women are forced to accept offers from agencies or trusted friends for a "well-paid job in the West," which come. Unfortunately, most of them realize only too late these offers are bogus.

Serbia is not an exception. It is both a key transit county in the Balkans and also as a destination country. Serbian women are transported to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Kosovo and West European countries. It is also not uncommon for trafficked women to be held in local bars. Since it became operative in 2002, the experience of Anti Sex-Trafficking Action's (ASTRA) SOS Info Hotline¹ shows that Serbia is also a country of origin. Most of the calls the hotline received about actual cases of trafficking are made by parents of the girls who are citizens of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) and who, at the time of the call, were being held within the country and from where they would eventually be sold.

Why Have We Conducted This Research?

Trafficking in women is often treated only as a problem of organized crime and it is presented as a very lucrative business with minimal risk. This is because most countries do not have legal sanctions for traffickers and similar lawbreakers, and implementation of the law is too often inadequate and slow. In some cases, it is also assumed that

Women in the Serbian Media

trafficking in women, drugs or weapons is the same type of crime. In the republic of Serbia, no legislation exists which recognizes the trafficking of human beings as a criminal act.

In January 2002, ASTRA started a media campaign specifically focused on trafficking in women. The goal of the campaign was to introduce and increase awareness of the problem of trafficking and its scale in our country. As the media plays a significant role in influencing public perception of trafficking, before the campaign started, ASTRA decided to examine the manner in which the Serbian media takes up these issues, namely, the approach and amount of coverage it receives. We were interested to learn if trafficking in women was being presented as a problem of violence against women and violation of their human rights, or just as a “criminal chronicle” entry. During our analysis, we had two hypotheses: that the problem was not recognized on a political level in our study period (1998-2001) and that, in the media, patriarchal and sexist attitudes prevail when women and “women’s issues” are presented.

We analyzed the contents of articles published in five of the most widely sold newspapers in Serbia—*Glas Javnosti*, *Blic*, *Politika*, *Vecernje Novosti*, and *Danas*. In our study period, the years 1998 to 2001, we identified four critical periods: 1) the bombing of FRY and the war in Kosovo (May/June 1999); 2) a post-conflict period (September/October 1999); 3) the period around presidential elections and change of the regime² (September/November 2000); and, 4) the period around the establishment of the new government (February/April 2001). The periods we covered were times of great social and political disturbance in Serbia and the region.

In the eyes of the public, the above newspapers are separated into two distinct groups. *Politika*, as the oldest publishing firm in Serbia was perceived as a mouthpiece for Milosevic’s regime and as such its pages were filled with war propaganda. *Večernje Novosti*, said to be the best selling daily newspaper, was also pro-Milosevic; while *Blic*, *Danas* and *Glas Javnosti* were then known as “voices of the opposition.”

Although the latter three newspapers were somewhat similar in approach, today their differences are greater. *Glas Javnosti* covers the political right stream of the society; *Blic* is a “colorful” newspaper, and *Danas* is the voice of “modern” pro-West ideas.

During our study period, while the print media was sharply divided into pro- or anti-Milosevic factions, we discovered that differences in approach almost disappear in their presentation of many other issues of daily politics.

“Naked Entertainers and Albanian Pimps”

Between 1998 and 2001, there were a total of 166 articles published focusing on trafficking in women. Our analyses focused on 49 (30 per cent). The largest number of articles were published by *Glas Javnosti* and *Politika*, and the fewest by *Večernje Novosti*. Only four articles on trafficking were published during the year 2000.

In relation to the analyzed periods, the amount of coverage trafficking received was the lowest during and immediately after the war in Kosovo, in 1999. Since the trafficking in women is most prevalent in militarized regions, this was very indicative. During and after the wars in the former Yugoslavia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, became the biggest receiving countries for women victims of trafficking, directly implicating neighbouring countries, which most often are countries of transit and origin (such as Serbia and Bulgaria). In spite of this, the full scale of this problem in Serbia was discussed in less than one third of the articles, while most of them focused on Kosovo, covering only the after-war period and arrival of Kosovo Force (KFOR).

An attitude was therefore created in the public mind that trafficking in women happens “somewhere else,” that is, in the areas where political control was handed over to “others.” For example, in Kosovo there is no more Yugoslav police or army to “enforce law and order,” a region now perceived to be run by “foreigners.”

The amount of coverage on trafficking increased during the year 2001, a year in which events elevated the problem to a political level. First, the “round table on trafficking in human beings”

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This photo, published in Danas, accompanied the article on the arrest of the Deputy Public Prosecutor in Montenegro, Jan. 8, 2003.

was held, and following that, in May, 2001, the “Yugoslav Team for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings” was formed.³

In spite of these events, the problem of trafficking, and trafficked women, continued to be dominated by sensationalism. Articles were restricted to limited information with no analyses of causes, consequences, or scale of the problem. Rarely did the articles studied go beyond the “criminal chronicle” pages—i.e., the problem of trafficking only appears to exist while it is “hot news” even though trafficking in women and violence against women and children are problems that have constantly been present in Serbian society. None of the articles analyzed presented a truly investigative approach to the issue.

The terminology used in newspaper articles on trafficking is a noticeable problem. Articles are filled with stereotypes, especially when it comes to the victims of trafficking. Trafficked women are described as “prostitutes” and phrases linked to them include: “scared, imported, auctioned, friends of the night and the sellers of sexual services, beauties of the night, ladies of suspicious morals.”

They are also discussed as “slaves,” using language like: white slavery, slaves from the sidewalks, women slavery, slaves in mini skirts ... pretty girls, night-shift workers, inventory of local bars, illegals, fresh blood for the West, merchandise from the East for truck drivers, naked entertainers....”

The term “white slavery” was first used at the end of the nineteenth century, and in today’s context it is completely inappropriate. It is racist (“white” women are not the only victims of trafficking), and it also stigmatizes women as victims who cannot be helped without any perception that they are people who need support to alter the situations they find themselves in.

Ethnification of the Victims

Articles often mention the victims’ and traffickers’ nationality. For women the term “victims of trafficking in women” is rarely used; instead terms like “Ukrainian women,” “Moldavian women,” or “Romanian women” prevail, despite the fact that it is generally uncommon to describe citizens of FRY by their ethnicity. Traffickers were identified ethnically when Albanian—Albanian Mafia, Albanian owners, Shiptars⁴ Mafia, ethnical Albanians as future pimps, or Albanian managers. Often we came across sentences like these:

Albanians have the reputation of being the cruelest pimps. One pimp was convicted because he put his wife, sister and mother on the sidewalk!... (“Pandering becomes more profitable than drugs”)

Foreign prostitutes became almost regular inventory of the local bars, and during the turbulent night-life, a market for so-called “white slavery” occurred there.... (“Police is shutting the red lanterns”)

Trafficking as a phenomenon is rarely mentioned in these articles. Headlines like “Full boat of prostitutes,” “White slavery is blossoming in Kosovo,” “Little African slaves,” “Some strange students,” “Condom dance without frontiers”... are more common. This approach is a method of obscuring the fact trafficking exists in Serbia, but is also an illustration of the lack of interest in providing a deeper analysis of the different forms of violence in Serbian society. Terms like “Cruel Albanians,” “arrested individuals,” “Moldavian women” simply reflect prejudices and stereotypes common in Serbia. The superficial kind of writing is also applied to the problem of trafficking in women, although any woman can become a victim of trafficking, and any person can become a trafficker, regardless of her or his ethnic origin. Using specific ethnic designations and/or pointing out a trafficked woman’s nationality only contributes to existing prejudices that trafficked women are naive foreigners who are guilty of the situation in which they find themselves.

It's Their Own Fault"

"Trafficked women" and "prostitution" are two different terms, however, in the articles we analyzed, this difference is not always visible. ASTRA argues that trafficked women are coerced into prostitution and exploited without their consent. A woman who is being trafficked and forced into prostitution has no control over her own body, often does not receive any of the money she earns by providing sexual services, and has no possibility of determining the conditions of the work. Working as a prostitute can also be a personal choice and such a woman has the agency to decide the number of clients to which she will provide sexual services. She will also keep the money for the services she provides and she can decide on her own conditions of work.

Nevertheless, both trafficked women and women prostitutes are stigmatized in Serbian society. They are marginalized and do not have organized protection and support. Both are denied access to basic human rights. For this reason, many never contact the police to report cases of violence. Labeled as "immoral" and "less worthy" women, they are perceived as not deserving access to social services.

In Serbia and Montenegro prostitution is considered a misdemeanor. This means that women who are victims of trafficking and who are forced into prostitution are not legally recognized as the victims of a crime, but rather as a persons who deliberately break the law. In the eyes of the public they are persons who engage in high-risk behaviour and are, therefore, guilty and deserving of any violence committed against them. The fact that they may have been trafficked, coerced and exploited is often not emphasized in the newspaper articles we examined.

The articles which deal with child prostitution need special consideration. Although as minors they cannot be seen as having consented to working as prostitutes and they should, therefore be treated as cases of trafficked children,⁵ in the articles we examined during our study period, there is no analysis of root causes and factors which render children victims of traffickers and force them into prostitution, domestic labour, forced begging, or forced marriage.

Of note are the visuals that accompany a number of the articles we analyzed. With the exception of two published photographs directly related to a specific text, regardless of the content of the articles, many featured photographs of naked or half-naked women and girls dancing around a pole in a night club or bare-breasted women and girls throwing themselves into the cars of potential customers. Whether the articles were about trafficked women forced into prostitution through psychological and physical violence, or about sex workers working in the industry by their own choice, is left for the reader to intuit.

Although almost 50 per cent of the analyzed articles mention some kind of coercion, physical or mental vio-



This photo was published in Blic, accompanying the article about the police action which cut four trafficking routes in Serbia, Dec. 13, 2002..

lence to which women and/or girls were exposed, the coverage of trafficking is often sensationalistic. The details of "victim's story" are told: how many times she was raped, when, where and in what manner, the putting out of cigarettes on her body, techniques of beating used to leave marks, forced miscarriages, and other gratuitous details. The approach of the media ostensibly is that "her" story is "necessary," that it must be "persuasive" otherwise the public will never believe that she is, in fact, a victim.

In an article that reports on a police raid where several "white slaves" were arrested, the bulk of the article focused on the what the prices of sexual services were as well as how many ribs were broken and in what way during the arrest. Once again, there was little coverage on the causes, consequences, and the political, social and legal aspects of the problem of trafficking.

Trafficking in women is not the only form of violence against women treated in this manner in newspapers and magazines. Domestic violence, sexual abuse, incest, are issues that are discussed only when something heinous happens, something which is "hot" news. These issues are

taken up in sporadic, sensationalist reports without ever delving into a deeper analysis of the root causes and factors of the problems, nor do they explore strategies for change and/or possible solutions. The media needs to consider women's perspectives and include the women's voices far more often in their reporting on violence issues and on the problem of trafficking in women. In covering these issues more accurately, the media could instead play an active role in sensitizing the public and raising awareness about trafficking in women and girls and the need to protect and ensure their basic human rights.

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¹The ASTRA SOS info hotline offers support and help for women who have been victims of trafficking, their families/friends, and also informs all interested individuals about the risks and prevention.

²Slobodan Milosevic lost the Presidential elections held on the 25th of September 2000, but refused to pass over the control of the state. On the 6th of October, the citizens of Serbia and the opposition parties organized a street demonstration. On that same day, Milosevic resigned.

³The "Yugoslav Team for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings" was the first official state institution dedicated to combating trafficking. It is made up of state institutions (such as the Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Social Welfare), international organizations (OSCE Mission in FRY, International Organization of Migration) and local NGOs dealing with trafficking (ASTRA, Counseling Against Family Violence, Victimology Society of Serbia). The aim was to collaborate on prevention programs, education, victim assistance and change of legislation. In 2002 it was transformed into the Republican Team of Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, working only at the Serbian republican level. Its biggest and most important achievement was in the field of legislation. In April 2003, the Republican Parliament adopted a new article in the legislation which classifies trafficking in human being as a criminal offence.

⁴The term "Shiptar" is used as an ethnic slur against Albanians in Serbia.

⁵In December 2000, the United Nations adopted the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime. With respect to children, it specifically states that "The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered 'trafficking in persons'" and that a

"child" is "any person under eighteen years of age." The entire document is available online at: www.uncjin.org/Documents/documents.html

MARIE JANICK BELLEAU

Argentina, Terre-Neuve

Belle et puissante
La vague mue par le vent
Et pourtant fatale

Marie Janick Belleau a publié livres et de nombreux articles et poèmes dans différentes revues nationales et internationales.

A. MARY MURPHY

I remember when everyone was heterosexual

I remember when everyone was
heterosexual
except maybe the bank manager's son and
the florist
when things like My Lai
made a peculiar Viet Nam kind of sense
because an enemy is an enemy is an enemy
but when I remember the cover of Time
magazine
and complicate it with all grown-up sorts of
understanding
William Calley's mistaken sex appeal lay
completely in his misshapen power not his
massacre
and when I remember the anxious walk
the horn-rimmed glasses on a nervous face
the laughter goes flat and I wince
we were vicious predatory little bitches
to taunt that poor queer and call him Oberon
king of the fairies
we knew our Shakespeare

A. Mary Murphy live in Calgary, Alberta.