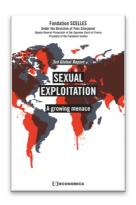


Sex and power



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Prostitution remains a subject that demands explanation; the scandals it provokes supply ripe stories to be published, and has been transformed into a business all of its own. By bringing together two worlds that otherwise had little chance of collision, prostitution provokes a chain reaction of scandal and public interest.

The previous few years have provided particularly rich stories: Dominique Strauss-Kahn (DSK), Silvio Berlusconi, and Zahia¹ affairs which took place one after the other and, once analyzed, appear extremely similar despite different actors and settings. Each of these widely published stories reflects the ambivalence born from prostitution. It is, at the time, fascination and repulsion, producing unprecedented social shockwaves. DSK and Nafissatou Diallo are now known worldwide, with hundreds of reproductions centered on their "encounter", objects made in their image, and direct parodies, all surfacing after the exposure of their sex scandal.

Public opinion is by and large offended. The average population continues to wonder how those in power can continue to act with the moral and ethical fragility largely associated to normal people. And, thanks to large-scale media hype, prostitution has developed acclaim or, in any case, become a

social craze within the public eye, especially in the eyes of the young.

The activity attracts the eyes of many by the same fantasies that it provokes. It represents the breach of rules and becomes synonymous with the world of the powerful that is aligned with the idealized life of both danger and mystery. To put it simply, prostitution represents a life of adventure, in every sense of the word.

In addition prostitution represents simplification; it is the reduction of a complex world to a situation dominated by market transactions. In this way, the difficulty of ethical considerations, empathy, understanding, philanthropy, and human relations is erased entirely. Existing in an idealized world – lawless, liberated, governed by money, materialism and pure power – prostitution creates a tempting illusion.

To give an example, the Chinese actress Zhang Ziyi, accused of having paid sexual relations with Chinese dignitaries – most notably Bo Xilai, dismissed from the communist party in 2012 after a murder involving him and his wife – earned tens of millions of dollars for her "work." Due to her involvement in notably successful films (Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon, Rush Hour 2, Memoirs of a Geisha), her financial success

leaves many wondering why she would practice prostitution. Did she want to earn more money? Did she want to maintain a strong network to ensure her career? Both answers appear possible, even probable. However, her decision may have also been influenced by the feeling experienced by those with power, that they can obtain and offer anything that they desire, including human beings. In certain power structures, it is hard, if not impossible, for women to say no.

Besides the issues of power, prostitution is also a response to individual suffering. Prostitution claims clearly, "yes, there are characteristics that construct women, and there are those that construct men. At the heart of these characteristics, divisions exist. On one side, we find pure women: On the other, whores. Men are nothing more than the victims of sexual desires, and they will never be mastered. To put these beasts to rest, to ensure that they do not spill over into violence toward those we respect, prostitutes serve their purpose. That is the way it has always been, and the way it always will be."

In reality, this archetypal construction, a reduction of humans to sexual objects, is the only thing as old as humanity itself. The archetypes appear and reappear in diverse texts; it's a temptation to simplify that continues today, and is supported by advertisements and media.

Nevertheless, following multiple sexual affairs that became the subject of media frenzy, which will be analyzed later on, these anthropological representations of the dichotomized human, far from being erased, have grown in scale. This phenomenon remains especially true in regard to the young, bombarded by raw and evocative images and situations.

Today, prostitution conceals itself under the umbrella term "escorting" which takes advantage of a term that is not yet fully understood to signify the activity it describes. Seductive, sparkling attire, fabulous parties, and famous, powerful figures now gild the dirty connotation of "prostitution." In this way, it has become a comfortable idea for the younger generation, as a tame word in line with the physical criteria of beauty and elegance.

A necessity for elegant enjoyment exists now more than ever before. For here on, we have to enjoy ourselves longer and more fabulously than those who came before, to take full advantage of new means of communication, of consumption. The schemas that associate a woman's body to objects of consumption, and trapping men in the idea that they are the natural consumers, have never been stronger.

What we are seeing is therefore an increased attraction to this type of prostitution. The market-society demonstrates the value of individuals as proportional to their monetary capital; escorting allows us to rapidly earn and gain access to the social status of an icon. For these reasons, a certain number of young girls find themselves dreaming of escorting as the royal road to fame and riches. A true tragedy, many of these girls consider the sale of their bodies to be the only way for them to obtain what they want, as in the case Zahia, or F. Ribéry's "birthday present."

The question of what causes this phenomenon is rarely put on the table. For what reasons do these men believe it appropriate to call for the services of these women? Why do those around them tolerate it? Why are these behaviors considered scandalous, only once they are brought to the public's attention? And, finally, why does the public feel as though it has been betrayed after discovering a scandal?

Once caught, the public lashings that politicians inflict on themselves are often similar. They appear contrite, tears gleaming in their eyes, but proper. The excuses follow, and the words they use fall in line with pious

sentiments. Bill Clinton, in his televised admittance of an affair on August 17th, 1998 claimed, "Indeed I did have a relationship with Miss. Lewinsky that was not appropriate. In fact, it was wrong." Tiger Woods, on February 19th, 2010 stated, "I never thought about who I was hurting. Instead, I thought only about myself. I ran straight through the boundaries that a married couple should live by. I thought I could get away with whatever I wanted to. I felt that I had worked hard my entire life and deserved to enjoy all the temptations around me." Dominique Strauss-Kahn, to give one final example, claimed on September 18th, 2011, "It was not just a weakness, it was a moral fault."

The multiple affairs of DSK, or *The Women* of the 6th Floor (Philippe Le Guay, 2011)

It is impossible to mention the topic of celebrity affairs and glance over the one that blew up into worldwide media frenzy. Dominique Strauss-Kahn (DSK) and Nafissatou Diallo are, from here on out, icons of sexual relationships based on power. The mere mention of either name suffices to bring back clear memories of the case and its facts.

In one meeting between these two, a plethora of power relationships can be described: Man and woman, black and white, rich and poor, powerful and marginalized, northern and southern, power and vulnerability, fame and anonymity. The possibilities of dichotomized relationships in this case are endless.

From the first day, the breaking news of the affair between DSK and Nafissatou Diallo heavily impacted France, the United States, and the global community. It was only a few hours afterward that Taiwanese television channels published a series of images to reconstruct what happened.

Throughout the day, opinions of experts, commentators, and close friends provided an endless stream of information for radios,

newspapers, television programs, and websites. In France and around the world, conversation revolved heavily around what may have happened in Room 2806.

But what makes this story so unbelievable? Quite simply, people were incapable of understanding why it happened. "But why *her*?" "Why a maid, who isn't beautiful or young, when he could buy almost any woman he wanted, given his money, power, and status? Why would he risk everything for her?"

In addition to these questions, it became clear that this scandal was only the beginning. DSK's "affair" with Piroska Nagy, one of his co-workers at the International Monetary Fund (IMF), came to light a few days later. The woman in question soon left the IMF, with a bonus that her professional experience did not merit. DSK's affair at the Carlton hotel in Lille took place during the same year. In this case, he was accused of gang rape and procuring. The accusation of gang rape was later dropped, however the second is still under legal consideration. After returning from New York, pronounced innocent of all charges, DSK was again confronted with another legal case. Tristan Banon, a French journalist, appeared ready to press charges against Strauss-Kahn for an alleged rape in 2002. The case was subsequently dropped, and did not result in criminal conviction.

More recently, another case has been brought to light, after the publication of "Belle et bête" by Marcela Iacub. The work, which describes the relationship between the author and Strauss-Kahn, resulted in legal proceedings. From this point forward, the publication company must insert a note in each copy to explain that the book is an infringement on DSK's right to privacy. As a result, DSK received 50,000 € in legal remuneration.

As for the affair between DSK and Nafissatou Diallo, the civil case was decided

out of court. The woman in question, who became the subject of endless analysis, received more than \$1 million USD in damages.

The movie "Women of the 6th floor" uses Paris of the 1960s as its backdrop. In the heart of the city, a young man with a strict moral code discovers a group of beautiful young Spanish girls living on the top floor of his building. By meeting them, he becomes aware of a simpler universe that seduces him in the same way as one of the young Spanish girls. His decision, however, does not please the other characters of the play, who don't support mixing social classes.

In this film, the world of the working class and that of the bourgeois collide. Their collision reveals the gaps that exist between their mentalities and ways of life. It is, nevertheless, the improbability of their relationship which adds flare to the storyline.

In the DSK affair, the story progresses in a similar fashion. The master falls from his pedestal to meet women living with modest means, and momentarily they share their daily lives, while experiencing new pleasures.

He already possesses women of high society, but they are not enough. He wants all of them, no matter who they are or what they do. One of the prostitutes, who is used to what the press curiously calls "the fine parts" of DSK, says herself that he prefers newcomers.

DSK's line of defense in the majority of these cases is simple. The women always consent. Nafissatou Diallo, Tristan Banon, the diverse prostitutes, all of them. But the testimonies of each of these women, who dared to publically mention DSK's brutality, are similar and almost interchangeable. Are they a line of defense proposed by lawyers or a true confession? A mix of both, it seems. Some have gone so far as to pardon DSK in the name of his "French" nature, which supposedly produces men with unnaturally high libido.

The unending Berlusconi case, or *The Learned Ladies* (Molière, 1672)

Silvio Berlusconi is used to being inside the courtroom. Since the 1990s, he has been through many trials, with a mix of politics, the mafia, arms, embezzlement, false testimony, abuse of power, corruption, tax fraud, prostitution, the list goes on. In short, he is the only man to have every necessary ingredient for a good movie on the Italian underworld, or on any underworld, for that matter.

As a preventative measure, while he was still in power and his cases began to pile up, he passed multiple laws allowing him to push back judgment day. One such law granted the Prime Minister of Italy immunity during his mandate. Another stipulated that all prison sentences of under two years given to those over the age of 75 would be carried out under house arrest.

S. Berlusconi is currently 77 years old, and was recently condemned to one year in prison. He has challenged the decision in Italy, allowing his sentence to be suspended until retrial.

If S. Berlusconi is famous for his extramarital affairs and his "bunga-bunga" parties, he has also attracted Europe's attention by his choices in policy staff. In 2007, he announced the creation of his party, the People of Freedom (Il Popolo della Libertà) meant to reassemble the Italian right wing.

Two years later, during European elections, he chose original electoral rolls consisting of young, attractive women with few ties and little knowledge of the political world. With television coverage and photos, he put forward those who were denounced in the press as his "bimbos." After a bit of research, it was discovered that a few of the women had visited the Prime Minister's villa in Milan, reputed to be a place for orgy parties always supplied with prostitutes.

The pressure generated by this scandal was important (Berlusconi's wife went as far as to describe her husband's choice as "the emperor's entertainment"). S. Berlusconi eventually decided to keep only one of the women, a former television presenter, despite the fact that the young woman of 28 years had no knowledge of politics and considered herself unfit to enter into the political system.

But S. Berlusconi, nicknamed the *Cavaliere* had not said his last word. The following year, during Italy's regional elections, he employed the same tactic. The strategy is clear, he does not conceal it: "A woman can be good in politics by simply being young and maybe also by being pretty" he claimed, during an interview (*L'Express*, February 24th, 2010).

One of these women, who was lucky enough to be elected, was formerly a dental assistant who had helped repair the *Cavaliere*'s teeth after he was attacked in Milan. Another was a television star and model, assumed to have participated in the special parties held by S. Berlusconi, and was proud to introduce herself as his favorite.

The most recent case is often referred to as Rubygate. S. Berlusconi allegedly purchased the services of (at least) one child prostitute, named Ruby. S. Berlusconi confirmed numerous times throughout the affair that he was unaware of the girl's age, before going back on his own statements like the *Cavaliere* himself.

An investigation into the case is currently underway. S. Berlusconi, as well as certain close relations, is facing charges that include the abuse of power, exploitation of prostitutes, and sexual exploitation of minors.

Similar to certain characters in Molière's plays, Silvio Berlusconi doesn't seriously value intelligent women. His selection criterion is always the same: physical appearance. His apparently insatiable sexual appetite pushes

him to reward his conquests by naming them to positions of power. The *Cavaliere*'s mistresses are dispersed everywhere, in both the public and private professional spheres.

The famous learned ladies, who give their title to Molière's play, are not ridiculous because of their will to learn, but because they believe they are learning from individuals who are, in reality, pretentious and of little worth.

"If you ever feed your mind at all, everyone says it is with airy diet".

For the majority of those who accept positions of power for this type of remuneration, the situation unravels in a similar manner. Dazzled by S. Berlusconi's charisma, or by the lure of easy power, these women willingly accept to see themselves brought into the political world as a pretty face, claimed as learned.

The amateurism of the affair involving Barack Obama's bodyguards, or *Female Agents* (Jean-Paul Salomé, 2008)

The resume of facts is the same, despite the article or its publisher: a short time before the U.S. President arrived in Columbia to attend the US-Latin American summit, an affair took place which challenged the legitimacy of secret service agents who had come to prepare for the President's arrival.

The bodyguards are reported to have drunk heavily, according to the hotel staff, before inviting a group of 10 or more prostitutes into their room. Their actions were revealed to the public at large the next morning, when the Columbian police were called to resolve a financial dispute between a prostitute and a bodyguard. The man wanted to give her \$30 USD, though he had proposed to pay her \$800 USD the previous night.

The local police, embarrassed to become involved in the situation, called the American Embassy. The agents in questions were sent

back to the United States one day after the President's arrival.

"Out of the 11 Secret Service members suspended and awaiting the result of an investigation of this case, 'one member was authorized to retire, another is in the process of being fired... another left his position,' affirmed the Secret Service." From the same source, "the eight other employees remain suspended,' while the internal investigation continues" (7 sur 7, April 19th, 2012).

The information and reactions communicated by the press in different articles are interchangeable: Barack Obama affirms that this incident does not reduce his interest for the US-Latin American summit, while he continues to put full faith into his Secret Service. In addition, despite the affair, it was continually affirmed that the President's security was not jeopardized.

Other actors directly involved in the summit who talked about the event, were discontent to see attention focused on the scandal instead of on the political meeting.

"It's incredible; four days after the US-Latin American Summit that brought together Barack Obama and 32 other heads of state, no one is talking about the meeting," proclaimed Maria Teresa Aya, director of the Columbian Diplomatic Academy. "The international press is only interested in prostitution scandals." A young government worker of the Ministry of Exterior Relations proclaimed angrily, "we slaved away for this damned summit and, in the end, it was only for a story about prostitutes" (*Le Monde*, April 20th, 2012).

Finally, as in many other occasions, what is disconcerting is that the agents acted in this way while working for the President preparing his arrival, not that they bought prostitutes in the first place. Rep. Peter King, R-N.Y., chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, stated, "For Reuters, this incident brings to light the human weaknesses and

working conditions of men in the shadows. Those who don't travel with the President sometimes organize parties once Air Force One takes off toward other destinations. There exists a need to decompress that P. King does not deny, explaining that 'what is most worrying in the case at hand, is that the party took place before his arrival'".

The discredit thrown onto the United States is equally as worrying. For the nation that is believed to help bring light onto the world, such a scandal heavily tarnishes its reputation. Throughout all testimonies, honor was the golden string to tie all words together, as men began to express regret in the name of their country.

The ethical questions around prostitution itself, or the working conditions of the women who were bought, were never tackled. In the end of the affair, only one of them is known by the public eye. Calling the police to settle financial issues and giving an interview a bit later, she had this to say about the agent's stupidity:

"They were a bunch of fools. They are responsible for Obama's security and they still let this happen. I could have done a thousand other things. If I had wanted to, I could have gone through all his documents, his wallet, his suitcase" (*The Telegraph*, May 5th, 2012).

In the film *Female Agents*, Louise Desfontaines, an agent engaged in the French resistance, is given the mission to smuggle out a British agent captured by Germans.

In order to accomplish her mission, she brings together a dream team: she choses Gaëlle, a chemist; Suzy, a cabaret dancer; Jeanne, a prostitute. Out of these four women, only Louise is a professional agent. Beside the chemist, who is recruited for her talents in explosive material, the two other women are recruited for the talents in seducing men.

Today, this practice remains in place. In order to trap male agents, their weak points

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have to be exploited; send them women. For this reason, it is difficult to find a James Bond or any other secret again without the essential seductress, who plays a double role to charm the agent and extract information from him.

If the Columbian prostitutes had themselves been secret agents, like the characters of the film, it would have been easy for them to access information transported by the agents and to put Barack Obama's life in danger. Given all of the international repercussions that could have resulted, this hypothetical situation is the most worrying element of the affair.

The Enigmatic Zahia affair, or Born Yesterday (Georges Cukor, 1950)

The affair in question is certainly one of the largest media successes in the last few months. Its success may be explained by the fact that, unlike the three other affairs listed above, it is the only story with the prostitute as main character, leaving her clients to the sidelines. Throughout the press, she is the only person mentioned; Franck Ribéry and Karim Benzema, the main French football players involved, are mostly brought up in relation to judicial decisions.

Football and prostitution maintain a long relationship; the scandals that tie these two spheres together are numerous and similar. During large sport events, they highlight the emotions of fans, and are later left in a forgotten limo until a new affair explodes into the public eye. January 2011 saw the scandal involving players from the Swedish team, July of the same year brought scandal onto the Mexican team, and every World Cup brings a large influx of prostitutes into whatever country happens to host. The 2006 World Cup in Germany witnessed the construction of numerous super structures dedicated to prostitution, before the arrival of a massive number of testosterone boosted fans. For example, a new "megabrothel" of 32,291 sq ft was built in order to welcome 650 clients right next to the principal stadium in Berlin. Smaller, bathroom sized constructions were also built on site, to be used by clients and prostitutes alike. Despite the large number of prostitutes who worked throughout the event, the women who sell their bodies remain largely unnamed and unmentioned.

The juvenile Zahia, conquered the public because she evoked an emotional reaction, because she was a minor who resembled a naive doll while she was a prostitute, and because she developed a certain mystery around herself, by her frequent silence often incorrectly attributed to her soft character. She embodies a story close to a modern fairy tale; hers is simultaneously cruel and enchanted, as traditional stories often were.

Zahia refuses to be assimilated as a prostitute, and differentiates the activity from that of escorting.

"You know, it is always men who give me propositions. It's for this reason that I refuse to be called a prostitute. I am not on the edge of a sidewalk, or sitting on a barstool. I go out into connected areas; I meet people in show business, in sports... But they propose... and I decide" (*Paris Match*, May 3rd, 2010).

And yet, in the net section of the article, she admits (like many women in her situation) that she sold her body to obtain a sufficient amount of money to open her own beauty parlor. The activity therefore is not one that she practices in total liberty for her own pleasure. Prostitution is considered to be a temporary activity, justified by a future project that requires funding.

For this reason, far from being the naïve, limited white girl targeted by a media who wanted to paint an unflattering, lachrymose picture of her (which was always centered on her physical appearance), Zahia seems to have mastered the subtle manipulation of her media coverage. Today, no one speaks of her as the French team's favorite prostitute, but as a

popular fashion creator protected by reputed figures (Karl Lagerfeld, notably).

When typing her name into international search engines, many pages have to be flipped through in order to find an article that deals with the first reason behind the young girl's popularity. This phenomenon eclipses the means that she employed to arrive at her stardom, giving a large number of young girls the idea that they can achieve their dreams by following in the footsteps of a former sex worker.

These young girls are generally not aware of the implications on gender relations, and believe that using their body as an object is the best way to succeed in life. This conformity to a norm that treats women as merchandise allows them few means of affirming themselves as an individual.

This type of behavior and attitude, expected according to an individual's sex, was theorized by Christophe Dejours, a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, in 1988 under the name of Mulierity. As Pascale Molinier notes, Mulierity is "a defensive identity of sex that consists of woman' 'making the to avoid victimization. The female collective that, in order to forget its oppression and to not suffer, restrains women to give up all aspirations contrary to social femininity, relieving the collective masculine identity." She also notes that Mulierity degrades self-esteem and selfhood (the varying identifying part of each individual that makes him or her unique). By trying too hard to incarnate the culturally constructed feminine archetype, we finish by forgetting who we truly are and remain lost.

The young women who are fascinated by the Zahia model, or by bimbos on reality television, have no idea how hard prostitution can be, and are unaware of the physical or psychological damage that can result. These women belong to the hyper sexualized period of our society that Jocelyne Robert, a sexologist and author, defines as such: "XXX scenes and pornography are disappearing in public space. It is increasingly rare to speak of eroticism, relations, signification, desire, pleasure, expectation, consent, education, or sexuality... It's rigid sex, parochial, focused on genitals, consumerist, mechanic, and rushed. It has squeezed its partner, sexuality, that in its own corner continues to embrace emotional, sensual, relational, emotional and identifiable panoramas..." (*Les Nouvelles News*, January 26th, 2012)

For Zahia, the story does not end badly in principle, but how many other broken lives have been left in wake of the story? Despite a period of her life that was determined by prostitution, it seems that she has succeeded in creating a free future for herself.

As in the film *Born Yesterday*, Billie Dawn, a former cabaret dancer, is estimated to be an imbecile before reality tears down these initial conceptions. Due to a team that never leaves her, and controls the smallest details of her life, Zahia knew how to use her image as an airhead in order to manage her fame and her business with an iron first hidden under a pink velvet glove.

The mix of power and prostitution: A Matter of Taste (Bernard Rapp, 2000)

Those accused of being at fault attempt to restore their image by adopting the figure of the repentant sinner. It's next to their spouse, their family, and their country that they break down into excuses. At the heart of these famous affairs, the most important aspect of the game is honor. Collective honor is the only victim of the four cases studied under this theme, as in all others. As for the prostitutes, they are not often taken into account by article or by the excuses offered (except for Zahia, who fascinated the public eye). These women remain the object at the beginning of the entire affair.

The "affair," systematically term employed for this type of event, is a soft euphemism that covers a cold reality. "The initial refusal to name facts is discerned throughout the entire scandal," as Karine Hamedi notes. "The term 'affair' seems to create its own reality in and of itself, by scandalous designating facts that completely separate from political debate". She remarks as well that all "affairs" mix a conflict of values with a power conflict.

In this way, when an emotional element is added to the story, using this term becomes appropriate in certain well-defined frameworks. At its origin, "affair" is used to name sentimental relations and is always assigned to describe extra-marital relations in Anglo-Saxon vocabulary. In tandem with the spouse or the humiliated victim, the public feels cheated by the actions of the person they had admired or respected beforehand. The public feels vindicated by excuses made in their name and in the name of the victim.

In these four affairs, public opinion, media, and the protagonist concentrate heavily on the context and repercussion of the events, not on prostitution itself. In the DSK "affairs" such as those centered on S. Berlusconi or the U.S. Secret Service, only socio-political impacts are analyzed publically. In the Zahia "affair" the equivalent impact is felt in the realm of international sport.

The trials of S. Berlusconi and D. Strauss-Kahn remain in motion. Those of F. Ribéry and K. Benzema began in June 2013. But to this date, none of the stories can clarify the causes and real conditions of prostitution. Far to the contrary, they have glorified the activity, hiding it under a dazzling and trendy garb. In the eyes of the young, the activity appears and heavily influences their sexual-psychological development.

Public opinion largely tolerates the meetings between powerful figures and their mistresses and prostitutes. Even when hidden,

the public is likely to forgive reprehensible practices, knowing that they exist and considering them to be a natural result of power. It is precisely this welding of power and sex that is important to question. It confirms a symbolic order in which, once you become rich, it becomes normal to collect women like cars or works of art. Under the same heading as a luxury good, women become part of the "package" of power.

As long as the media covers only the glamorous aspects of these "affairs," they will continue to glance over the essential elements. Their refusal to dig further into the problem helps perpetuate old, degrading schemas for women and human beings. For this reason, it is unfortunately probable that both tabloids and prostitution have productive and lucrative days ahead.

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¹ Zahia was the young female prostitute that several players from the French Soccer team used while she was still a minor. They will be on trial on 2014. ² Scène 7, acte II (v. 549-550).

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