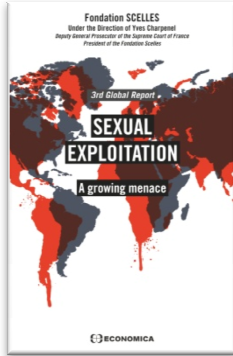




Fondation Scelles

Connaître, Comprendre, Combattre
l'Exploitation Sexuelle

Words of a sex buyer



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In order to try to identify the client's personality - to the extent that it would be possible to reduce their multiplicity into a single individual standard - the study of the text written by a customer, whose nickname is "Un mec !" seems to be necessary, as it combines in itself the essence of clichés relating to prostitution.

The customer remains the great unknown of the prostitution sphere. The client is nevertheless one of the pillars of the system that remains nine times out of ten ignored. As already noted by the Fondation Scelles in 2004, "Must we not see the expression of a 'collective unconscious' that refuses to carry an important part of the responsibilities of the 'consumer' at the profit of those who organize the market?" The customer has been taken into account in the French criminal law in 2002.

The figure of this fleeing character has been studied since the 1980s in Sweden, notably by Sven Axel Mansson. In France, it was not until the 2000s that the customer actually gained interest, including the works of Claudine Legardinier & Bouamama Saïd, Max Chaleil, or also the report of the French National Assembly No. 3334 on prostitution in France.

The ratio of available women

The customer, "Un mec !" explains his first experience with an escort girl, when he was 25 years old, living in London. Previously, he explained that he was raised by his mother, "an open-minded, feminist, who considered "whore" as the worst insult to a woman." He then stated that he was fully aware of the issues of prostitution, but still ignored what he calls his "principles" to request an escort girl.

"Un mec !" made his choice on the Internet, noting how this process is very similar to that of buying an everyday object, "like choosing a new TV on Amazon." He first notes the easiness of the process and the wide range available. For every woman, there is a description that he qualified as "technical": photos, measurements, comments from previous guests, age, languages spoken, favorite drinks, sexual practices. First observation from this description: no descriptive categories shocked him, yet an obvious bias appeared upon reading: the only category that really concerned the individual prostitute herself, as an individual, lay in her taste in beverage. The rest was only the pragmatic description of the characteristics of the object that the client considered buying.

And more... Alcohol is synonymous with relaxing, with a festive atmosphere, allowing one to let go, is commonly used by a number of prostitutes in order to have enough courage to endure their activity. The champagne, which is ultimately chosen, is known as an elegant drink of sophistication and of seduction. It also has the reputation of being the alcohol with the most immediate effect. This choice is therefore perhaps not so innocent: it allows you to immediately register the client in a luxurious world of fantasy, and place the individual prostitute in a state of slight intoxication, in order to facilitate the exercise of this difficult activity.

He finally chose a Russian model (not fearing clichés) who prostitutes at night (on average \$2,732 USD for the night) in her own apartment or in that of the client. Once the order was placed, the author translated, within his text, the tension that resides between the anxiety and the excitement of the client (a challenge to the education he received from his mother, having a feeling of doing something forbidden and reprehensible, to being the "bad boy" of rap videos) and the bad conscience that the act generates. And this is without a doubt the cocktail that excites him.

Infinite sexual uses of women

The woman who opened the door was described as the antithesis of the archetypal street prostitute: he described her as "graceful, charming, far from being vulgar, and smiling."

"Even though we both knew what I was doing there, the experience, as short as it was, was deeper than just the sex that would follow." In fact, it is precisely because they both knew why they were there that the experience was "deep." Because of his bad conscience, he feels compelled (once past the sexual act) to be interested in her, and not to reduce her to a mere sexual objects and, especially, by extension, to not be seen as a banal and sordid prostitute client.

The value is much greater than a single appointment especially for the women in front of him, to whom this is a "business". She is full of good will, and obligated to seduce the client so that she will be noted well on forums, which will guarantee more clients, and eventually returning clients.

It is for these reasons that this experience seems to "*Un mec !*" to be much deeper than a simple meeting between two individuals, especially as he described it as "close to a one-night stand, less hope for love and more openness [he has nothing to prove, she is a prostitute, she is there to satisfy his every desire]."

"*Un mec !*" named the following paragraph: "The customer is king". Herein lies the major difference for him with his love of past experiences. The pleasure of the customer is first. He described it as a "significant attraction for male sexuality." It is the same for the first attraction: women always available as an object/place of performance of male fantasies. It comes down to the idea that cradles human civilization that women are primarily there to satisfy the desire of men, and are thought of as to be always available.

Like the feelings of this client, one can cite two other "consumers" in a documentary film by Hubert Dubois: "*The prostitute is always available and then there is the choice!*" said the taxi driver. "*This is what I like at Bois de Boulogne, I can take my pick*", agrees his companion. They admit coming here between six and ten hours per week, driving or not, to consider the dozens of prostitute(s), transvestites and transsexuals from around the world, before deciding. "*The pleasure of voyeurism is huge*" says the friend, who adds: "*Once we made the circuit, one sleeps well*".

The feeling of misguided injustice

According to "*Un mec !*", in a couple, one always sexually gives more than the other, thus justifying the existence of prostitution. What

interpersonal relationship can be described as purely equitable in life? He puts this remark in connection with the prostitute that does everything for him, gives herself entirely in brief, incarnates "The Woman". This is quite contradictory as their "relationship" is itself purely unequal.

In addition, "*Un mec !*" says the prostitute meets each of his requests with a smile, which he himself notes is "probably commercial, but nevertheless convincing." He wants to believe in the delight of his partner in order to remove his guilt.

He also notes that she is a sexual expert, unlike many other women of his past experiences. He compares her to "a craftsman who has perfected his mastery over time," associating prostitution with the nobility that other artisan jobs have, and with the nostalgia involving consuming unique and non-manufactured products, but full with knowledge acquired through the experience of the artist. Can one see here a certain nostalgia for the days of brothels, where women were thought of as "professionals" of the sexual act, refining their practice over time and customers?

"*Un mec !*" then launched into a diatribe against the lack of knowledge women have about male pleasure (which he attributes to male machismo and the weight of religious institutions), adding that ultimately, he himself, knows little about female pleasure. He even added that "many women grow up without the pleasure of masturbation, the idea that sex is dirty."

This man, however, said he frequented many women - which he described as far from being "closed-minded Puritan" - projects his own illusions about the fairer sex. According to the study "Contexte de la sexualité en France (CSF)" conducted by INSERM and INED in 2006, "more than 90% of men say they have practiced masturbation, against only 60% of women." More than one in two women already

seems a fairly large number of individuals, especially since one can assume that this figure is an underestimate, since many taboos are still very much alive regarding female sexuality. Presumably this gap is, in reality, much less.

Perhaps "*Un mec !*" does not know female sexuality well because it does not exist in the representations: sexuality as one knows it is always androcentric. In pornography, for example, the sexuality presented is that of men, by men and shown with reference to this phallogocentric impregnation widely accepted in all sexual representations. Similarly, all sex shown or described follows a standard course. They inevitably end when the man ejaculates. Regardless of whether the woman took pleasure or not.

This overall lack of knowledge of female sexuality remains valid for men but also for women themselves, as well as in a number of specialists. In this respect, one can include the famous confession of the misunderstanding of Freud comparing the great unknown female sexuality to a "dark continent."

After the act, "*Un mec !*" fancied himself with the prostitute that he solicited, and understood that she came to see him to exercise this activity by economic restraint. He did not make any comments about this subject, as if the fact of prostituting oneself to live was an excuse per se, and not an exploitation. "Of Russian origin, she studied economics in college, and after a number of boring and underpaid jobs, she threw herself (at her own will, according to her) into prostitution."

It is interesting that the famous daytime activity of modeling disappeared from the presentation that the young girl made of herself when he selected her on the internet, as she was presented as exercising this occupation during the day and only prostitutes at night.

When they come to address the issue of their other clients, it maintains the fantasy of cleverly chosen prostitution. "She finds most

customers pleasant, seeking a more erotic encounter than sexual slavery. She herself finds a certain satisfaction in being able to offer another person a moment of relaxation and fun." Indeed, to say the opposite to one of her customers would not be very sellable. These statements involve maintaining the fantasy of the woman who prostitutes because she "loves it" and therefore clears the customer of any scruple damaging to the trade.

Finally, only at the end of the penultimate paragraph, "*Un mec !*" announces that it was impossible to know if her story is true and if she was really independent. "There is the traditional boundary between forced prostitution and "free" prostitution. Having sex with a prostitute from a network, this is wrong, this is exploitation, but with "free" prostitute is tolerable, because she does it voluntarily." It is curious that for the vast majority of people, the fact that an individual is subjected to economic duress is not thought of as affecting the freedom of the individual. Regardless of this constraint, this distinction does not come into play again to stop the feeling of guilt, whereas physical constraint was considered without further ado.

This dichotomy refers to the amalgam frequently made between prostitution and other activities, with the common characteristic of being livelihoods. However, prostitution is not comparable to a business, as alienating as it is, for the simple reason that no other job uses the physical intimacy of the individual, which is the private sphere¹.

Intellectual shortcuts propagating and protecting misconceptions

"*Un mec !*" then announced that he hoped for a legal framework for prostitutes that would allow them to escape networks: "In the end, I prefer the system in force in Germany or the Netherlands, leaving each one to make sense of things." Despite his "feminist opinion," he still demonstrated that he was not interested in the question of prostitution, in any

case not otherwise than as a consumer. It is a misconception, unfortunately widespread, to believe that legalization and supervision of prostitution leads to improved quality of life for prostitutes. Quite the contrary. The different experiences of legalization have increased the number of prostitutes, but also networks of exploitation and violence. Thus, as Claudine Legardinier shows in her latest book: "...the development of a legal sector has had the initial effect of boosting the illegal sector. A Dutch report from REIC showed that in 2010 only 17% of 2,600 prostitution ads in newspapers and on the internet came from the legal sector. Clearly, 83% came from the illegal sector, where there is no exercised control. The bonus is clearly for criminals, and the penalty is for prostitutes. Not only did legalization lead to an explosion of prostitution and trafficking, but even the authorities admit that traffickers are able to invest in the legal sector. In 2010, the head of the German police reported the increase of trafficking for prostitution in the country - 11% in one year, 70% over 5 years - especially that of women of Eastern Europe East and Africa. In Switzerland, authorities are moved by the increasing presence of Hungarian prostitutes, young or very young, rising Roma and Romanian networks and the rise of Italian and Balkan networks. Everywhere the police and authorities denounce attractive markets for organized crime."

After this naïve and erroneous assertion, "*Un mec !*" revised his words: "On the other hand, I am not completely at ease with the idea that paying for a prostitute is a normal act." His guilty conscience resurfaced. Nonetheless, this guilt did not last very long: in the very next sentence, he did not hesitate to continue describing his experience.

Another justification used by the client is to report the case of a friend, an escort boy, who told him that his customers (premium) not only wanted him as a sexual object, but "something special," as if that was enough to

justify the existence of this activity. Since the words of his friend are absolutely not relativized, or established in context, the experience of a single individual (which we know nothing about) is not sufficient to justify the existence of all those who engage in this activity.

"In the end, I find it easy to look at prostitution from a pious camp, but it would be more appropriate to look beyond clichés and scandals that sustain the tabloids. Before anything else, I would like for one to place respect for the prostitute at the center of the debate, whether one defends or vilifies the escorts."

The article of this man was specifically chosen because it carries in itself a significant amount of clichés about prostitution. Indeed, like many, he claimed to speak on behalf of the welfare of prostitutes while having attended one, once. Experience (of which he considers himself lacking) has turned him around, and obviously he has never addressed the issue.

What is really easy, is to not be in the camp of the pious, but the ignorant.

The egocentric nature of the typical client

In this article, in addition to expressions that speak of himself, his feelings, his experience, and his ideas, "*Un mec !*" used almost 70 times 81 lines of personal pronouns returning directly to his own person, against 24 times that refer to the prostitute.

Here, the major lexical field is predominantly that of egocentrism; the whole experience actually rotating around him: "Once my choice was made, as a Siddharta curious to get to know, I made an appointment for the same evening, shared ethical malaise and an almost animal excitement to the idea of exploring a very controversial aspect of our society, but also of my own sexuality."

The prostitute is only a means of satisfying a need, a curiosity: she is not even

mentioned, the focus is only placed on the situation and how it will evoke this man.

"What really differentiates our evening from all of my past experiences was the predominance of my desires". The customer himself is aware that time is dedicated to his person, his desire, his pleasure, as he literally said. The quotes he used to frame the word "relations" are clearly suggestive: he understood it was not a "sexual relationship." in the sense that the term "relationship" implies a reciprocal action, which did not take place during his experience with the escort girl, but a unilateral relationship, entirely directed towards him.

The title is also particularly eloquent: "I tested for you... sex with an escort girl," taking the usual formula of consumers sharing their experiences about any product: the "prostitution" consumer magazines release.

Like all customers, he allowed his sexual desire, attraction of immediate gratification, and this consumer-type relation to take over his bad conscience and the feeling that this act is not fair. Surveys² show that moral indifference characterizes many clients. One interesting thing: they get what they want, and at the lowest prices. "When I eat steak, I do not wonder if the cow has suffered³," said one when asked about the risk of exploiting a trafficking victim client. The pleasure of the customer always takes precedence over everything else. Julia O'Connell Davidson shows that "this kind of moral indifference is very well accepted in society of these markets. Buyers are generally expected to act according to their own interests without being bound to those who make the products they buy or assume moral duty to them."

All customer experiences with a prostitute speak about the reality of it, the whole relation is about the client, and not a relation between others. A prostitute is the object through which the client is confronted with his own sexuality, his personality, himself, and assumes to fully

be a man - as common representations depict males, it is to say, with irrepressible needs for which women are made to meet.

The conclusions of the customer are the following: to the question if he regreted having allowed himself to "use" another human being for his sake, he replied: "Yes and no." This experience was for him "fascinating and fun, and [he] remains convinced that prostitution can be practiced in mutual respect." He remains convinced, as he already was, which puts some doubt on its presentation as having been raised by a feminist, anti-prostitution mother and his description of himself and his "feminist side" obtained through his education.

In addition, he recognizes that prostitution may be exercised in mutual respect even though he is well aware that it automatically implies a unilateral relationship, as he himself noted previously. Where was the respect in his experience? He told himself that, on the one hand, the sexual "relationship" was actually completely turned to his own pleasure and absolutely not of the prostitute, on the other hand, she is pushed into prostitution by economic constraints, and finally he cannot be sure if she exercises this job "freely." Where lies the famous mutual respect which he is so sure exists?

The narcissistic fantasy world of a client

It is significant that "*Un mec !*" did not name the prostitute from whom he solicited services; the term, being exact, he preferred an orderly vocabulary. "Companion" is the word he used the most, but always with quotes, to understand that he was aware that it was not at any time a relationship of normal type, and that this woman had never been considered as a potential partner. He then used the term "woman," and frequently used "escort-girl/escort" to talk about it, but since he obviously did not want to be too redundant, he used it sometimes to talk abstractly about prostitutes.

The other dominant lexical field is that of fantasy, of erotic ideal, of the archetype of femininity embodied: "The meeting was simple and nice," "The woman who opened the door was graceful, charming, far from being vulgar, smiling, and I was immediately at ease," "respectful, sweet, and erotic at the same time," "sublime mastery of certain sexual acts."

"*Un mec !*" lives a waking dream, he is completely captivated by his "companion" that he compares, as one has seen, to a craftsman and he characterizes her as "beautiful, sweet, intelligent," to even consider having the "privilege to have encountered". The meeting took place in a unique setting, was accompanied by champagne, the atmosphere was conducive to all fantasies, the woman was available: "This woman is offered without limit and without discomfort to satisfy my desires", very sexually attractive but not vulgar: "*Un mec !*" actually experienced a true chic porn.

Suspicious of doubt, replaying a few times in the text, are completely cleared by this first sensation - very narcissistic - living a true fantasy, sanitized, controlled and gathering all the clichés of masculine and feminine, as of a pornographic film dedicated to him.

The cruel lack of empathy

The man who recounted his experience here comes from a privileged social background (he lived in London, for around 25 years, reported a refined language, and has the means to pay a prostitute whose rates are around 2,000 € (\$2,743 USD) per night). A good representation of the contemporary capitalist mentality, buying a body for him is ultimately an action like any other, despite his single sentence stating that he minded it a bit.

This act is the very illustration of the theory of giving and anti-giving of anthropologist, Marcel Mauss. It shows the existence in an interpersonal relationship, in an exchange between individuals, this double

obligation to give and get, up to what is received/given. These movements are at the same time voluntary and mandatory, because to disdain the other means to extract oneself from the system, and by extension, refuse the link to the other. Moreover, this amounts to admitting defeat and thus, to lose face.

Establishing the relationship between the client and the prostitute is such: as in the case of any goods, the customer interacts with the seller to acquire property. By paying, he has the illusion of being just about what he owes to the person with whom he has a commodity exchange, which is the only condition that can leave him with a clear conscience, and sometimes even with a feeling of having helped the prostitute.

In conclusion...

For some years now, investigations on prostitution tend to be centered on the customer, trying to figure out who he is, trying to find a common denominator for all these consumers of prostitution who appear so different (socio-professional category, marital status, age, etc.).

The answer to this puzzling question, the mysterious point in common in all of these beings, seems to be emerging: they are men. What is less obvious, however, is the following clarification: it is because they are men (they are educated as such, they operate in a world of cultural representations in the strengthening of this typification genres⁴) that they feel entitled to consume other beings, especially women (also educated as such and also moving in this world of gendered representations, thus accepting consciously or not their fate as dominated and potential objects).

This is the theory of Bourdieu reduced to its simplest form. For a system of domination to work, two major conditions must be met: first, that the dominant accepts and asserts their dominant position as natural, of course. And secondly, what is probably the most

overwhelming part of this sad fact, that the dominated themselves accept their fate and domination as natural. That is why the root is not in the socio-professional categories or in the different generations that drive men to use women and it is in the anthropological representations of what a man is and what a woman is.

Françoise Héritier shows, in two volumes *Masculin/Féminin*, that the observation of the difference between the sexes is the origin of all thought. Radka Radimska admirably sums up his point: "The reflections of men cannot be based on what was given to them to observe closer: the body is the medium in which it is immersed, yet the ultimate character and the most significant of human body, it is the difference between the sexes and the different gender roles in reproduction. All oppositions created by human reason are then listed in the grading grids into two poles: male and female, and one can find these two poles in all systems of representation that preclude concrete or abstract values (F. Héritier cites fundamental oppositions as hot/cold, wet/dry, high/low, inferior/superior, light/dark)."

Thus F. Héritier reveals the concept of the "gender differential valence" system showing that the value given to subjects and objects differs depending on the gender assigned to them, what is connoted as masculine traditionally emphasized to the detriment of what is connoted as feminine. For example, this explains that typically feminine activities, such as cooking or sewing, are represented at the highest level by men (starred chefs, famous fashion designers) because, since we are in the field of excellence, it is the side of the male. Vulgar daily kitchen work, this, belongs to women. Thus, at birth, humanity adopts an asymmetrical thinking of feminine and masculine.

Regarding prostitution, more specifically, Françoise Héritier clearly notes this turnaround to hide this unequal relationship in essence: "To say that women have the right to sell is to

hide that men have the right to buy. "It is also to hide the very foundations of anthropological representations, men are subjects, while women are already objects, who are exchanged against other groups of women (to renew the genetic stock), or against objects (if the male/female ratio in the group is disproportionate)⁵.

Claudine Legardinier wrote "Far from being the product of "nature" that he claims to be, the Prostitute [= customer] would be especially that of its culture". Thus, what the clients of prostitution have in common is being custodians of these ancient representations depreciating women. In modern times, these destructive representations are coupled with market ideology, which redoubles. This aggravates the already derogatory perceptions of women, but also of men, placing each in gender roles that ultimately do not benefit their well-being, which they could access in a more egalitarian situation⁶.

Fighting against this state of affairs is possible, as evidenced by changes in statutes and women's rights around the world. However, the road ahead is still very long. "When we have taught men and women to agree to respect and not to be ashamed of sex, you will not need prostitutes," says Gabrielle Partenza, president of the association, Avec Nos Aînées (ANA). The Palermo Protocol, whose findings have been repeatedly advocated since 2000, under the protection of the United Nations, have established research, and launched focused information campaigns, especially on the education of gender equality, to curb the demand for prostitution. In addition, the Protocol clearly establishes a link between customer demand, exploitation and trafficking.

The first customer that history remembers, Enkidu, one of the central characters of *Gilgamesh* (the oldest novel in history, dating from the Mesopotamian era, end of the third millennium BC), created by the gods and raised by animals, accesses humanity by

having sex with a prostitute (which the author did not bother to mention by name or word). Today, it is important to educate (potential) clients, who will access this full status of humanity - in the sense of philanthropy - to realize that their actions are just a timeless repetition of terrible inequality, which is absolutely not natural.

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¹ For a larger discussion of this confusion, see the article on the French press and prostitution.

² Legardinier Cl., « Prostitueurs, état des lieux », *Prostitution et Société*, n.163, October 2009.

³ *Les Clients*, a documentary by Hubert Dubois and Elsa Brunet, 2006.

⁴ Numerous studies show differences provided to babies at birth by sex treatments - and throughout life - in order to enroll in a well-defined gender identity, in this regard, see in particular the work of Françoise Héritier, Elena Belotti, Christian Baudelot & Roger Establet, *L'Introduction aux études sur le genre*, L. Bereni, S. Chauvin, A. Jaunait, A. Revillard, De Boeck, Brussels, 2012, or Article Françoise Vouillot « Construction et affirmation de l'identité sexuée et sexuelle : éléments d'analyse de la division sexuée de l'orientation », *L'orientation scolaire et professionnelle*, 31/4 | 2002, 485-494 : "The construction of sexual identity is the result of the interaction between biological, cultural normative influence (mediated by education and socialization) and structuring activity of the subject that involves its ability but also its desire to be expected as it is".

⁵ See the work of Claude Levi-Strauss.

⁶ See the work produced by Fabrique Spinoza, whose conclusions show that "Work towards a rebalancing of relationships between men and women, so it's working for the collective well-being. Men are equally beneficiaries of the proposed measures."

<http://www.fabriquespinoza.org/2012/07/rapport-40-propositions-pour-une-amelioration-des-relations-femmes-hommes/>