

Opinion

# Listen, I am a Victim of Sexual Trafficking

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When I lived in Guatemala I heard from a mother, referring to a young girl who worked in a bar (in Guatemala, nightclubs and canteens where sexual service is also offered are called bars, or brothels) waitressing and had had three children from different men -she was a single mom- "she's there because she's a whore and likes the cock".

The other women taking part in the conversation, all mothers, married by the church and by all laws, seconded the comment and also railed against the girl, whom when they came across with kindly greeted, kissed and hugged and called her, niece. I, who cannot stay silent in the face of such an injustice, asked the women, "and are you not whores and do not like the cock"? But that's another thing, we are married, we are housewives. We're all whores, married or not!

The girl had migrated from his hometown to the capital to work as a maid, in her village she had fell in love with a jerk who cowardly fled after impregnating her when she was 15 years old. Her parents kicked her out of the house. With a child to support she left in search for work. Along the way, alone, without knowing anyone in the capital, depressed, anxious, she fell into the trap of one of those sexual slavery networks that deceived her offering shelter and food besides a job; she ended up in a bar. Acquaintances said they had seen her working as a sexual servant and not as a waitress. "She was not forced" because she used to go out and traveled to her village to see their children. Hers was a form of sexual slavery so common in the world.

Question, what were they doing in a bar, householders, married? And on top of that flaunting before their wives, nephews and sons about their wanderings in bars?

One day when my brother was in his pubertal timing my dad came with his eleven sheep, told him to get ready because he was going to take him to a bar so that he became a man, my little brother was about 12 or 13 years old. My father said so wholly unembarrassed of his wife and daughters, as if he was talking about food. My mom and my older sister did not say anything, that one who protested was me, "in that case you should also take me so they make me a woman"! Over my dead body you get my brother to rape girls! That was a discussion in which my parents ended up shouting at me: fucking crazy! I don't know if in the course of the years my dad took my brother... to a bar "to become a man", they alone know.

Since I can remember, the men in my family, from my grandfather to my cousins, (I guess my brother too, even if I refuse to accept it) have been frequenting bars, and has been accepted and seen as normal by the women in my family, who as an excuse say: inside home men belong to us, outside home men belong to the street, so long as they don't infect us with any diseases, everything is fine. That's why most have children out of wedlock, (whom have not been recognized, of course) a good number of lovers and their regular visits to bars where they will spend much of their monthly salary.

I write this not to demonize my family, I write it as an example of a patriarchal society of which we are also part. The trafficking of girls and boys, adolescents and women would not exist if the customers were not our men: parents, friends, brothers, co-workers, bosses, sons, grandparents. And if women wearing the veil of purity and virginity would not stigmatize others as whores, and instead would let them to their fate.

The other day I was at a social gathering, talking with a group of men who call themselves revolutionary

who know the political history of the continent by heart, and are Fidelistas, Chavistas and Guevaristas to the core, at the end they said goodbye because they all were going to a bar, and did not want to be late because others might get the new girls who come every Saturday. Disgusting! Isn't it?

When in college a good group of peers, future professionals (many of them are now university teachers) used to go every Friday to a bar that was at the end of the block, they said that with the bar "sluts" they could do those things their girlfriends wouldn't allow them to do. What can a man do with a woman who is in a place to be abused and humiliated? It is us as a consumer society.

As a soccer referee in Guatemala and when my colleagues and me had to administer in the provinces, we used to spend the night there, many of my colleagues, the night before the game, would go to the local bar looking for girls, there they would hang out together with the players. On Sunday they would appear on television immaculate, as impartial and worthy judges. And the players as the unreachable stars. And that happens too at the international level. The referees of the host country, when tournaments or international games take place, the first thing they do as a courtesy and welcome is to bring the referees to first rate bordellos. It is us as a consumer society.

I could give a thousand examples, and I know you also as readers have thousands of them, sexual trafficking does exist because we are a society that consumes it. In this article I speak specifically of trafficking for sexual exploitation, but also exists for labor exploitation and organ trafficking.

And it is because no blood ties exist with the victim that we are insensitive to this, which it should be our greatest shame as humanity. Because they are not our daughters, sisters, friends, mothers. Because we are selfish and believe is only important who is within our bubble and comfort zone. Because we have not yet understood that this world will not change if we do not change. For indolence and perversity corrodes us. Prudery and dehumanization have taken over us (when it suits us).

What society allows the existence of bars and bordellos? What society allows the existence of trafficking networks for sexual exploitation, labor and organ trafficking?

It is us who allow it; we are the consumer society, some for getting used to it and others for remaining silent. What would we do if one day in any circumstance we find a child, adolescent or woman who tells us: help me; I am a victim of sexual trafficking?

It is what's depicted in the documentary (4.55 minutes) Eschúchame, created for the awareness of the consumer society. Or the movies Evelyn, Trade, La mosca en la ceniza, La jaula der oro, La vida precoz y breve de Sabina Rivas. And many more.

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Translated by Marvin Najarro